

Fast boats in demand

By John Mulcair

LESS secure times are helping fill the order books at Taren Point boat builder Britton Marine, which is supplying military and federal and state police forces with fast-intervention boats.

Based on a rigid, inflatable, South African design, the boats have been developed by the company to operate at up to 55 knots, or just a shade over 100 kilometres per hour, powered by huge twin outboards or turbocharged diesels.

Managing director Steve Britton said more than 95 per cent of the company's business now came from the military, government and police forces.

"Recently, we won, against worldwide competition, a contract to supply 14 vessels to the Royal New Zealand Navy as part of its fleet expansion," he said.

"We've also supplied the Royal Solomon Islands Police, operating under the direction of the Australian Federal Police, for island security patrols; the boats are proving ideal for covering remote areas."

Britton Marine is also training Solomon Islanders on eight islands to maintain the vessels as part of a policy of developing and leaving behind high-level skills.

The company began in 1987 on what Mr



Big horses: Steve Britton with a partially built rapid-intervention boat, powered by twin 500-horsepower outboards, destined for the Northern Territory Police.

Picture: Carlos Furtado



Fast action: Britton Marine boats will be part of security arrangements for the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation summit, to be attended by world leaders, in Sydney next September.

Britton said was "a little slipway repairing boats at Yowie Bay."

The company now boasts a staff of 18, all from Sutherland Shire, while all possible components of the 100 boats it has built in the past five years have been sourced from local suppliers.

Five state police forces and numerous Australian government agencies, including the army and navy, are operating Britton Marine's fast-

intervention boats.

The company is also developing what is described as the world's most advanced boat for shallow-water mines clearance.

Combining the low acoustic and electronic signatures of the boat with company refinements of a diesel motor to operate more safely than conventional vessels, it is drawing strong international interest.