



# THERE'S NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT...

Enough of the pondering, enough of the wondering... The time has arrived!

**Y**ou've spent ages looking through the brochures, browsing the Web in those illicit moments at work hoping that your searches for 'Hypalon versus PVC' don't ring too many alarm bells in the IT department, and you've scoured the Web forums looking for good, bad or any comments about the RIBs you're keen on. A few days hanging around marinas and slipways have pushed you close to the edge, but it was the visit to Cowes for

RIBEX and the London and Southampton Boat Shows that really did it for you. There's no avoiding it – the time has come to buy a RIB. Your flexible friend (or bank manager) needs exercising!

Everyone reading this article has been through some or all of the above, so I thought that prior to the series of articles we're leading into, addressing the use of a new or existing RIB, we'd look at the options and considerations for you when stepping onto the ladder. Over the years I've met plenty

of RIB owners, and so spoke to a few to get their thoughts and views to share here.

Buying a boat can be approached in two very different ways. One way is the 'emotional' purchase. Whether you've been looking for ages or not at all, some will just make a snap decision to buy a boat having given it no great thought. Often this works fine, although equally often, as you get afloat and start to understand your needs, you find the boat doesn't quite suit – which is where the more

military or rational approach comes to the fore.

If you've been thinking it through logically, the key questions have to be what you want to do in the RIB and where you are going to use it. Equally, do you need or want to use it right through the year, or is it just a spring/summer purchase? The majority of those afloat tend to want an 'all-rounder' that they can undertake reasonable passages in, can waterski/wakeboard from, and in which they can anchor up and crash out with



the family.

As David said when I asked him why he bought his 6.2-metre Avon, 'I needed a boat that I could take the family to the beach in and, as they grow up, get them wakeboarding. I've also got an older son and we're keen to do some 20- to 30-mile coastal cruises, so a boat this size seemed a great way to get out in suitable conditions. It's also got good resale potential for when I finally persuade the family a 7.5-metre or 8-metre is the way forward!'

If you are thinking about a family RIB with young kids, then the seating configuration will be key. Pod seats are usually my preference, but with younger kids (who tend to have short legs!) they are not ideal, so a rear bench seat offers a safer option. Make sure, though, that the side support is good, since there is no point having a high bench seat with little side protection, as you increase the risk of pinging a rear-seat passenger overboard. Generally, the smaller seats forward of the helm position in the console are not an option in anything other than flat, calm conditions. Some RIBs have

some shocking seat set-ups, presenting passengers with a real challenge to hang on in rougher conditions, so do look closely at the set-up and check that the RIB layout affords you the protection and comfort you need.

Cruising in a RIB need not require a huge inboard diesel set-up; however, it is fair to say that if your aim is cruising, then you will be assessing your RIB in a different way. Length does matter, with longer, well-built RIBs with proven hulls massively easing the fatigue on those helming, and chomping the miles with relative ease. Potentially, diesel boats may offer a cheaper longer-term alternative in terms of running costs, and in some areas may be essential for easy refuelling. On the recent Round Britain Rally it was clear what a difference these things make. Indeed, even considerations like fitting a commercial-size fuel filler cap for those more remote locations, where you will refuel alongside a fishing fleet, could save lots of time otherwise spent with a funnel trying to prevent a spillage.

Tied into where you intend using the RIB is the question of when, as if you want to use

the RIB all year round, or in areas not blessed with great weather, you will want to consider protection for your crew. Once again, the recent Round Britain Rally gave an interesting perspective on this, as we noticed the type of RIB in the marinas change as we progressed. In places like Falmouth, most were 4.5-6 m open RIBs, whereas Ireland and Scotland (predictably!) saw more RIBs cut out for the serious stuff, with varying degrees of crew protection – the Redbays, which I don't see too often around Poole and the Solent, were suddenly in abundance.

As Martin commented, 'I

started out with a 6-metre family RIB, but getting a 9-metre diesel inboard RIB suddenly changed my boating. No longer was a 20-mile passage very weather dependent, and I found myself getting out a lot on my own. The family still comes but we almost have two boats – I do my bit but it's also configured well for crashing out at the beach. Do think about console set-up, though, as if you intend cruising alone you will want the key bits of kit visible to you and within easy reach.'

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A few days hanging around marinas and slipways have pushed you close to the edge! Make buying a RIB easy - come to Ribex 2011, 13th - 15th May, Cowes IOW.





One of the disadvantages historically with a RIB has tended to be a lack of wind shelter if boating in colder weather or with kids



weather or with kids, and for the ladies the lack of decent (any!) toilet facilities. A couple of RIB manufacturers I spoke to evidenced how key this was, and for some purchasers this can be a dealer breaker/maker. Scorpion RIBs added the option of an in-console toilet in the 9 m+ open RIBs last year after a specific request, and had they not been able to deliver, the purchase would not have proceeded. For others, a cabin RIB and the protection, comfort and sleeping options it offers is a real winner – particularly if the family have their eye on a sports boat-type set-up.

One thing I do tend to find with those starting out boating is that initial intentions tend not to be totally fulfilled. The family that has not boated before is likely to undertake fairly short coastal passages in their first two or three years, so sometimes it makes sense to factor in a stepped process. Start with a medium-sized family RIB, with the intent of probably moving towards a larger RIB in a couple of years. This keeps the costs down and allows you time to form a clearer view of which way your ribbing will progress.

All the talk has been of larger RIBs so far, but boats from 3.5 to 5.0 m also offer great

and relatively cheap boating options. A few years ago I bought a 4 m Avon with a soft hull and a 15 hp Yamaha from a client. I paid about £1,500 and reckon that I, and he before me, had almost more fun per pound than anyone else in the harbour on a powerboat. It had no draught, flexed big time in waves, and needed friendly sea conditions, but it was so easy to use, handle, store and get ashore from.

Consideration needs to be given to where you will store the RIB too. Keeping it in the water is never ideal, as

the tubes tend to touch the water with many RIBs, and antifouling the bottom of the tubes is irreversible. The RIB also acts as a rather effective water-gathering machine, so keeping it clear of water is not easy even with a good cover, as they can be difficult to secure properly when afloat. In many situations it is unavoidable, though, so ensure bilge pumps are up to the job and install a separate battery to avoid not being able to start the engine. Keeping your RIB on a racking system with launches via a forklift is an increasingly popular option, particularly on

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the south coast where space is at a premium. Expect to pay the same as for a marina berth, about £1,800 – £2800, for a 5.6 m RIB. Of course, trailing your RIB is a great option, giving you flexibility on boating locations and the potential to store at home. The downside, though, can be the extra time it takes to get afloat and recover the boat. For some this is not an issue, but it will add about an hour or more travel time, which might reduce your desire to go afloat sometimes. Launch and recovery costs vary, with some slipways being free (increasingly rare), through to £500 per annum for a slipway pass in some of the larger commercial marinas with good

facilities.

Judy is one half of a new RIB duo: 'We started by trailing the hour to the slipway but soon got frustrated by the extra hassle involved. It costs more to keep it on a rack berth but we use the boat far more. We don't hesitate to get out for just an hour or two because the launch and recovery time is minimal. We figure that the more time we use the boat the cheaper it becomes (sort of!), and after all, a boat is all about having fun and relaxing.'

Other considerations are, of course, the running costs. Insurance will cost about £250 – £500 per annum, and it's worth budgeting £500 – £1,000 for servicing and breakdowns. In your first

year you'd be well advised to undertake an RYA Level 2 course (typically £500 for three people on your boat), and it's likely your insurance company will insist on this if you are new to boating. An initial kit purchase (life jackets, flares etc) will cost you a few hundred pounds. While this might all sound quite a lot, it need not cost too much if you shop around and aim at the smaller end of the market.

Finally, what about how you 'buy' the RIB? Of course, cash or loans are simple, but there are other options, like the various boat-share schemes, that are becoming more and more common. There are a variety of schemes around, and you need to look carefully

at what suits you, as some are rental-type agreements whereas others are part-ownership. Straight rental is also an option on a day, week or monthly basis.

Owning a boat is great fun, and the research and buying of kit are often major parts of that fun for people. As we said at the beginning, search the Net, speak to other boaters, instructors etc, and then...take the plunge. You'll have great fun!

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