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MAKING WAVES

Malibu's 21 VLX
Wakesetter unplugged



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MAKING WAVES

Malibu's 21 VLX Wakesetter has wave- and surf-making talent in spades ... and it looks great, too.

By Kevin Smith

Malibu's latest 21 VLX Wakesetter is as stylish and slick as they come, and is creating waves and setting trends in global wakeboarding and wakesurfing circles.

The evolution of competitive wakeboarding never ceases to amaze me, and the tricks and manoeuvres just seem to be advancing to almost unbelievable levels. It is, no doubt, an extreme sport and one that requires equally extreme equipment to get the job done – specifically when

it comes to the hulls and dedicated technology built into the boats. And, of course, there's also all the fashionable gear that is so much a part of the scene.

Malibu is no newcomer to the industry, and is considered a premium brand with its range of stylish wakeboats that are dedicated to recreational and professional wakeboarders and family boaters alike. While the designs are overwhelmingly American, given that Malibu is a US brand, Australian-distributed Malibus can be claimed as our own, as the hulls are locally produced in Albury, New South Wales.

New dealer, JSW Powersports on the Gold Coast, supplied its latest 21 VLX Wakesetter for our test. As was to be expected, it's a head-turner when it comes to wakeboat styling and aesthetics, on and off the water. Designed to be the ideal

the 21 VLX Wakesetter is certainly at the higher end of the wakeboat food chain

watersports crossover boat, this model has a capacity for up to 13 people and is a true family boat, with stylish wrap-around seating options, a big sound system, and the ability to cater for skiers, boarders and tubers alike. It even has heating for those hardy souls who want to practise their sport in the winter.

For serious watersports folks, in particular wakeboarders and wakesurfers, the 21 VLX Wakesetter is certainly at the higher end of the



wakeboat food chain and shines as a professional wakeboard and surf boat, with some amazing innovation and technology incorporated to create perfect wakes and waves.

FLASH DASH

One of the classiest and most innovative features I've seen on a wakeboat is the dash set-up on the VLX, which includes 12in and 7in touchscreens to provide all the data you need at the tip of your fingers to fine-tune every part of the ride and wakes/waves. In addition, the smartphone cradle and analog dial control for fast manual tuning of the Surf Gate, Power Wedge II, as well as the boat's speed and the stereo, adds to the ease of setting up and controlling the boat while underway.

Above: Easily launched, the 21 VLX has plenty of room for the whole family or group of friends.

For serious wakesurfers, Malibu's quad-ballast is integrated and, via the Command Centre, can be adjusted from 567 to 828kg across the wake centreline, so wakes and waves can be set up quickly and their size and shape easily fine-tuned to suit individual riders.

Adding to the wake/wave size is Malibu's hydraulic Power Wedge II that can also add an extra 680kg to the wake through water displacement, as well as automatically increasing lift to assist in getting onto the plane quicker with a large load and full ballast. It is also claimed to improve fuel efficiency.

GREAT GATE

Another interesting feature is Malibu's Surf Gate, which takes wake and wave shaping to a whole new level. In simple terms, it's like a trim-tab system, but mounted to each side of the transom. The actuators extend and retract faster than standard trim-tabs to enable quick changes to the wake/wave face, producing a crisper lip and sharper face.

The actuator also retracts quickly to allow for quick lip shifts for experienced riders transferring to the opposite wake/wave – quite impressive, to say the least, as I experienced it first-hand riding the wake, rather than observing from the boat as I normally would. As a novice to wakesurfing, it was an absolute blast and, as a conventional waterskier and wakeboarder, I found it amazing to ride behind a boat without a tow rope.

Additional features incorporated into the Surf Gate system include an indicator horn and light signals to let the rider know when to make their move, as well as a rider's Surf-band remote that allows the rider to take full control of the Command Centre while riding.

TRICK TOWER

It's important to have a quality tower on a towsports boat and Malibu's G4 tower has an aggressive shape and lines, with plenty of fixtures to complement the hull. Speakers, bimini compatibility, wiring, no pinch points, and quality board racks are integrated into the tower, while the sturdy aerospace aluminum construction significantly reduces weight. It only needs minimal effort to fold down for storage.

One of the most impressive aspects of the 21 VLX Wakesetter's many Command Centre



features is its cruise-control function. A simple tap on the Ballast Fill icons will have you ready to go in just over five minutes from empty. From there, it's just a matter of selecting wakeboarding or wakesurfing/skiing options, which then automatically sets the ideal speed and wake settings. Simply knock the throttle down and the Command Centre does the rest – all you need to do is steer and enjoy.

Mastering the Command Centre might look a bit intimidating to start with, but it's designed to be simple enough for a novice to operate. Nonetheless, JSW Powersports will spend a day on the water training customers to be competent with the many functions that can be employed to make the most of the boat's capabilities.

TONS OF TORQUE

Fitted with the 410hp Indmar Monsoon 6.2L V8 motor, the 21 VLX has plenty of low-end torque to provide a gutsy hole-shot and, along with the Power Wedge II, provides a smooth and quick transition to higher speeds. Throttle response is quick and crisp throughout the range and I found the Wakesetter to be an effortless and smooth boat to drive.

The Malibu 21 VLX Wakesetter is undeniably a trendsetter when it comes to style, performance, technical innovation and quality finishes, and serves as an awesome all-rounder or multi-purpose watersports boat, whether for a fun day on the water or when a more professional approach is required.



As tested, with just about all the options ticked and bundles of top-of-the-range bling, its price of \$142,060 is quite reasonable, especially taking into account its high level of refinement and capability. Cheaper craft tend to have far less functionality and none of the advanced technical features of the 21 VLX. That said, those on a tighter budget can still have an entry-level 21 VLX without all the bling for \$106,900 drive-away. 

MALIBU 21 VLX WAKESSETTER	
Hull length:	6.4m
Beam:	2.50m
Draft:	0.7m
Crew capacity:	13 persons
Dry weight:	1996kg
Fuel capacity:	182lt
Standard ballast:	340kg
Max ballast:	1674kg
Engine:	640hp Indmar Monsoon, 6.2L V8
Drive:	Inboard/V-Drive
Price from:	\$106,900
Price as tested:	\$142,060
More information: JSW Powersports, tel: (07) 5529 2616. Web: MalibuBoats.com.au.	

Above: Engine accessibility is good, with all the useful electronics you'd ever need in easy reach when seated at the controls.