

WAKEBOAT REVIEW: MALIBU 20VTX & AXIS A20

Two of a kind

MALIBU BOATS RECENTLY ANNOUNCED SOME EXCITING NEW 2020 BOAT MODELS AND WE RECENTLY JUMPED ABOARD FOR A TASTE.

• BY MARK WARD

We all go boating for different reasons. Personally, I love fishing and adventure while others love the peace and quiet of a glass of bubbles in a secluded bay. And there's another group that love the adrenaline sports like wake boarding and water ski slalom courses.

My entire family are boaties. My brothers and I are the fishermen, my parents just love to float around as they eat cheese and sip wine and my sister's family are skiers; I watched for many years as they would spend just about every summer weekend on the lake. Not being much of a skier, I would often join them just to sit beside my brother-in-law as we would do laps of the lake with the kids in tow. The little ones would laugh as their tube would bounce over the wake and the big ones would all try to outdo each other for air and face-planting the water. I would even get a go at the helm every now and again, which is a huge privilege as owners of ski boats are a little picky about who they hand the keys over to! But I can't blame them. There is something very sexy about the rumble of a V8, the beautiful lines of the ski hull and those towers with their booming speakers. Even the trailer of a ski boat is often pimped up and sporting wheels worth more than my car.

RIGHT: Malibu's all new 20VTX is packed with features for wake boarding, surfing and skiing.





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ABOVE LEFT & RIGHT:
Wave surfing behind the
Malibu is big on fun.

OPPOSITE: While it
doesn't have all the
features of its bigger
stablemate, the Axis
A20 is an ideal craft for
all types of water sports
enthusiasts.

BELOW: The Malibu
offers more visual
control of the wake/wave
via its dash displays.

Back to the future

It's been a few years since I have been skiing with the family so it was nice to hit the water with the team from Malibu to review the new 20VTX as well as the Malibu built Axis A20.

Malibu started building ski and wake boats in the US way back in 1982 and quickly developed a cult following. Even though the sport has progressed significantly over the years, those old original Malibu hulls are still highly rated amongst ski boat enthusiasts.

With the climate we have in Australia and our love for the water, there was a market that Malibu just had to tap into. In 1994, Malibu opened a plant in Albury and started manufacturing boats and the brand has never looked back.

The Axis brand is relatively new and has been developing entry level hulls with all the features that the ski, wake or surf community need. Everything about the Axis is Malibu, except the price. The Axis is powered by the same high torque V8 engine, has all the features for ski, wake and surf as the Malibu but by sticking to the basics and removing a few of the expensive bells and whistles, the Axis becomes very affordable. It may be cheaper and missing a few bits and pieces, but it's no less impressive when you're hanging from its tow rope.

Design & layout

Both the Malibu 20VTX and Axis A20 hulls are six metres long and have a 2.5m beam. That's not big, but importantly the boats have many features, create big wakes and waves and will still fit in most garages. Additionally, they can be towed by the standard family sized SUV.

There's also enough interior room to have 11 people on board, but if you don't have that many boating friends, just about every seat doubles as a lounge so the less people, the more comfort. I do have a sneaking suspicion though that with a boat like the Malibu or Axis, your friends list will increase significantly.

The interior is made up of either seats or speakers. I do believe there's a steering wheel and control unit there somewhere and maybe an esky hidden under one of the lounges.





I might be in the 50-plus age group but I still love a good sound system. The Malibu's system is fitted with Spotify and the music is such a massive part of the lifestyle that nothing has been spared. Just to the left of the steering wheel is an entire panel for Spotify where each skier can have their own play list. I was even able to find some Jimmy Barnes and INXS tracks, but my much younger companions refused to wake board to it... not enough bass to get the sub-woofer beating apparently!

I also loved that there was no carpet in either boat. Instead, the non-slip flooring with eye catching design was very soft under foot and ideal for wet feet. If any portion is damaged, it can be swapped out one portion at a time. The Malibu also has a warming shelf over the engine to either keep towels and lifejackets warm or dry off the towels between runs; there's nothing better than slipping off a wet suit or coming out of some cool water and having a dry, warm towel to wrap yourself up in.

While the helms of both boats are very impressive, the Malibu takes this to a whole

“THE SURF GATE FEATURE HAS BEEN A GAME CHANGER. A WAVE CAN BE BUILT TO ROLL LEFT OR RIGHT, TO HAVE A DEEP LIP OR A SHALLOW BREAKING WAVE FOR THE KIDS TO LEARN ON.”

new level. The main screen has all the standard instrumentation but also has a reversing style camera so the operator is able to glimpse down to see what is happening at the back of the boat. What really impressed me though was that it gives an incredibly accurate representation as an animated diagram of the wave that is created with the settings that have been dialled in. For instance, with a standard ski setup, the diagram will show a simple wake but as ballast is added and the Power Wedge is activated, the wake will increase in the diagram as well as the back of the boat. Individual skiers can dial in their preferred ski, wake and surf settings and between boat speed, ballast, Power Wedge and Surf Gate, the wake or wave will be perfect every time. Even the speed can be controlled through either GPS or speed wheel. This is to ensure that even a current change that makes a miniscule change to the wave can be corrected by going from GPS to speed wheel, which will allow for the current when setting the speed. There is nothing these guys haven't thought of.

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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

The helm stations of the Malibu (above) and Axis A20 (right) are feature packed.

Party on – The boats have the capacity to carry 11 people.



This was particularly handy when setting up a wave for surfing. The Surf Gate feature has been a game changer. A wave can be built to roll left or right, to have a deep lip or a shallow breaking wave for the kids to learn on. Roll the wave right and the diagram shows the shape of the right-handed wave and vice versa. Even an old fisherman like myself could have skippered the Malibu. I would have just had to change the music.

The Axis A20 has all the features of the Malibu and made seamless right and left handed waves for surfing but to keep the price down, the computer generated illustrations were absent. Controls were your standard dials and the Spotify feature was missing. This means you'd have to run your play lists and go more old school but that's where any disappointment ends. The sound system was just as impressive, and the ski, wake and surf features were incredible. You do get what you pay for but there is not a lot of performance difference between the two hulls. The Malibu has all the bells and whistles with a heap of

performance and awesome ski, wake and surf options. The Axis has identical performance and still has all the ski, wake and surf options but is missing all the little extra features that add up to a totally awesome package. The budget may determine which one you select and if you are a competitive slalom course skier, the Malibu is the pick of the hulls. It is all the little "one percenters" that add up to make the Malibu a lot more impressive but at a higher price tag.

There is another big difference between the two hulls. The Malibu is a purpose designed ski boat that can be utilised for slalom courses. It has the usual pole position options but also has a centrally positioned slip in ski post for slalom courses. Water-ski slalom courses require the boat to track a true course while the skier negotiates between buoys. It is a smooth version of the snow ski slalom course. With a ski post that is positioned in the centre of the hull, it prevents the hull from being pulled off course as the skier moves sharply from one side to the other. At first glance, the tower appears to be pushed forward and slightly out of

place. This is for good reason as the skier can be working off the central post and be at 90 degrees to the hull without the rope hitting the tower. The Malibu 20VTX is the complete package. If you're a novice and need help setting up the wake, it does it all for you. Additionally, if you are a competitive skier and need a machine that will give you an edge, this is the boat for you.

Power plays

Both the Axis A20 and the Malibu 20VTX are powered by the Malibu Monsoon M5Di V8 engine. The Monsoon engine is designed and built for Malibu and Axis hulls. The idea was to have an engine to be perfect for ski, wake and surf but Malibu wanted to build the most reliable engine on the market. They achieved this by removing unnecessary components and the only engine part that makes contact with the water is the exhaust.

The engine is all about torque. Even with full ballast tanks, seats all full and the Power Wedge engaged, the engine hummed and pulled the hull and skier out of the hole instantly. The engine had a deep, throaty groan to it but was very quiet compared to your average V8 ski boat. As sweet as a thumping V8 sounds, Malibu wanted the speakers to make the sound and not the engine. Even surfing a few metres from the swim platform, the speakers provided the soundtrack, not the engine.

Being the number one ski, wake and surf boat on the market is no accident. Malibu listens to its customers and constantly leads the way with innovative boats loaded with features. No matter how many buttons and accessories these hulls have, it is still all about what happens at the end of the rope. 