

EXTREME RIBS

The weight advantage as provided by use of modern materials, is here examined by Paul Lemmer, as he reviews the Extreme RIBs operation. Photography by Sander Van Der Borch

Take an average 30ft (9m) inboard RIB hull with a set of buoyancy tubes and add a steering console, an engine box and a 150-litre fuel tank; how much do you think the

average weight is for a normal GRP-constructed RIB to the above specification? Having spoken to three major European RIB builders, it would appear that between 1100 and 1200 kg is commonplace.

Some more sophisticated RIBs will be lighter, others heavier, but none will get even close to the all-carbon-fibre-constructed eXtreme 30 RIB, which weighs in at an incredible 247 kg! Even when employing more

careful methods of construction designed to give more strength with less weight, the total, using conventional materials, is still likely to be around 1000 kg; so if the figures given by the manufacturers are accurate, the



eXtreme 30 is a quarter of the weight of a conventional RIB, and that is simply amazing!

Most people will be aware that certain modern construction methods combined with the latest sophisticated materials, such as Kevlar and carbon fibre, create stronger and lighter vessels, and one only has to look at some of the modern racing yachts to realise how development in this area has improved speed, efficiency and structural integrity dramatically over recent years. Many years ago I remember sharing a lift (elevator) with an elderly gentleman at the Earl's Court London Boat Show and he enquired if I was a boatbuilder. He then stated: 'The most important thing to remember is that weight is only useful in steamrollers!' The gentleman

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was Uffa Fox who, for the uninitiated, was at that time one of the country's leading designers, outspoken critics and flamboyant characters in the sailing/boating fraternity. I have always remembered his words and often seen the wisdom of his thinking.

So, here we have a 9 m RIB that weighs about the same as a 4.5 m, yet can evidently match any other 9 m for seaworthiness, load carrying...in fact anything except one crucial area: price! Well, we will come to that later in the test, but for now let us look at the eXtreme 30 and try to establish why anyone would go to such lengths to produce such a revolutionary vessel.

Firstly, one has to look at the background of the people



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Four Ullman suspension seats



The power block

behind the eXtreme project to understand the reason for this extraordinary craft. Swedish composite specialist, Göran Marström, has been working with sophisticated and exotic structural materials for over 30 years, not only in boats but in racing cars and other areas where light weight combined with immense strength are essential if the end result is to succeed. The other half of the equation is Dutchman Herbert Dercksen, an experienced and keen sailor and quality boatbuilder with a passion for speed combined with efficiency on the water. These two specialists are the driving force behind the 'Extreme Class' of cutting-edge racing sailing catamarans that is recognised

as one of the most exciting racing sailing series in the world. Having created the sailing craft, it seemed logical to them that a suitable 'chase boat' for the series should be made, utilising the same construction techniques, and the eXtreme range of RIBs is the result.

My first acquaintance with the eXtreme 30 RIB was at this year's RIBEX show, and whilst it looked very smart in its black and orange livery, it was not especially striking and certainly gave no clue as to its uniqueness within the RIB world.

Starting with the hull: this has a relatively shallow deadrise for this size of RIB and at first glance the shape does not appear technically advanced; it has a number of 'soft' chines (spray

...and it gave me the rare feeling of being at one with the craft, almost an extension of my fingertips.

rails) that extend right to the stern, and a fairly shallow stem. The interior is dominated by the tall, slightly ungainly cuddy/console, which looks a little old-fashioned considering the revolutionary nature of this craft, and there are four Ullman suspension seats for the crew. The interior of the console is comfortably big enough to seat a couple of adults, with plenty of headroom making it



Your mother-in-law wouldn't like this... bosh!

Even at over 40 knots it just seems to float on an invisible air cushion and never once landed with a bang or crash.

ideal for storing clothing and equipment to keep it dry but, curiously, it is too short to sleep in. Accessing the back of the dashboard instruments is easy from the shelter of the cuddy/console, but the interior finish is very basic and would benefit from the convenience of a toilet. To further save weight, there is a relatively small 150-litre polypropylene fuel tank fixed inside the console, the door of which is also constructed from carbon fibre, and my impression was that the manufacturers had made everything as minimalist as possible in the quest to save precious kilos.

Whilst the interior finish of the console was 'edgy' the exterior

finish could not be faulted, and there was no evidence anywhere that corners had been cut to try to save weight, or to save money for that matter. The driving position was better suited to taller crew than my short frame but everything was correctly located and, of course, the Ullman seats did what Ullman seats do: take the pain out of boating.

A simple carbon-fibre engine box conceals a tidy and easily accessed engine compartment, with everything properly assembled, easy to reach and neatly executed, but here comes the next surprise: on most 9 m RIBs one would normally expect something between 250 and 300 hp, but with this craft weighing no more than a 4.5 m, why put a massive engine in to cause an imbalance and burn excess fuel? eXtreme ribs have made no attempt to produce the fastest RIB on the water, but their choice of the relatively compact and lightweight Volvo D3-190 hp diesel sterndrive seems a little strange on first acquaintance; that is, until one tries the craft.

So far, apart from the revolutionary construction, nothing particularly outstanding has caught my attention, and this was what I felt when I first saw the craft at RIBEX, but now it was time to put her through her paces.

Stepping aboard one realises how light the craft is, for although she is stable she seems alive, almost eager to be let off the leash, and on engaging gear she instantly starts forward, without the usual momentary hesitation

one gets from a similar boat/engine set-up. Everything seems to be happening instantly, the slightest twitch of the wheel corresponding to movement of the hull, and it gave me the rare feeling of being at one with the craft, almost an extension of my fingertips. Accelerating, there is no perceptible 'hump', the transition being linear from displacement to planing and on up to maximum speed.

Acceleration is rapid once the turbo has managed to spin up to deliver boost, and the top speed



A carbon-fibre engine box conceals a tidy and easily accessed engine compartment



is not too shabby at 43 knots (evidently the engine was down on power and the propeller slightly damaged after hitting something), but it was the feel of the craft that made this eXtreme RIB feel so completely different to any other RIB I have driven. It felt absolutely alive and responsive and a joy to drive, inspiring great confidence in the turns, with the ability to switch locks with the flick of the wrist. Now I understood the reason for the relatively small lightweight diesel, for it is the ideal partner for this lightweight RIB, its weight not dragging the stern down, yet balancing out the four Ullman seats and forward-mounted console/fuel tank perfectly.

With such a shallow V to the multi-chined hull, I was convinced it would slam on every wave but it does the opposite: the boat just skips from wave to wave with no fuss or dramatics and without any banging as it lands. The ride is uncanny and completely unlike any RIB or, for that matter, any boat I have driven; even at over 40 knots it just seems to float on an invisible air cushion and never once landed with a bang

or crash. Herbert explained that the reason for this was the property of carbon, which reverses energy as it comes into contact with a solid object, in the same way as the carbon-fibre tub of a Formula One racing car does when it crashes.

There are still unanswered questions relating to this craft which are no fault of eXtreme: whilst there were sufficient



waves to get the craft flying, the Solent was not rough and therefore I have no idea how she would behave in inclement conditions, whether she would become flighty when pressed into steep head sea/winds or stuff into a following sea, but one thing is certain, the light weight really brings this craft to life and provides astonishing

fuel consumption figures, thanks to its relatively high power-to-weight ratio.

This was not so much a full boat test as a realisation of what can be achieved when two great minds come together. There will be situations where the light weight yet virtually indestructible nature of this craft will prove invaluable, and in those circumstances, currently only this product is offering the properties to meet those specialist requirements.

Personally, I would like to give the eXtreme a proper offshore test before coming up with any definitive answers, but at only 875 kg including the diesel engine, this craft can be towed with a medium-sized car, can be easily lifted onto the deck of a mother ship, yet carry an enormous payload and put a smile on one's face, thanks to the excellent fuel consumption/performance ratio and pure tactile nature of its handling.

It would appear from my brief acquaintance with the eXtreme 30 and Uffa Fox that Mr Fox may have been 'bang on' with his assertion... 'weight really is only useful in steamrollers'!

Paul Lemmer

TECHNICAL INFO

PERFORMANCE

KNOTS	SECS	RPM	LPH
0 to 20	7	2900	8
0 to 30	10	3000	13
0 to 40	15	3600	30
Max 43		3700	45

NB: The performance figures were conducted using GPS for speed and a stopwatch for time. The fuel consumption figures are an average from previous Volvo D3-190 tests at the RPM shown.

SPECIFICATIONS

Length Overall: 8.30m
Width: 2.30m
Weight: 875kg
Persons Capacity: 13
Max HP: 300 HP
Recommended Engine: D3 Volvo 220hp - Styer 236/285hp
Deadrise 'V' @ transom: 17/21°
Tube Diameter: 450mm
Number Of Chambers: 5
Max. Load Capacity: 1800 kg
Tube Material: Hypalon
CE Category: B-Offshore
Warranty: 24 months

STD EQUIPMENT

Carbon autoclaved hull, Carbon autoclaved console, navigation lights, 2 Ullman seats, Volvo D3 190 hp, Carbon autoclaved engine cover.

EXTRAS ON TEST CRAFT:

Garmin 15inc Touch screen chart plotter, 4 Ullman seats

PRICES

From: £82,250 (Ex vat)
As tested: £98,250 (Ex vat)

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