

# BETTER THAN EVER



RANGER'S Z520  
COMANCHE RAISES THE  
BAR FOR BASSIN' BOATS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LEE BOYT





**R**anger Boats has focused on delivering fast, stable boats for recreational and tournament anglers since the inception of competitive bass fishing 40 years ago—and the company's new Z520 Comanche is arguably its best bass boat to date.

We got our chance to try out the Z520 Comanche at Arkansas' Bull Shoals Lake. With Evinrude's new E-Tec 250 H.O. on the transom, our excitement increased exponentially. This was our first chance to really experience the 3.4L E-Tec up close and personal—and we were stoked.

### **RIDE 'EM, RANGER**

Bull Shoals is a marvelous place to test. There's plenty of runnin' room, and not much boat traffic. Water conditions for

our test looked good from the marina, with just a little ripple, yet out on the open water, 2-foot whitecaps went from one side of the lake to the other.

After stowing the test gear and cinching up the straps on our PFDs, the Evinrude rep driving the boat whomped the throttle down, and the E-Tec 250 H.O. had us up to 70 mph just about the time we left the serenity of the marina area to enter the world of wall-to-wall whitecaps.

Throttling back to a more sedate speed in the mid-50s, the new Z520 did quite well, without getting either of us wet. It executed tight turns at high speed with great confidence—even in the rough stuff.

Fortunately, we found a couple of long, protected finger coves where the

chop was only 8-10 inches, which put this Ranger in its element. Over a handful of long runs, we played with trim and jackplate positioning. In our choppy conditions we found the hydraulic Bob's Machine Shop jackplate invaluable, and used it to run the engine a little deeper for better prop hookup. After all that fiddling, we recorded 0-30 mph times under 8 seconds. Midrange acceleration was also good, with our test rig going from 40-60 mph in about 9 seconds. The Z520 and E-Tec combo certainly lived up to their hype. Pushing the throttle even more rocked the Ranger to a very pleasurable 76.2 mph at 5750 rpm. In our less-than-perfect conditions, the Z520 Comanche required a deft touch to get to that top speed.



The helm is as attractive as it is functional. Note the Teleflex Pro Trim switch on the steering column, which made it easy to adjust engine trim and jackplate height.

### BOTTOM LINES

The Z520's foundation is the proven 520VX hull, with some minor modifications. The beam has been widened 2½ inches to make more deck space, and the fuel tank and cockpit seats have

been moved slightly aft for a larger forward casting area. There are three strakes per side; the outer strakes are about an inch high, the two ½-inch inner strakes eventually become the sides of the pad.

The width of the boat across the bottom is 80 inches. The transom is notched—25¼-inches from the drain plug (in the aft end of the pad) to the transom—giving the engine quite a bit of built-in setback. The setback increases even more when you factor in the 8-inch jackplate. However, the Z520's actual running surfaces extend aft of the pad a short distance, increasing the boat's stability at rest, as well as improving its planing ability.

### FISHIN' FEATURES

As fast and good-looking as the Z520 is, we've got to keep in mind that its primary purpose is to provide a great fishing platform—and it does. Its wide beam nearly eliminates any tendency for the boat to list, even with a couple of well-nourished anglers standing on the same side.

The foredeck gives anglers a large unencumbered carpeted area from which to fish. Compartment latches are slightly lower than the carpet, and the trolling motor pedal sits in its own optional recess so there isn't anything to trip over.

There are three storage areas on the front deck: a port side rod locker with tube

organizers that can hold 10 of your favorite 8-foot sticks, a monstrous center compartment where you can stow 18 to 20 standard Plano tackle containers (or add six rod tubes to make it a middle rod locker), and an oversized in-floor gear stash on the starboard side. There's also a 30-quart cooler in front of the driver's console.

Our test subject came with a Minn Kota MAXXUM 80 24V trolling motor mounted on the port side of the bow, a Lowrance LMS-520C sonar/GPS/chart-plotter combo on the center of the bow panel, and a soft-touch pad switch

panel to the right of the Lowrance unit—all within easy sight and reach.

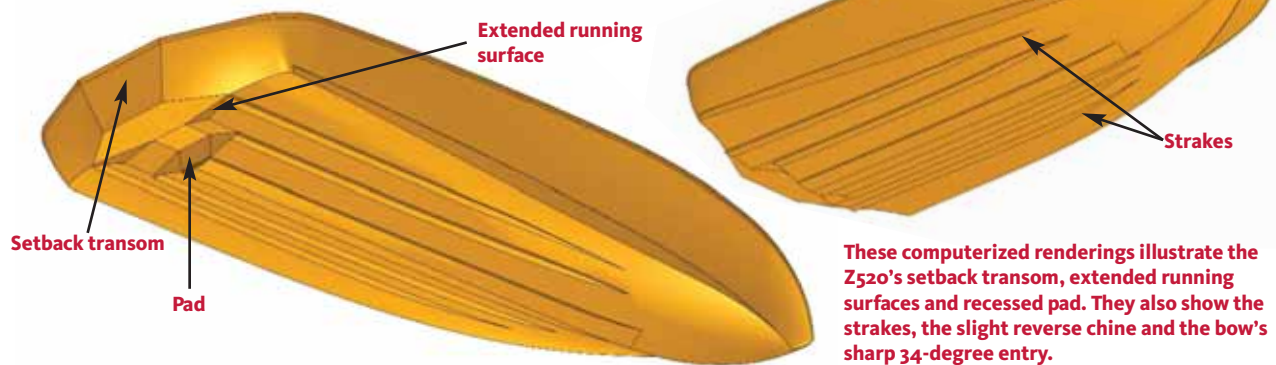
As on most bass boats, the backseater has less acreage to work with, but there's a lot going on under the aft casting deck. Immediately behind the cockpit seats is a 26-gallon recirculating, aerated divided livewell, with large storage lockers on either side.

A few other elements that add to the Z520's fishability factor include the Ranger Tournament Measuring Board secured in a bracket on the underside of the lid on the foredeck's center compart-

ment, the neat net holder in the cockpit (the handle slides in a slotted receptacle under the center seat and the net lays on the sole), and the passenger-side Runnin' Rod Rack to keep your favorite rigs handy, held snugly in place by a retractable strap.

### COCKPIT COMMENTARY

Competitive angling often involves long rides in less-than-ideal conditions. The folks at Ranger know this, which is why the seats in the Z520 Comanche incor-





# Ranger Z520 Comanche

<b>Base Price</b>	
<b>(w/ Evinrude E-Tec 225 H.O.):</b>	<b>\$54,199</b>
<b>Price As Tested:</b>	<b>\$55,120</b>
<b>Top Speed:</b>	<b>76.2 mph</b>
<b>0-to-30 mph:</b>	<b>7.9 seconds</b>
<b>Construction:</b>	Fiberglass
<b>Console Type:</b>	Dual
<b>Length:</b>	20' 9"
<b>Beam:</b>	7' 11"
<b>Hull Weight (per mfg.):</b>	1850 lbs.
<b>Rigged Weight:</b>	2555 lbs.
<b>Trailer Weight:</b>	3755 lbs.
<b>Fuel Capacity:</b>	48 gals.
<b>Livewell Capacity:</b>	26 gals.
<b>Maximum Horsepower:</b>	250

**Standard Equipment as Tested:** 40th anniversary trim package; SRS bench seating; recirculating aerated divided livewell w/ pump out and venturi air; Lowrance electronics; Minn Kota trolling motor; digital ignition and switching at helm

<b>Engine Tested:</b>	Evinrude E-Tec 250 H.O.
<b>Type:</b>	DFI 2-stroke
<b>Displacement:</b>	4.3L (210 cid)
<b>Weight (per mfg.):</b>	507 lbs.
<b>Recommended WOT RPM:</b>	6000
<b>Gear Ratio:</b>	1.71:1
<b>Propeller:</b>	BRP Raker 25" stainless 3-blade
<b>Jackplate:</b>	Bob's Machine Shop hydraulic
<b>Setback:</b>	8"

### WEATHER CONDITIONS:

<b>Air Temperature:</b>	72F
<b>Water Temperature:</b>	79F
<b>Wind:</b>	10 mph
<b>Water Conditions:</b>	8-10" chop

### TEST RESULTS

Engine (rpm)	Speed (mph)	Fuel (gph)	Range <sup>1</sup> (mpg)	Range <sup>1</sup> (miles)
1000	5.6	0.9	6.2	267
1500	7.4	3.3	2.2	95
2000	8.4	6.1	1.4	51
2500	24.9	6.8	3.7	159
<b>3000<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>34.2</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>181</b>
3500	40.4	9.8	4.1	177
4000	46.3	12.2	3.8	164
4500	56.9	19.8	2.9	125
5000	67.8	22.5	3.0	129
5500	73.7	23.2	3.2	138
<b>5750 (WOT)</b>	<b>76.2</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>133</b>

<sup>1</sup>Based on 90% fuel capacity

<sup>2</sup> Optimum cruise speed

### Ranger Boats

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porate Ranger's exclusive SRS (Soft Ride Seating) suspension system. We really appreciated those seats when blasting across whitecaps.

When you ride shotgun in many bass boats, there's usually not a lot to hang onto, which can be disconcerting at speed or in rough weather. The



trim lever on one side of the helm with the hydraulic jackplate lever on the other. Sitting in the driver's seat, you'll find everything where you'd expect it. The touch-pad switches to the right of the helm control the boat's electrical functions, and your right hand naturally rests on the side-mount throttle/shift control—ergonomics at its finest.

If you prefer flush-mount electronics, check out the blank panel to the left of the helm. Our Z520 had a huge Lowrance LCX-38C HD sonar/GPS/chartplotter on a swivel/gimbal bracket mounted to starboard of the windscreen. Though

**Left: The forward casting deck includes a large storage compartment for extra gear. There's also a rod locker that holds up to 10 rods.**

**Below: The rigging is top-notch with everything in its place and the wiring neatly contained.**



Z520 remedies that with a beefy grab handle to the passenger's left, and two ingenious retractable grab handles under each side of the center seat cushion, allowing co-anglers to ride with confidence.

Both consoles are highly stylized, with mini, smoked windscreens that—when combined with the console height and low seat position—do a good job of keeping the wind from blasting your shades off. Ball caps are still fair game for the airstream, so secure your headgear accordingly.

The helm station goes well beyond the simply functional. You'll find a three-spoke padded wheel on a tilt helm, an array of instruments around the radiused dash, and the

it looked a bit ungainly at first, the location and Lowrance's big screen made gathering information easy.

The padded footrests under the driver's console are great for bracing yourself during tight turns. Of course, if you choose an optional foot throttle, you'll only need one of the footrests to stay firmly planted in your seat.

### SIGNING OFF

The Z520 Comanche is the epitome of a Ranger bass boat. It offers outstanding fishability, a great ride, good performance, and great looks. Forrest Wood, Ranger's founding father, is proud of the Z520 Comanche. How can we tell? His signature is on the side of the driver's console. **BWB**