

SMOKERCRAFT 172 PRO ANGLER XL

A versatile performer that sits in a class of its own

BY CRAIG RITCHIE

Boat builders continually update the different models in their respective product lines, and we've all grown accustomed to looking forward to the winter boat shows each year so we can see what's fresh and new. But the designers at the SmokerCraft family of products seem to have taken things up a notch this past year and for 2013, the company is introducing a grand total of 130 new boats.

That's not a typo – these folks have been working overtime, and they really do have 130 new models. In fact, with the exception of the cartoppers, every single model has been updated, refreshed, or built new altogether for model year 2013 – 130 different units in all. Perhaps none reflect this landmark shift more thoroughly than SmokerCraft's popular 172 Pro Angler XL.

This is a boat that's been one of the company's best-selling fishing craft for many years – especially in Canada, where its combination of length, beam, weight and features make it just right for thousands of die-hard anglers. It's always risky to tinker with a best-seller, but after having the chance to sea-trial the 2013 model, I'm

confident to say the numerous changes to this version simply make a very good boat all that much better.

The most obvious changes are cosmetic. Matching the rest of the product line, the 2013 model adopts all-new hull graphics and styling, including a high metallic paint stripe and a no-glare black-framed walk-through windshield. But the devil is always in the details, and as you step aboard the multitude changes from last year's boat start making their presence known. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

What SmokerCraft did not fool with was the Pro Angler's excellent Hydra-Lift rolled V-hull, with its five-keel design and hefty .100 gauge bottom plating. With an overall length of 17 feet, three inches and a dry weight of 1,350 pounds, this is a boat that's small enough to tow easily with a mid-sized vehicle. But on the water, its generous 25-inch interior depth and spacious 96-inch beam make it feel like a much larger boat – something that's reinforced by its rating to handle outboards up to 150 hp.

The 172 Pro Angler XL is described as a multi-species fishing boat thanks to its

The rear casting deck also neatly conceals a 25-gallon live well with integral bait bucket, while both the port and starboard gunnels feature top-mounted rod storage lockers and meshed-in storage compartments below.



SMOKERCRAFT 172 PRO ANGLER XL

LOA: 17' 3"

Beam: 96"

Passenger capacity:
7 persons, 1,425 lbs.

Fuel capacity: 90 L / 24 gal.

Weight: 1,350 lbs.

Power (max): 150 hp

Power (as reviewed):

Mercury OptiMax 115 hp

Price (base): \$13,350 (boat only)

Price (as reviewed): \$24,695
(boat, engine, trailer)

Quoted setup may not be exactly as depicted in photos. Prices are subject to currency fluctuations and do not include freight, DPI or additional optional equipment.

Review boat provided by:
SmokerCraft Boats, PO Box 65,
New Paris, IN 46553
Telephone: (866) 719-7873 • smokercraft.com

versatile interior layout. A large, raised front casting deck conceals secure dry storage, a fishing rod locker that handles eight rods up to seven feet, six inches in length, and a 57-litre (15-gallon) live well. The carpeted front deck is perfectly positioned – high enough to provide great visibility, yet low enough to the water to make landing fish a breeze. Up front, a bow panel includes a plug for the standard Minn Kota Power Drive V2 electric trolling motor, while a second power outfit – this time a standard 12-volt outlet – can be found in the front of the helm console. An aluminum base for a removable pedestal seat is positioned almost dead centre on the front deck. The standard ash-coloured carpet is a sensible choice in this area – not only does it provide a secure, non-slip surface but its mid-tone colouration helps hide dirt and debris.

Pass through the elegantly curved black windshield into the main cockpit. The floor in this high traffic zone is vinyl (with a lifetime warranty), providing tremendous durability and easy clean-ups. Snap-in carpet is available as an option for those who prefer something cushier under foot. Four more pedestal bases in the cockpit, plus another on the carpeted rear casting deck, allow flexibility in positioning the new-for-2013 Centric One seats, with integral head rests. The rear casting deck also neatly conceals a 95-litre (25-gallon) live well with integral bait bucket, while both the port and starboard gunnels feature top-mounted rod storage lockers and meshed-in storage compartments below.

The 172 Pro Angler's helm sits in a neatly



sculpted console ahead of a movable pedestal seat with a sliding base. Anyone who has ever tried to climb behind the wheel of a fishing boat while wearing a full flotation suit – sensible practice when fishing particularly early or late in the season – will appreciate the added comfort afforded by the sliding helm seat. Someone was thinking here.

The helm itself provides a full array of instrumentation including a large tachometer, and a large multi-gauge including a speedometer, volt meter and fuel gauge. These two primary displays sandwich a lighted compass and twin bezels for supplementary instrumentation. A pair of toggle switches located port of the tilt wheel provide convenient control for the horn and master power, while a row of similar switches starboard of the wheel control navigation and accessory lighting, the bilge pump and both bow and stern live wells. A 12-volt power outlet completes the panel. The top surface of the instrument panel to starboard provides a flat surface suitable for mounting a GPS/fishfinder set, such as the Humminbird 728 unit found on our review boat. The standard tilt wheel offers a durable non-slip finish.

The adjacent passenger console includes a large glove box, plus a top-mounted accessory box that accommodates a Plano 3700-style adjustable tackle drawer. An

AM/FM stereo with auxiliary port for an MP3 player is also standard. Deep storage compartments sit at the base of both the helm and passenger consoles.

Although the hull is rated to accept outboards to 150 hp, our review boat was powered by a Mercury Optimax 115 spinning a 19-inch standard three-blade aluminum prop. The three-cylinder, 375 pound Optimax is a good match to this hull, providing excellent acceleration and torque while weighing in at a full 80 pounds less than Mercury's four-stroke 150.

Driving solo with a half-tank of fuel, the Optimax had absolutely no trouble popping me and the boat up on plane in under three seconds, and even faster with a touch of negative trim. Acceleration was quick and steady, and within a few moments the boat was cruising along at 5,500 rpm and wide open throttle, the wind blowing through my hair at 44 mph. But even more impressive was the boat's handling as I pushed it through a series of hard turns and rapid slaloms. SmokerCraft's three-keeled Hydra-Lift hull has long been known for its extraordinary grip, and I was pleased to see that the numerous changes to the boat had done nothing to detract from that time-proven performance.

The SmokerCraft 172 Pro Angler XL has been a popular multi-purpose fishing boat for many years, but this updated, new-for-2013 version is far-and-away the best one yet. Combining a sensible, straight-forward design with thoughtful innovations that only result from time spent on the water, it's a truly versatile performer that sits in a class of its own. 🌿



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