

Boat of  
interest

# Nifty

– pumping up the fun

‘The Nifty is fine for inshore and sheltered water fishing, lakes and even slow-moving rivers’

*The boat is light enough to easily manhandle down to the water's edge.*

**John Eichelsheim is no stranger to small inflatable craft. He puts the new and very portable Nifty through its paces...**

used to enjoy fly-fishing from a float boat I owned for many years. A float boat is a cross between a float tube and an inflatable boat, with fixed oars, a seat, and half the floor cut away so you can stick your flippered feet through and quietly finetune your position if required.

So unpacking and inflating the Nifty boat I field-tested recently felt familiar – right down to its decent bellows pump and good quality non-return valves. The fabric looks a similar grade to my old boat's too, which lasted more than 10 years, and the seams are well finished. Indeed, everything about the boat and its accessories looks well made and fit for purpose. The New Zealand importer offers a one-year warranty.

Deflated, the 30kg Fifty and all its accessories go into a carry bag small enough to easily fit in the back of my station wagon. Inflating it for the first time took me no more than a 10 minutes, including the separate inflatable floor. With practice it would be quicker.

Fully inflated, the 3.65m boat can carry a maximum load of 225kg, or one to three persons. Two I could imagine, but three would be very cosy...

With a beam of only 1.1m, the Nifty is rather canoe-like, but is fitted with fixed oars, not paddles, and a conventional inflatable dinghy transom.

The Nifty comes in several colours, including camo.

I'D BORROWED a 3.3hp Mercury two-stroke from Fish City in Albany for the test, close to the 3.5hp maximum recommended by the manufacturer. According to Nifty's New Zealand agent, the boats go well with just 2.5hp.

## Simple plan

My plan for the day was simple: use the boat to transport me around the point to a stretch of coast I often fish from my kayak. I intended to fish in the same way I would in my kayak too, nosing quietly into the shallows and then drifting with the wind and tide while casting soft-plastic baits.

To this end I pulled the inflated and assembled boat down the sand to the water's edge and loaded it with the gear I'd need. I went a drogue and a length of line for drift fishing – I figured I could tie the drogue off one of the grab lines attached to the inflatable boat's sides – and a small anchor I use for my kayak. I stowed them under the fabric foredeck/bow cover.

Behind that I stowed a chilly bin with a bag of saltwater ice, my small tackle box, a landing net and a couple of rods. According to the literature, the Nifty should have had a pair of rod holders across the transom, but there were none on the boat I used.

I also squeezed a container of spare fuel up in the bows and used the zip-up fabric compartment under the rear beach seat to hold a rain jacket, portable VHF radio, and a few odds and sods. With the Mercury clamped securely to the transom, I was ready to go.

## Underway

After rectifying an embarrassing and smoky start that involved my mistaking the choke for the stop-go lever, I was up and running. In flat water the boat planed easily, slipping along at perhaps 12-13 knots. It might have gone faster, but as the speed increased the propeller started grabbing air. Ventilation was worse in the rougher water of the channel, so I slowed down to a more sedate speed of perhaps 7-8 knots. Using a long-shaft outboard may eliminate the ventilation issue.

The journey to my destination took perhaps 25 minutes, half as long as it would have taken in the kayak. I was comfortable and dry and my arms weren't tired when I got there.



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- 1 Boat and motor fitted snugly into the back of the wagon.
- 2 The contents of the carry bag unpacked.
- 3 Underway, the little Mercury pushes the Nifty along at around 12 knots.
- 4 Handles on the tubes make it easier to move the boat around.
- 5 The boat's fittings are decent quality.

## Fishing with Nifty

I used the oars to quietly row the Nifty in close to shore where I wanted to fish, and then let the tide carry the boat. I cast my soft-plastic as we drifted, and soon began to encounter hard-fighting snapper amongst the kelp, rocks and sand patches in a few metres of water.

The Nifty was great for this style of fishing: very quiet, with even less hull noise than a kayak, and it was easier to see into the water thanks to the higher seating position.

Seats are simple aluminium benches secured across the tops of the pontoons. The rear seat is padded and had the integrated Nifty boat bag hanging underneath it. Folding seats are available in some markets.

In a couple of hours fishing I caught 20-odd pan-sized snapper, all but one of which was released. I added a decent 5kg snapper to my tally late in the session, also released, and lost another larger fish when the hook pulled close to the boat. The bigger snapper pulled the boat around easily, even more easily than they would a kayak, but I didn't find this a disadvantage. By pulling the boat, they took very little line off the reel. If you can keep big snapper on a short line in the shallows, there's less chance of them breaking you off on the bottom.

The Nifty is stable, but I wouldn't recommend standing up to fish. I tried it, but sat down again pretty smartly. It's also reasonably comfortable, though my knees and bum were starting to ache after three hours. You can stretch your legs out but it's easier to sit with them bent.

When rowing the Nifty my knees seemed to get in the way. The best technique was to make short strokes. The oars are relatively short and the flat-bottomed boat tends to wander a bit under oar, but rowing such a lightweight isn't difficult or tiring. The oars were great for quietly repositioning the boat without spooking fish in such shallow water.

## Packing up


On the way back I had to refuel; as the Mercury's internal tank only holds 1.5 litres, range is limited. The wind had got up a bit for the return journey, which was a little slower, but I stayed dry except for the rain, with no spray entering the boat. A sliding valve opens the transom scupper to drain water out while the boat's underway.

Back at the beach, packing up was as quick and easy as unpacking. To my surprise I managed to get the folded boat and all its gear back into the carry bag, but the boats can also be transported inflated on the roof of the car. At 1.1m wide, they'll fit most roof racks.

I'd had a fun morning in the little Nifty. I'd tried to talk my 12-year-old into joining me for the morning, but she decided she had other plans. There certainly would have been room for two, because one-up the little boat feels quite spacious.

There's scope for customisation too: rod holders, folding seats or Railblaza mounts to hold a variety of attachments.

The Nifty is fine for inshore and sheltered water fishing, lakes and even slow-moving rivers. The camo version would be good for duck shooters. You could fit a small electric motor instead of a petrol outboard – I reckon the battery would fit nicely in the under-seat boat bag.

Compact enough to transport in the back of the car and quick to inflate, it's also light enough to carry short distances. At around \$1499 the Nifty seems well priced; the small engines it requires are fairly cheap too, around \$1256 for the Mercury 3.3hp and much less if you can find a good one secondhand. Together it adds up to not much money for a whole lot of boating and fishing fun. 

### Specifications

Length:	3.65m
Width:	1.1m
Weight:	30kg
Carrying capacity:	225kg (1-3 persons)
Horsepower rating:	3.5hp.