

TP MARINE

9 METRES ON TEST

PAUL LEMMER TAKES A TRIP TO VISIT DUTCH-BASED TP MARINE ON BEHALF OF RIB INTERNATIONAL. WHILST IN HOLLAND HE TAKES A LOOK AT THEIR SET-UP, THEIR BOATS AND THEIR BIG SEAS!

An unexpected and urgent phone call on a Sunday morning resulted in me having to immediately stop what I was doing, pack my offshore kit and head for the airport to catch a flight to Holland. HMS was expecting to take the trip to TP Marine in IJmuiden to test their latest offering but a confrontation with a horse resulted in yours truly having to step in at the last moment.

I had admired the look of these sturdy, purposeful RIBs both at RIBEX and at the Southampton commercial boat show, Seawork, but had never been in one, so this was my chance to see if the performance lived up to the looks.

Having stayed overnight in Amsterdam, I caught the early hydrofoil ferry that speeds at over 40knots non-stop to the famous sea port of IJmuiden in a very respectable 25 minutes. This punctual and convenient service is barely known to most visitors to Amsterdam, yet it leaves from behind the main station, costs only nine euros return and offers an excellent traffic free option if one is catching a ferry to the UK from IJmuiden or just visiting the town.

Having arrived at TP Marine's factory on an industrial estate near to the port, I was immediately impressed by the cleanliness of the small but professionally run workshop and by the standard of workmanship on the craft. All stainless steel and other fittings are massively constructed and further enhance the rugged workboat appearance. Until

recently TP Marine had the 9m hulls constructed in Poland and then shipped to Holland for the final fit out, but due to the very high demands of the end user and the intended role of the craft, the company decided to make all the GRP and fittings in Holland and have the heavy-duty 1680 denier Hypalon buoyancy tubes manufactured by Henshaws in the UK. By doing everything including fitting of the buoyancy tubes 'in-house', TP believe their products are second to none and with the use of high tech Vinylester X2/isothalic resins as part of the very substantial building specification, they now offer a five year warranty and a reliable after-sales service, confident that everything about the craft is to the very highest standards. The hull shape of the 9m is a 24 degree variable deadrise deep 'V' form with a very flared bow and a distinctive pronounced chine and top side that runs from the bow to the transom where it lifts the tubes sufficiently so they do not drag in the water at speed, whilst still providing stability at rest. With a beam of over three metres combined with a totally flat deck, the carrying capacity is enormous and commercial users are able to choose their own internal layout to suit their specific requirements.

The company also offers other craft for specific duties that are supplied by outside firms, the K11m and K16m wheelhouse RIBs made in Sweden, which feature foam tubes and a 40knot performance from



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twin Volvo D6 diesels mated to waterjets, and a smaller range of Polish sourced RIBs for a number of different uses.

The craft that were the subject of the test were two of their 9m open general purpose RIBs, one a basic model fitted with a Volvo D6 300hp diesel sterndrive and the other a fully certified and equipped model fitted with the Volvo D6 350hp. The more powerful craft had a massive 20 man life raft fixed to the deck in the bow, together with additional equipment that made it substantially heavier, especially forward and this was responsible for making the two craft handle quite differently in



the interesting sea conditions off Ijmuiden.

Just before we set out on our test, I was pleasantly surprised to meet well known RIB handling instructor and sometimes correspondent in this journal, David Mallet and he agreed to join us for the test and take pictures of the craft in action. Evidently his young daughter is the skipper of one of the support vessels that look after the wind farm that lies of Ijmuiden and it was a lucky coincidence that David was visiting her and therefore able to take the action shots offshore.

The low speed handling of both craft is very precise, aided by the light, precise steering, plus Volvo's 'fly-by-wire' electronic controls and the directional stability was excellent, with no tendency to wander, even with a substantial force 7 north westerly blowing as we left the dock. From the shelter of the marina, we could see the lumpy seas hitting the outer harbour walls and even within the harbour there were sufficiently large waves to allow us to get the lighter of the two craft airborne at speed. Having 'played' with the boats for a while to become accustomed to their handling characteristics, we decided to head out to the bigger stuff beyond the outer harbour wall to see how these craft would handle in conditions they may encounter during their role as commercial standby boats.

Both craft had displayed a very smooth ride and precise tracking at speed in the more sheltered waters, although the heavier craft with the weighted down bow stubbornly refused to lift her bows, despite applying a considerable amount of trim to the sterndrive, making her a lot wetter as water was thrown from the depressed bow, caught by the howling wind and then straight back at the helmsman's console. Initially I thought how

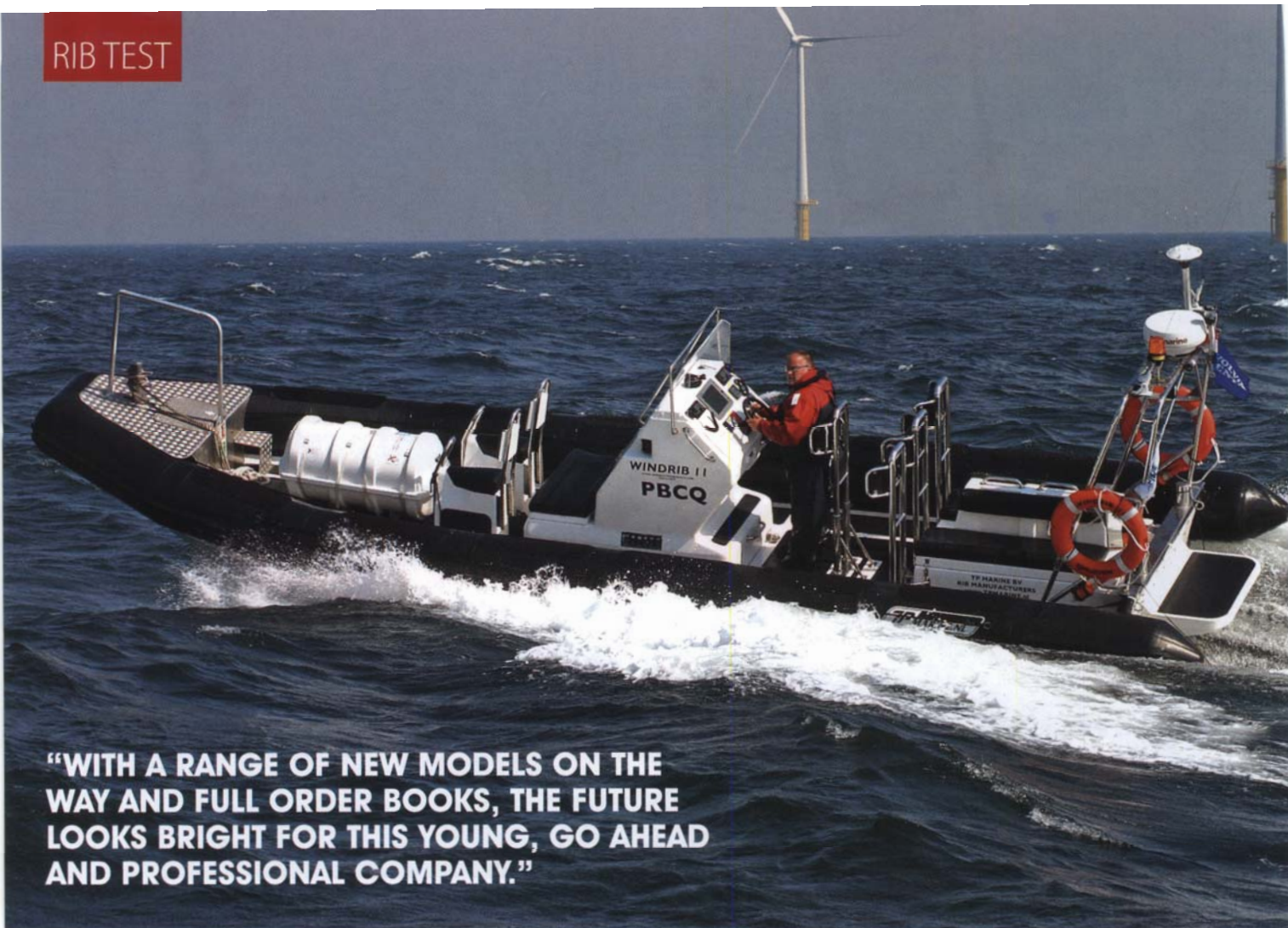
"BOTH CRAFT HAD DISPLAYED A VERY SMOOTH RIDE AND PRECISE TRACKING AT SPEED IN THE MORE SHELTERED WATERS ..."



fortunate we were to have the protection of a high windscreen which the helmsman could shelter behind but with all the spray hitting it, forward vision was so seriously impaired, that I found myself having to look around it, thus negating any practical use it could have provided. The other identical hull of the lighter boat was substantially drier riding but nevertheless still took the inevitable 'odd one' with similar forward vision issues and in my opinion the windscreen needs a re-think, as this detracts from the enjoyment of helming an otherwise excellent handling craft.

As we drew level the outer wall, we realised just how big and steep the waves were and with a

certain amount of trepidation we nosed out into the mountainous seas hoping that the TP Marine crew were familiar with both the waters and crafts' rough water capabilities. We need not have feared for almost immediately it was obvious that these RIBs were immensely capable and predictable although the difference between them due to the weight distribution was quite marked. The basic 9m handled the oncoming breaking waves as one would expect, with the bows punching the crests and the craft leaping clear for a few moments before landing safely into the trough of the next building wave. The fully certified craft on the other hand carried such an enormous amount of weight forward, that



"WITH A RANGE OF NEW MODELS ON THE WAY AND FULL ORDER BOOKS, THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT FOR THIS YOUNG, GO AHEAD AND PROFESSIONAL COMPANY."

having punched through the crest of the wave, she barely flew at all and tried immediately to follow the contour of the back of the wave she had just ridden over. This gave the craft a feeling of immense stability and solidness, almost like being glued to the sea and only after repeated attempts to get the craft airborne by increasing speed with each passing wave, did we finally manage to get her 'flying' a little. Having turned to travel down the waves however, not surprisingly, the lighter basic boat rode the seas much better than the nose heavy craft, which would probably have 'stuffed' had she not been driven with caution at a much more restrained speed and prudent use of the throttle. The lighter craft showed no such tendencies and appeared to handle the very difficult and potentially dangerous seas in a controlled and safe manner, so it would be fair to say that TP Marine have probably got it about right on hull design but should seriously consider placing the overweight life raft elsewhere or change to two smaller rafts that can be stowed aboard where they do not upset the balance of the craft!

During the test, we noticed that one of the craft kept trimming its leg up without touching the trim switch and when we returned to port we found an excessive amount of water in the engine compartment. This was a mystery to the TP Marine crew, who had never seen water in their engine compartment before and looking at the excellent breathing system for the engine I could not see how water could penetrate the engine bay either. The engine was liberally splashed with salt water and this is probably what led to an electrical problem



that caused the engine to trim itself, but it also highlights the importance of having to keep modern electronically controlled diesels dry; I had broken down in a new RIB a few weeks earlier due to a small amount of bilge water entering the multi-pin plug that connects to the engine's management system, so RIB builders please take note!

Having finished the tests, we retired to the local Yacht Club for a de-brief and noticed on the wall a wind speed indicator that was attached to a vane on the buildings roof. To our surprise it was hovering between force 9 and 10, confirming why the seas were so rough, but more interestingly and somewhat scary was what followed. That same evening David produced his lap top computer and started downloading information on the sea state for the region for that day. Evidently, the highest wave

height ever recorded for this part of the coast, 19m was recorded by a weather station some 10 miles offshore, which went some way to explaining why when we were out testing, a Russian timber carrier had entered the Port listing over at a crazy angle, with her cargo hanging off the side of the vessel!

One would not usually test craft in such inclement conditions but considering the type of tough seaworthy RIBs that TP Marine build, as it turned out, it was probably the ideal testing day and certainly proved the rugged and capable nature of these well built and finished craft. With a range of new models on the way and full order books, the future looks bright for this young, go ahead and professional company.

Paul Lemmer