



RIBald fun

RIGID INFLATABLES ARE THE MOST VERSATILE OF POWERBOATS, AS THIS HIGH PERFORMANCE RIB FROM HIGHFIELD SHOWS, REPORTS KEVIN GREEN.



An all-weather craft that has multiple uses allows the modestly priced RIB, like this alloy hulled Patrol 760, to be towed by a family SUV, yet is seaworthy enough for that dash out fishing the shelf. I've enjoyed using RIBs in many sea states, sometimes as a rescue diver and other times as a safety boat skipper during yacht races because their low centre of weight makes them very stable, while the deep V-hull cuts, rather than slams, through seas.

Yacht racing in fact, was the reason for Highfield's Patrol range. Comprising the 600, 660, 760 and 860 models, these launched in partnership with the last Vendee Globe race, where the Patrols were used as protector boats, and so had to go offshore in all weather conditions. I've also used Highfield during the Extreme Sailing Series when we had to dodge among foiling catamarans doing 30-40 knots, so nimbleness and stability were essential. Apart from these high-end models, the Chinese based company sells the ubiquitous small tenders that go from 2.4m upwards and are seen on the back of many motherships; supplied through an extensive 38 country distribution network.

AUSTRALIAN CUSTOM RIB

Our review boat was the Patrol 760 fitted with a Yamaha 300HP and supplied by Sydney dealer Justin Lambeth at Le Jen Marine and

custom built by importer Swift Marine in Queensland; which built the custom trailer that went with it.

"The beauty of the Highfield is that it arrives here as hull-only and we configure the best boat for the purchasers requirements and budget," explained Heidi Lambeth from dealer Le Jen Marine. The customisation is done by Swift Marine, who did the original hull designs suited to Australian conditions — with options for luxury finishes such as a teak deck, inflatable sundeck and T-top bimini; or bare bones workboat. These hulls are constructed by a French-Chinese consortium in Weihai, China — from 5mm 5083 aluminium plates with 10mm stringers for longitudinal

HIGHS

- Size and specification
- Alloy hull
- Towability

LOWS

- Lacking bow ladder

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A simple but effective console speaks to the Highfield's rugged functionality; Cutting through the waters around Sydney Harbour; Power isn't an issue thanks to a Yamaha 300HP.

Sea Trials

Three people, light wind and full fuel tank

SPEED (KNOTS)	LITRES PER HOUR	RPM	COMMENTS
12	12	2000	Planing (286 nm range)
24	24	3100	Cruising (285 nm range)
48	100	5500	Max speed (136 nm range)





“Our review boat was pretty flash with synthetic teak decking, anodised twin helm seats and an electronic package and targa bar for towing water toys; all housed in a sleek, grey hull”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Perfect for both work or joy rides with quick and responsive steering; The transom locker protects the battery and creates space for life jackets; The Patrol 760 is built tough for Australian conditions; Twin bucket seats behind a spray shield provide ample protection.

DECKED OUT

The finishing on our review boat was pretty flash with synthetic teak decking, anodised twin helm seats and an electronic package and targa bar for towing water toys; all housed in a sleek, grey hull. The sponsons also sported strategically placed hand holds and pad eyes — I’ve had some tough times as a sub-aqua diver getting aboard RIBs without these — including ones on the outer hull for trailering. The steering console had a carbon facade with tall spray shield, which protected the Garmin GPS map plotter, Icom VHF and single throttle control for the Yamaha. At 300HP, this V6 was slightly overrated, as the hull recommends up to 250HP. The console also had an engine data screen and most usefully, a large grab rail for steerers’ preferring a standing stance. For those long trips to the shelf the optional hydraulic suspension seat would reduce backache.

The uncluttered deck layout and walking space allows a dozen people to go aboard (and it’s rated for up to 18) with lounging space fore and aft. The bow area has a deep anchor locker with gas strut and strong Samson post with rubber rollers for anchor deployment. Also, there is the petrol cap for the integrated tank (holding 285 litres). Moving astern, done safety with sure grip under foot and plenty of hand holds, takes me to the four-person transom seat which has a large locker containing the starter battery (topped up by the 70 amp alternator on the Yamaha) and fuel filter that is easily changed. Overhead is the targa with its four

rigidity. This sturdy build allows them to be used for a wide variety of conditions — that includes running up beaches, which is something I did during our sea trial.

Apart from the hull, the inflatable sponsons are the other key part of a RIB and the Patrol uses high quality Orca hypalon fabric (synthetic rubber rather than plastic), which has longevity and good anti-UV qualities. Combine this with six separate air chambers and it gives a good seaworthy base for fun or work. In work mode, the 25 foot Patrol could easily transport six divers and gear offshore or in fun mode, take a dozen people for a fast joy ride or drop a skier off the back if you add the optional ski pole.





“The Seastar hydraulic steering responded quickly without oversteering as I curved along the swells and returned to run up their faces.”

rod holders and navigation light, and below is transom shelf access to the engine and hydraulic steering rods.

The hull shape has a strong Vee (26 degrees deadrise) with two deep, pronounced chines that are intended for strength and directional stability that finishes in a squared off bow section with rubber protector at the waterline — sensible given the amount of flotsam and jetsam in our waters. The triple eye towing hitch is strongly welded and finishes this seaworthy hull off nicely, while onshore, the twin axle Dunbier Supa Rolla trailer is ready for hook up to your SUV.

BLASTING OFFSHORE

At sea, there were no surprises with the Patrol 760 as I sped through Sydney Harbour, cruising along at 24 knots, as the powerful V6 Yamaha buzzed quietly. Snug behind the console the ride was smooth, but with more fun awaiting, I blasted seawards to ride the long swells that ran north from the Southern Ocean. This is very much home waters for performance RIBs and the Patrol

responded by tracking straight and coping with beam seas (without wetting the crew).

The Seastar hydraulic steering responded quickly without oversteering as I curved along the swells and returned to run up their faces before leaping off the back; the rounded seats allowing my legs to grip them as if riding my Yamaha dirt bike.

The Patrol's length-to-beam ratio (25 foot by 9 foot) felt just about right for these 10 foot swells but it was time to lower the adrenaline, so I cruised inshore towards my favourite Harbour beach. Gliding into Chowder Bay, we approached the half tide beach cautiously and came in on a wave; the engine tilted as we ground to halt on the sand. A bow ladder would have been nice but the Patrol easily coped with the entry and exit. On the homeward run, the Patrol gave me the confidence to go full throttle, nearly reaching 50 knots, yet with good stability and no slamming. Impressive; for a boat that can be towed by a larger SUV to your favourite waterway. ■

facts & figures

Highfield Patrol 760

PRICE

\$117,722 (including trailer)

GENERAL

LENGTH: 7.60m

BEAM: 2.83m

INSIDE LENGTH: 592cm

INSIDE WIDTH: 163cm

WEIGHT: 850Kg

DEADRISE: 26 degrees

MAX PAX: 18

MAX LOAD: 1800kg

MAX HP: 250

SHAFT: Extra Long

TUBE: 56cm

AIRTIGHT CHAMBERS: 6

FUEL TANK: 285L petrol

ENGINE

MODEL: Yamaha F300

HP: 300HP, V6 cylinder (four valves per cylinder)

CAPACITY: 4169cc

WEIGHT (DRY): 254kg

ALTERNATOR: 70amp alternator

MAXIMUM RPM: 6000

Fuel injection with optional electronic gauges

FOR MORE INFORMATION

VISIT: lejenmarine.com