

50 YEARS

Q & A WITH FRANK ROFFEE

In recognition of 50 years of the company, Frank Roffee, founder and MD of Humber RIBs, agreed to take centre stage for PBR ...

What was the marine leisure market like when you first became involved in building boats 50 years ago?
It was very competitive. I quickly realised it was very old-fashioned with almost Victorian ideas (I served my apprenticeship in 1949 in an old Victorian workshop and I didn't like it!). We now use the word 'dinosaur' to explain old-fashioned.

Being one of the very first RIB builders back in the early 1960s, did you feel like an innovator or pioneer of something new?
I was finding it difficult to sell my range of Hypalon inflatable boats, although one or two years earlier I was manufacturing and selling 500 units annually. Cheap, plastic, welded inflatables put a stop to that, imported from France. We, along with Avon Inflatables, had to cut back, and then some more. One of my dealers and friend Paul Lemmer saw the future and suggested I

build a RIB. My answer to that was: what's a RIB? And the rest, as they say, is history. As with the inflatables, when I started I had never stuck two pieces of rubber together, and with no one to teach me I had to teach myself. It was exactly the same with fibreglass - I had to teach myself. But when I want to learn something I work 24/7 to succeed. Everything I did was more of a

People all over the world are becoming more aware of the benefits and advantages of a RIB as opposed to a conventional craft.

hobby and a means to an end, so motivation and pioneer didn't come into it.

Did you ever anticipate RIBs would become so incredibly successful globally?
Yes. I was diving most weekends from my inflatables, and the first RIB I produced enabled me to travel faster, safer and further and reach dive sites that very few could reach. I realised then that many people would love the experience that I was having.

How would you say RIBs have changed the face of boating?
People all over the world are becoming more aware of the benefits and advantages of a RIB as opposed to a conventional craft. In most applications, whether it's professional, commercial or leisure, a RIB can outperform and is more versatile, especially in rough sea conditions. You can easily get hooked on RIBs. Travelling fast in a RIB is certainly a mesmerising buzz - almost

Destroyer 5.5 used by the British Antarctic Survey in some of the world's most extreme conditions



intoxicating. I believe the market will continue to expand for many years to come and we will see commercial and leisure craft becoming larger and more technically advanced.

What constitutes a 'good boat' in your view?
Quality, performance and a very reliable engine.

What other boatbuilders and makes of boat have you found inspirational and why?
I've never been influenced others; I always think for myself and take the flack if I'm wrong. I design all my RIBs and still don't know where the ability comes from - other than, as I said, being focused.

What do you see as the main changes within the UK marine market over the last 50 years?
People seem to have more leisure time and spend more on leisure. I haven't seen much change in conventional boats except for superstructure design and a big improvement in quality. Also, a massive change in marine equipment, including reliability in the outboards. RIBs have offered the public a different aspect of boating, and probably the most important thing is safety.

Where do you see Humber in 10 years' time and what advances do you anticipate in terms of design and manufacture?

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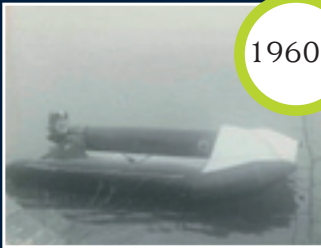


High performance Leisure Pro for family use



HUMBER'S TIMELINE

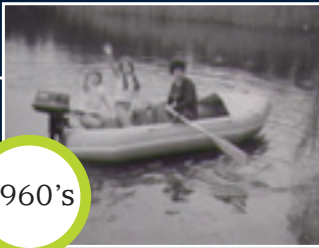
IT ALL STARTED BACK IN THE 1960's



My very first 11ft inflatable dive boat

1960's

My family on the 9ft tender



1960's



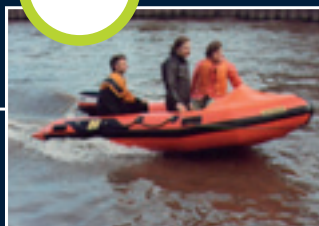
Part of the inflatable leisure range

1960's



The then new 9ft guppy range was very popular in the tender market. we still see these today

1960's



Enter the commercial range....13ft inflatable

1970's



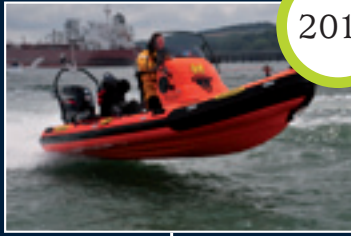
Heading into the dive market with the RH600

1980's



2000's

TO THE FUTURE...



2013

The Humber Attaque, also previously popular in the dive market, in action during the Round Ireland PBR Challenge



2012

Change of colour but the same 13ft inflatable design, being supplied to Humberside Fire & Rescue

Offshore 11m for passenger charter use in Denmark



“You can easily get hooked on RIBs”



Ocean Pro 6.3 being used during the Arctic Challenge



Ocean Pro 7.5 in use by IFCA Fisheries Patrol



Offshore 10m used for police counter terrorism operations

I possibly won't be alive! Andrew's forecast. I can't envisage anything without discussions and future planning with Andrew and Sue Humber's future.

Andrew: We see ourselves as a progressive company. We don't want to be 'one of those companies sat waiting for something to happen'. We've been in business 50 years and are probably the only RIB company in the world who have achieved this still under the same ownership. We have coped with countless competitors and changes in market trends. We can't predict the future but we can make sure that plans are in place to cover different possibilities that may occur in the marketplace.

In 10 years' time, we believe that the rigid inflatable boat's designs and techniques will have gone through significant changes compared to today's market. We believe RIBs will be in bigger demand than today. We intend to be supplying the increased demand in both the professional/commercial and leisure markets. To do so, we will have increased our manufacturing facility to cope with increased worldwide demand, structured around mass-production RIBs and inflatables and bespoke and professional/commercial craft. This

will allow us to employ more staff and increase output to meet demand.

We also intend to have reinforced our already strong global brand by expanding our worldwide dealership network across all continents, thereby having even more Humber's spread across the world.

We also anticipate that we will have designed and manufactured new innovative products in the professional/commercial and leisure markets to keep up to date with the changing market trends of future years.

This may sound ambitious but I believe this is where we will be in 10 years' time, and with a positive mindset and outlook this is where we will be.

If you hadn't established Humber RIBs and gone into boatbuilding, what might have been your chosen vocation?

I had intended setting up to manufacture a range of caravans. As I had 12 years working on a production line, I learnt production control, time and motion. I knew that to make it work, everyone had to be coordinated, and as such we were able to produce 60 caravans a week with

Travelling fast in a RIB is certainly a mesmerising buzz – almost intoxicating.

65 operatives. Almost identical manufacturing methods are used to produce RIBs today, but I realised manufacturing boats was, and still is, much more interesting.

What advice would you give those contemplating entering the world of professional boatbuilding?

I suggest three things, although there are many more. Be determined, stay very very focused, and more than anything, keep control of your cash flow and think of it as Monopoly money – it's not yours to spend on yourself. You always have to find time to sort out your problems. **PBR**

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