

Predator 660

If you're looking for a sizeable, quality RIB the Predator could be for you, as Simon Everett recently discovered.

The ease of using a RIB has drawn many new boaters onto the water and converted many existing boaters to the joys of inflatable boating. The trademark of a good RIB is the load carrying capacity and the massive reserve of buoyancy within the enveloping tubes. There's also the perception that a RIB is protected by those big air bladders and they act as all round fenders when a tender to a bigger boat. However, many a RIB tube has come to grief under this misguided belief; a RIB should be handled just as carefully as a hard boat.

The Italians have been building RIBs for as long as they've been around. It's commonly held that the Atlantic College was the first to create a RIB by putting a plywood hull on the bottom of their inflatables to protect against

damage from rocks when beaching. Semi-rigid inflatables of various types have been around for even longer and the inflatable boat has been about for centuries in the form of animal skins sewn into what have developed into the carefully shaped items we would now call tubes.

Modern RIBs have the benefit of modern materials the hypalon tubes and complex laminations used in the hulls and mouldings are immensely strong and durable. As the use of RIBs in the leisure market continues to grow, so the design features incorporated into these boats continues to develop. As with most things the Italians are masters of design and they seem to produce shapes and function with a flair for aesthetics that seems to be beyond the rest of the world. The Italians can blend simple function into glorious eye fodder.

PREDATOR 660

The Predator 660 is the largest of this passenger carrying range from the Italian capital. They ply the waters of the Italian lakes carrying people and picnics to the stylish villas and hotels along the banks, but they're proper sea going RIBs with high volume tubes and fittings to suit.

At first glance the Predator looks much like many other RIBs, but once aboard the subtle differences begin to shine. On the test boat the teak deck immediately made an impact; it looks very smart and is so nice to walk on. It set the boat off a treat.

The tubes are very slightly tapered and in typical thoughtful fashion the blunt bow permits anchoring without having the anchor warp having to run over the tubes while under tension. ►►



►►A further benefit of this squared bow concept is to reduce overall length without reducing hull length, and it makes it easier for boarding over the bow. In the bow, steps have been moulded on the top of the stem and as a locker lid for the rope locker. It all fits very sweetly.

CONSOLE

The console wasn't too large and so left plenty of room to get past. This is always



something of a trade off: a large console provides extra protection, but it intrudes on the walkway. The Predator's console was just wide enough for two but still left a walkway either side.

The pilot seat is more of a padded leaning post and works well. For long passage making, a rare thing without a break in a boat of this size, it would become tiring standing for the entire trip, but it gives a good bracing position against the angled footplate.

The curved top lifts to reveal a raised stowage box that isn't watertight, but I fail to see how much water could ever get in there, unless the rain can find its way in - something I didn't find out.

In the base, facing aft, there's a proper watertight locker with a gasket sealed door. This is where to stow anything that really must stay dry. Oddly, on the after end of the console seat a lifebuoy is provided and housed in a dedicated moulding. This is a rare commodity to find on a pleasure RIB, and I am still in a quandary weighing up the positive aspect of safety against the use of the space. That's one for the individual purchaser.



AFT SEAT

The aft bench seat is moulded in right across the stern and also provides a generous stowage space below. It has a raised cushion for a back support and raised gunwale coamings to give a strong sense of security with the extra degree of safety this provides. Anyone with children will appreciate the importance of this feature to increase the internal freeboard.

There are a couple of small lockers in the gunwale capping to take odds and ends. These lockers are the mounting points for the optional radar arch if it's specified instead of the tubular A-frame.

Overside, the engine is bordered by a swimming pad either side to provide easy re-entry from the water. The tubes have a very short overhang and sit squarely on the water making for a stable boat. This is where the neatness of the tubes really shows. There are no glue stains running out of the seams and the tubes are very neat indeed.

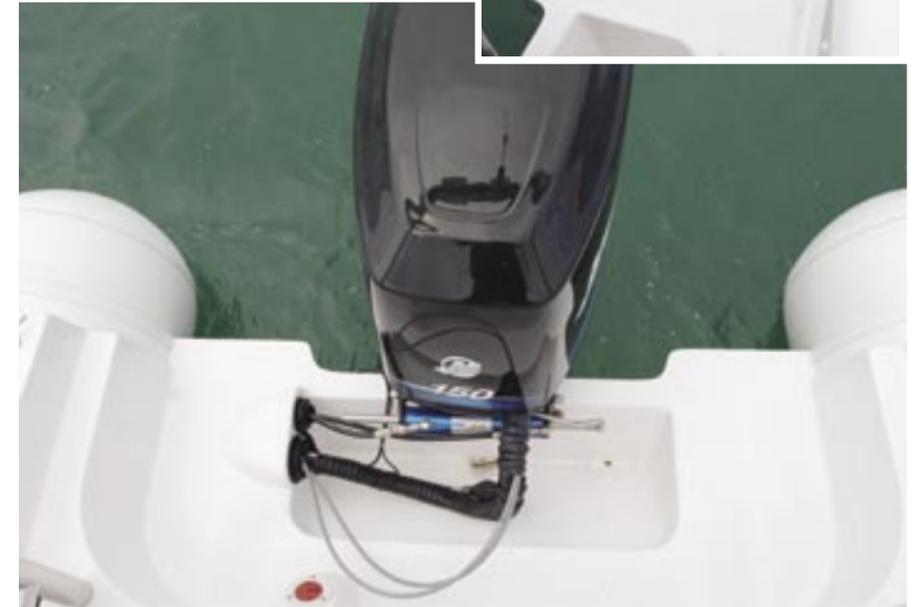


Wear pads are glued over the tubes at the point where boarding and disembarking takes place to reduce the wear and tear on this spot. Rubber handles on the quarters and usefully at the 1/3 length point make manhandling her easy and laced lifelines run the length of the forward cockpit.

The boat is very light on the helm and changes direction with the merest twitch of an eyebrow. You just have to think about turning and the boat responds to ►►

FORWARD

The forward part of this boat is where the style really shines through. The whole of the forward sunpad lifts to reveal two massive stowage holds. In this cavernous 'hole' you can also see the very substantial stringers used in the construction. They truly are enormous and they make the hull very stiff and strong. This comes through in the feedback when on the plane.





your thoughts. This lightness does make her feel a bit skippy, but she holds her own and once used to it you soon get to appreciate the ease with which she steers.

Right in the bow the rope locker is formed into a step to help boarding over the bow. The top of the stem is flattened off to function as a step and also to mount a stemhead fairlead for correct anchoring. The steps on the test boat were topped off with the optional teak decking; on standard boats a non-slip surface is used instead, which covers all the walk-on surfaces.

The area ahead of the console has been deliberately kept clear to create a large sunbathing area for leisure use, or a useful cargo carrying space for taking stores out to a bigger boat on a mooring or lying at anchor perhaps. It can just as easily be pressed into service for ferrying all the barbecue paraphernalia in the afternoon ahead of the part goes in the evening. There

are many ways you could use a useful deck space like this.

POWER

The Predator is rated up to 195hp, but the 150hp Optimax gave her a useful turn of speed in the high 40s. Accelerating from a standstill did show a tendency for the bow to climb rather high and obscure the view ahead for several seconds before she levelled off.

As the boat has plenty of bow lift naturally she needed no trim to make her work well and trim nicely. Lifting her leg a bit added a few revs to the engine and squeezed a little extra speed, but at the cost of a very sensitive ride. In normal use the Predator runs quite happily without fiddling with the trim button all the time.

This ease of use will appeal to the family of boaters with young helmspersons coming on, as they can learn without worrying about the technicalities of trim during their initial periods in the driving seat. ■

FACT FILE

SPECIFICATION

Predator 660
■ Hand laid deep V hull
■ Hypalon tapered tubes
■ Centre console with s/steel steering wheel, screen, handrails and double console seat with storage
■ 250 litre stainless steel fuel tank
■ Raised bow sundeck with fitted cushions
■ Lockable under deck storage hatches
■ Seater aft bench with under seat storage
■ Double helm seat with storage with lifebelt
■ Moulded engine well with diving platform
■ Hydraulic steering
■ Moulded handles on tubes
■ Anchor locker
■ Moulded VTR anchor guide
■ Navigation lights
■ Stainless steel fittings
Boat only: £12,200 + VAT
Boat with Suzuki 140hp or Mecury 150hp Optimax: £19,950 + VAT
Length: 6.60m
Width: 2.69m
Int. length: 5.98m
Int. width: 1.45m
Max hp: 195
People cap: 12
CE category: B

WHO TO TALK TO

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