

# new EXPLORER

*Under new ownership, Explorer Boats has made some significant changes to its Panther 300 series jetboat range, which the company see as a first step into competing head to head on the world market. Barry Thompson got a chance to run one of the first of the new Panther 340 yacht tenders before it was shipped off to its new owner in France.*

Explorer is certainly working hard at becoming a significant player in the luxury jet boat tender market.

**T**he Panther 340 is one of five models in the Panther 300 series which ranges from the 2.85m, Panther 285 through to the 3.8m Panther 380. The main variance between the models is the overall length and the engine in the 380 being mounted in the stern rather than the centre location of the other models, with a similar layout familiar to all. Obviously, as the size increases so does the internal diameter between the tubes. While the 285 carries a 0.8m internal beam, the 380 takes that out to 1.08m so you get a little bit more space. Both the 285 and the 300 have the same external beam of 1.65m, with the 320 and the 340 taken out to 1.73m.

The Explorer Panther range was developed over seven years ago and has continually undergone development changes, the most significant in the past 12 months. When Andy Lamont took over

the business immediately after the 2018 Hutchwilco NZ Boat Show, one of his first decisions was to look at revamping the Panther and Viking Jet Series.

“We knew we had a great product but it needed to be refined and we had to not only improve the overall quality but also have a look at the power train we were using,” says Andy.

He adds that when the boats were sent overseas, there was always an issue getting the marinised Toyota 1300 engines serviced, so they looked around for a more conventional and universal marine engine package. The obvious choice was a PWC engine from either Sea-Doo with their Rotax or Yamaha’s TR1.

“We decided to go for the Yamaha TR1, and it has proven the ideal engine for the Panther 320, 340 and 380. Owners can go to any Yamaha service centre if they need something done, so service is not an issue any more.



BOAT REVIEW  
**EXPLORER PANTHER  
340 JET TENDER**



**Above:**  
The layout is about maximising seating options, with three bench seats with space for 4-6 people.

**Right Clockwise:**  
The console lifts up for engine access.

A Yamaha TR1 is the standard power plant.

The anchor tackle is stowed under the forward squab.

There is plenty of storage under the split aft bench seat.

As the Panther is primarily designed as a tender, the bow and stern areas have been reduced to minimise the overhang.

“The change to the Yamaha engine package has also meant a more streamlined production schedule, and along with our proprietary right jet pump, the install is now hours not days,” says Andy.

While Yamaha doesn’t divulge the horsepower of their PWC engines, the word is that the TR1 is around 100-110hp, which in the Panther 340 is more than adequate. However, if you want more, then there is the option of the Yamaha VX engine, which reports put at 125hp. The 250hp Yamaha 1800 Supercharged is too big for the Panther but well suited to the larger Viking Series, although even then that’s a lot of power for a 4m RIB. Explorer rate the Panther 340 to 115hp, so the Yamaha TR1 is a perfect package.

Andy says that while they are not looking at a diesel package currently, they are exploring the electric power option in the future once the existing range is fully developed. Now that would make an exciting jet tender.

The engine couples to Explorer’s jet unit, complete with a 6” pump that’s designed to provide maximum torque when the boat needs to get up on the plane with a load of people aboard. It is a lot more robust unit than you would find in a PWC and has an extra-long nozzle which helps with directional control. It also has a lightweight but super strong composite multi-directional reverse bucket and is used in all Explorer jet boat models.

Fixed trim tabs also assist in lifting the stern when you accelerate, and optional fins help stop the stern from getting loose when towing water toys. It’s a reasonable light but extremely strong and stiff hull, which is comprised of an outer shell, composite subframe and inner liner. Andy points out that it is not only much quicker to build, - from about two months to 5 weeks- but also allows for a precision fit. The

Flexiteak used on the cockpit sole and fore, and aft decks add a quality finish.

## STUBBY TUBES

As the Panther is primarily designed as a tender, the bow and stern areas have been reduced to minimise the overhang at either end. The stubby appearance identifies the Panther as a tender, with no part of the hull extending past the outside of the three chamber per side Hypalon tubes. The 3.4m overall length is all well used.

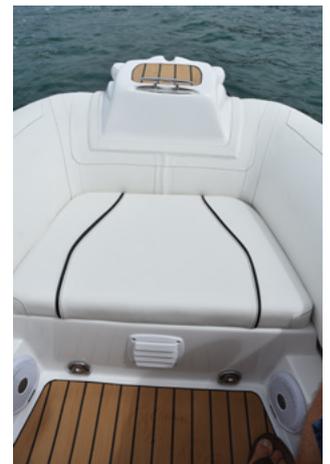
The layout is about maximising seating options, which in the Panther 340 sees three bench seats with space for 4-6 people. The rear seat extends right to the transom, with space for a driver and passenger. Forward of the moulded side console is another smaller bench seat, and there is a third across the bow which includes the anchor locker.

The offset console allows for access forward from the helm seat and has a raised instrument panel, plus plenty of space for the side mounted controls, Clarion stereo display, engine management and switch panels. Our boat also came with Hella nav lights and internal lights. I found the flat mounted Garmin MFD was almost impossible to read when driving and needed to be on a bracket mount. Simple change and one which is an owner’s choice. There are plenty of options available for rod holders, cup holders, handholds, cleats etc.

The console hinges forward on air stays for ease of access to the Yamaha engine, with a separate panel in the sole if you need to get to the driveline.

## LEARNING TO DRIVE

I ran the boat off Gulf Harbour in a smooth to moderate sea, and I have to admit that even after 49



years of reviewing boats I have still had very little to do with driving jet boats. Not through choice, just circumstance, so when I do get behind the wheel of a jet it always takes me some time to adjust to the way the helm reacts. The Panther 340 was no exception, and while I started with some caution, it didn't take long before I had it mastered. Mind you I still made sure I had the kill-switch lanyard attached.... just in case I got into a jet spin and went for a swim. The Panther 340 is agile, fast, ultra-responsive and a great little boat to drive at speed. Once you drop the throttle, acceleration to max rpm is almost immediately, and so you need to make sure you are in full control behind the wheel. A slight reaction on the wheel has an immediate effect on where the boat wants to go, so it pays to start slowly and work up your confidence, before giving it some serious jandal! But once you have mastered it, it's an easy boat to drive at any speed.

It's a boat that seems to adjust to the extra weight well and will carry one or two people as easily as four or five. This is an important factor as the Panther 340 is principally designed as a yacht tender, so weight carrying capabilities are essential. With its low-profile design, the Panther 340 is ideally suited for a larger tender garage or at just under 300 kgs is also not too heavy for stowing on the deck, using a tender crane.

Flat out I saw nearly 33 knots on the speedo with two up and found around 4500rpm @ 25 knots a comfortable cruise speed. Not sure of the fuel consumption as we had no fuel gauge, but the Panther 340 carries 35 litres in a polypropylene fuel, so that's going to be more than enough for most trips.

## EXPORT LEAD

With the first two of the remodelled Panther series sold overseas - Thailand and France - and a lot of interest in Australia, it seems that the changes made have certainly proven worthwhile. Explorer is going for CE approval so they can sell into Europe and Asia and have a five-year plan to upgrade and productionise the entire range. Quality is an aspect that cannot be overstated, and with the new series, Explorer is certainly working hard at becoming a significant player in the luxury jet boat tender market. 🌀

## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Make &amp; Model:</b>	Explorer Panther 340
<b>Price As Tested:</b>	\$POA
<b>Type:</b>	Side Console Jet RIB
<b>Construction:</b>	GRP Composite Hull/Hypalon Tubes
<b>LOA:</b>	3.40m
<b>LOW:</b>	1.73m
<b>Beam:</b>	0.87m
<b>Deadrise:</b>	15 deg
<b>Height Of Boat:</b>	0.97m
<b>Weight:</b>	280 kg (dry)
<b>Test Power:</b>	Yamaha 4S EFI/Explorer Jet
<b>Top speed:</b>	32.7 knots
<b>Power Options:</b>	Jet Only
<b>Max HP:</b>	115 hp
<b>MFD:</b>	Garmin
<b>Flooring:</b>	Flexiteak
<b>Fuel:</b>	35 L (standard)
<b>Manufacturer:</b>	Explorer Boats NZ Limited, Ph +64 9 412 2040 andy@explorerboats.co.nz www.explorerboats.co.nz