

RATINGS

- Useless, avoid
- It's got problems
- Does its job
- Now we're talking
- You've gotta have it



**OCEAN PRO 6.3M
RIB WITH DIESEL
INBOARD ENGINE**

From £20,000, Humber Fabrications
tel: 01482 226100

Words and photographs by Charles Hood

The new Ocean Pro 6.3m RIB from Humber combines a range of 270 nautical miles with a diesel inboard engine and, crucially, allows the user to make dramatic savings on fuel costs.

On a January afternoon we launched this RIB into the cold, but relatively calm, North Sea at Filey, a few miles north of Flamborough Head in Yorkshire. The noise on starting the engine was reminiscent of that of a London Taxi. However, when I opened up the throttle the similarity ended. A smooth, higher-pitched whine replaced the taxi diesel-engine sound as the turbo kicked in and the RIB took off. Within 15 seconds we were at a speedy but comfortable 35 knots, the cold North Sea wind bringing tears to my eyes. The second thing that was immediately noticeable was that unlike conventional outboard rigs, the bow didn't rise steeply – despite the rear-positioned driving console. As the weight of the inboard is forward of the transom, the overall weight

distribution in the RIB makes it ride more horizontally. Weaving around in the waves produced by the wash of another RIB, she held the water very well, with none of the usual slapping of the bow. Throttling back to 3,500rpm she glided through the water at her usual cruising speed of just under 30 knots. At this speed we could travel an amazing 270 miles with a full tank of fuel. That's the equivalent of going from Dover to Calais and back, nearly six times!

'Why would you want to have an inboard diesel engine when there are loads of two and four-stroke engines already on the market?' I asked Andrew, son of Humber owner Frank Roffee. 'Better torque, very much safer, and huge fuel savings,' he replied.

Okay, so let's examine each of these. Better torque means that at lower engine speeds, the engine delivers greater power than an equivalent petrol engine. Therefore the RIB gets on to the plane quicker, while carrying more weight, with less fuel consumption. The downside is that petrol engines usually have a greater top speed (upwards of 60mph). However, fast speeds are not a priority on a dive boat.

In terms of safety, the Ocean Pro also performed well. As RIBs get bigger, storing and transporting them becomes more of a safety issue. Diesel has a boiling point far higher than that of petrol and is consequently more difficult to get to burn. Furthermore, RIB fuel systems are not subject to the same



rigorous regulations that motorcars are, so having a RIB full of diesel rather than petrol is vastly safer.

One of this RIB's most significant advantages is that because it has a diesel engine, it can run on marine 'red' diesel. Red diesel is subject to about 45p per litre less duty than ordinary diesel, making it approximately 37p per litre. It is dyed to an easily-identifiable red colour and all marine craft may use it. A quick calculation gives the user a nine or ten-fold saving on fuel costs over a two-stroke outboard. At these prices a typical club might save more than £1,000 a year in fuel alone. The cost of servicing is on a par with that of an outboard engine, although in reality diesels are inherently more reliable. In terms of fuel consumption, the 1.7L TDI MerCruiser engine generates 120hp (89.5 kw) and burns a staggeringly low nine litres per hour* at a high cruising speed

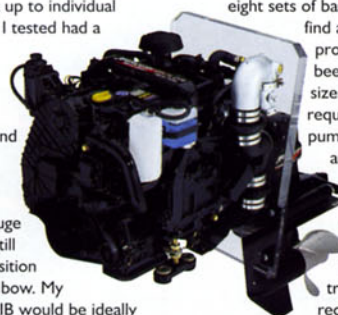
(30 knots). This compares to about 35 litres per hour used by the equivalent modern petrol engine.* The final design is a stable, spacious, fast and fuel-efficient dive boat.

The Ocean Pro is set up to individual requirements. The one I tested had a stand-up rear console with the instruments neatly laid out at chest height. This set-up resulted in good all-round visibility, which was aided by the horizontal riding position. In addition, there was a huge kitting-up area, which still allowed for an eight-position bottlerack towards the bow. My conclusion is that this RIB would be ideally suitable for eight divers plus a coxswain.

The only disadvantage I could find is that the inboard takes up quite a bit of space. To get around this, Humber can custom-make

virtually any design. One suggestion the company makes is to have an equipment container rack built above the housing. This would provide ample space for holding up to eight sets of basic gear. We did, though, find a couple of teething problems – the engine had been fitted with the wrong size fuel filter, which required us having to back-pump the fuel line twice, and the diesel filler cap was positioned under the bottlerack, which would make it difficult to fill. However, it's great to observe sea trials being undertaken to rectify these minor issues before the boat goes on general sale.

Humber has since informed me that both these faults have now been rectified. ■



Last year saw the 40th anniversary of Humber Inflatables, a company producing vessels primarily aimed at the diving market. Director and owner Frank Roffee started building inflatables in the early Sixties so that he could go diving himself. Someone spotted him with his first prototype and was so impressed that he asked to buy it from him. Roffee promptly sold it and built another, better one, in order to continue his obsession with diving. He sold that one before it was launched; and the rest, as they say, is history. Some 9,000 boats later Frank claims, with good reason, to know just about everything there is to know about building RIBs. Today Humber remains a family-run business, with Frank's son Andrew at the helm. The company produces around five boats each week and sells direct to the customer, saying that this saves the client the 20–30 per cent that would normally go to a dealer.



EQUIPMENT MATTERS

Boat Specification	
Length	6.3m
Beam	2.34m
Tube diameter	48cm
Chambers	5
Weight	470kg
Internal length	1.35m
Max capacity	1,700kg
Max HP	200

Engine Specification	
Type	1.7-litre turbo fuel-injected diesel
Power	120 hp
Propulsion	Alpha 'Z' stern drive
Maximum Speed	35 knots
Acceleration	0-20 knots – 7 seconds 0-30 knots – 12 seconds
Maximum speed 8/10 divers	
21in pitch propeller	35Knots
23in pitch propeller	40 knots
Maximum speed 6 divers or fewer	
25in pitch propeller	45 Knots
Fuel consumption	
@ 30 knots	9 litres per hour
Range	270 miles approx.
Engine Displacement	1,686cc
Combustion system	Direct fuel injection
Engine weight inc drive	296kg

* Source EP Barrus, distributor of MerCruiser and Mercury outboard engines in UK.

Verdict

If your club is considering updating its RIB, the Ocean Pro 6.3m is an excellent boat for up to eight, fully kitted divers and cox. Consider having the stern driving position as it gives loads of room, and the diesel engine provides huge fuel cost savings.