



Whitley Factory Tour – *birth of a Cruiser 630.*

by Ian Ashley. Photos – Vicki & Marianne @ Whitley and the Ashleys.

We recently had the unique experience of touring the giant Whitley Factory in Campbellfield Victoria (opposite the Ford Factory) while our new Cruiser 630 was being built.

Now when I say giant, I mean you can see this factory from space (Google-Earth to be precise). At 3 acres under roof (10,230 m²) not only is its physical size impressive, its first class design and engineering facilities enable the 85 highly skilled employees to turn out 18 completed boats per week.



For rapidly growing organisations it can be easy to lose sight of the personal touch – not so at Whitley, where Steve took 2 hours out of his busy schedule to escort us around the factory and as you can see in one of the photos, there's Neville with drill in hand fitting the windscreen to our 630 – not that they do this for all boats, but the 630 is a new design and ours being number 8 is still close at heart for the boys.

The factory floor is basically laid out in 3 zones:

1. fibreglass fabrication
2. woodshop, pre-finishing, R&D centre and canopies;
3. upholstery, soft furnishings, engine bay, fit-out and finishing bays.

Most of the boats take 1 week to build, with a Cruisemaster taking 2 weeks. The 630 being new takes a bit longer at the moment but that is coming down each build.

All up there's 28 moulds in the 630, starting in the back corner with the deck and hull moulds (made in Slovenia) and close by the small part moulds - floors, stringers, galley tubs, cockpit liners, hard tops etc.



Anything you see with red inside is an empty mould into which a release agent is applied before the gel-coat and fibreglass is pressed.

The 630's fibreglass stringers provide more flex and a softer ride than the glass wrapped timber of other models so additional stiffness is provided through design of bulkheads and side inserts. Steve pointed out that even the strakes in the hull of the 630 are resin filled for added strength and durability.

On the down side fibreglass stringers are a lot heavier and more expensive than timber, so everything in engineering is a necessary compromise.



630 born

Once the hull and deck are set, various tools are used to separate the parts from the moulds including wedges, slings and compressed air. The components are then placed on rolling frames and trimmed-up in a sealed area before proceeding to the centre of the factory (pre-finishing bays) where deck and hull are glued together and floor inserted.



660 being joined

In an adjacent bay the wood shop manufactures the interior cabinetry using a specially modified 5-axis computer-controlled milling machine, which also cuts plastic components such as windows. This machine is amazing – not satisfied with its standard 100mm cut depth, Steve has had the machine modified with stepping motors so it can reach 250mm and thus enable larger 3-D fabrication.



Near the wood shop, the upholstery section is hard at work making seats and cutting carpet and the soft furnishing section is making cushion & v-berth covers over pre-cut foam.



upholstery & soft furnishings

The boat fit-out and finishing bays are where most of the components come together – bow rails & deck hardware, trim tabs, wiring looms, anchor winch, side inserts, storage units, galley, dash, windscreen, cabinets, seats, carpets etc.



Nearby the motor is fitted before moving to the final area of the factory to have canopy fitted, final quality checks and be shrink-wrapped for transport to the dealer.

With approx 50 boats in various stages on the go at any one time and 1 week from go to whoa per boat, this is a large operation requiring a well designed and equipped factory and a well drilled and skilled crew.

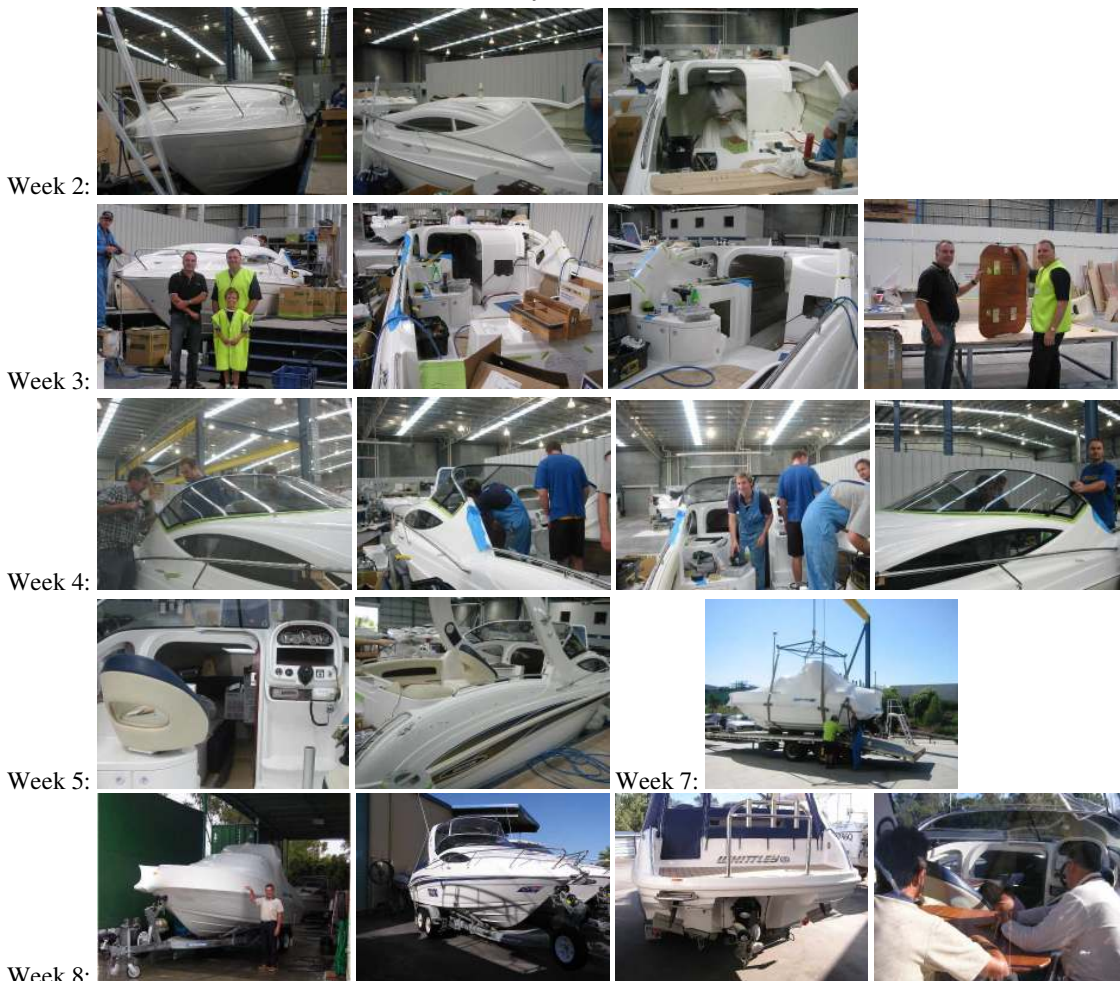


All boats are virtually hand built, and the quality of each reflects the pride in workmanship of each and every person at Whittley.

The astonishing growth of Whittley from its foundation in 1953 at Briar Hill with Jim producing his popular timber runabouts through Thomastown to Campbellfield in 2003 where all Cruiser, Sea Legend, Savage Fibreglass and now two Clearwater models are made is not so surprising to Whittley owners, after-all the cream always rises to the top.

With Neville and Steve steering the ship, Donald in command, Vicki controlling the production schedule, creative thinkers in the ultra modern computer aided design centre and a highly skilled team of specialists on the factory floor, the Whittley marque will continue to grow strongly at home and around the globe.

Our Cruiser 630 Fit-out, Finish and Delivery!



Week 2:

Week 3:

Week 4:

Week 5:

Week 7:

Week 8:

Many thanks to Neville, Steve and Vicki for their hospitality and time spent with us.

Visit: <http://www.geocities.com/clubwq> <http://www.whittley.com.au>