

dramatic with its high 'rooster tail' of spray flying many metres into the air at full speed, it was somehow less impressive than the open commercial version which was nowhere near as aerodynamic, perfectly practical and probably twice the weight!

Of course, I had to try the canopied version but to my slight consternation, it was even more spartan on the inside than the outside. There were just two bucket seats with a seat belts, a steering wheel, controls, engine instruments and a GPS; there were no grab handles or footrests with which to brace oneself and as a passenger it was slightly unnerving. The point of this is to report a recorded GPS top speed of 87 knots (100mph) and that is fast in any boat, thus proving the excellent hydrodynamics of the hull.

Whilst there is little justification for such a craft outside the racecourse, Raven are planning more practical semi-enclosed multi seat versions for thrill seeking commercial passenger rides, or for professional authorities who require a vessel that is faster than the 'bad guys' boat! Whilst this is an innovative approach for a limited market, the open craft is far more practical, with various versions available based on the same extraordinarily efficient hull.

Summing up, the Raven 9m RIBs are one of, if not the fastest and sweet handling production outboard commercial RIBs I have tested and if performance is the end users' number one priority, these craft would have to be on their short list.

**RAFNAR EMBLA 11M**

Probably the first major RIB manufacturer to hail from Iceland and its unique features reflect the environment in which these craft operate.

With its white wheelhouse topped with a bright orange flash on the roof, this craft stood out from the many black/dark grey stealth type RIBs on show and because the Rafnar is designed to operate in freezing Icelandic conditions, its wheelhouse has been built to offer its crew proper thermic protection from the elements.

The buoyancy tubes are unusual in the way they are kinked halfway along their length; the aft tube sections are close to the water to provide stability at rest/slow speeds but they kink up for the forward half of the craft and then run flat to the bow. Most other RIBs have sheer to their bows but the Rafnar's approach achieves its raised bow in a different way. Why it is done like this is not clear but it does afford more freeboard



Rafnar is designed to operate in freezing Icelandic conditions

forward and thus provide a safer working area for crew operating on the foredeck, although interestingly, it does not provide a drier ride but this may be down to the shape of the hull and the way the craft rides.

On the water the uniqueness continues through the hull shape and it is in this area where Rafnar really is totally different from any other RIB. The bow has a wave piercing appearance, with a straight sheer that suggests a conventional hull aft but unlike any other Rib, the hull drops down to form a bulb shape amidships and then rises up again in the aft sections. What this unusual hull shape does provide is extraordinary handling, the craft being able to be turned in its own length, pivoting around the central 'bulb' of the hull, even at high speed and it's a strange sensation turning in this manner.

The deadrise angle is a relatively shallow 15 degrees and this could suggest slamming in steeper waves, however, the unique hull shape evidently keeps the whole length of the hull 'planted' and because the bows are less likely leave the water, they part rather than ride up over waves. Although unable to prove this theory in the sheltered waters around Gothenburg, the company's confidence in the crafts abilities was proven when this Rafnar 11m arrived by sea having navigated all the way from Iceland to the HSBO! During our test, the GPS

showed a top speed of 41 knots at only 5000RPM, which suggests there is more speed to be obtained and to back this up, an owner of an identical Rafnar who was visiting the HSBO claims to regularly see 50 knots with only twin 225hp outboards.

To sum this unusual craft up is difficult due to the lack of waves in which to test it but it certainly offers good protection for its crew, turns like no other RIB and is very well finished both inside and out.

**IGUANA EXPEDITION 31**

Unique is difficult to achieve when describing boats, but that word definitely applies to the Iguana 31. Here is a people carrying craft that is beautifully constructed and an excellent handling wave piercing hull that looks as if it should provide a smooth ride in adverse sea conditions but that is just the beginning!

Although driven by a single Mercury Verado 400hp outboard, which provides more than sufficient power, there is a second 2 litre VW inboard engine hidden beneath the steering console, whose sole purpose is powering the craft's separate sophisticated hydraulics system and the reason for these hydraulics is because the Iguana is an amphibious vehicle.

What appear to be built in fenders on either side are in fact rubber caterpillar tracks and these can be deployed in 8 seconds to allow the

craft to be driven up a sandy or shingle beach, through mud, across reasonable size rocks or through boggy terrain! What at first sight looks nothing more than an expensive toy, suddenly becomes a completely different animal. Here is a vehicle that can be driven up just about any shore and deposit its passengers safely on land without breaking sweat.

The brainchild of a wealthy Frenchman from Brittany, the Iguana was initially conceived to provide a high quality vessel that was not just the equal or better than many similar sized craft but one that could also climb over or through the tricky terrain on the Brittany shores. While existing amphibious vehicles could cope with many slipways and surfaces, they struggle with the steep inclines and different terrain that are a feature of many shorelines. By using rubber caterpillar tracks and low geared hydraulics, the Iguana can evidently traverse quite severe surfaces/inclines and whilst this restricts the crafts land speed to 5mph, it nevertheless opens up opportunities that have until now been the reserve of expensive specialized military vessels.

Whilst this luxuriously appointed example is obviously aimed squarely at the well-heeled luxury market, the potential for commercial versions is obvious and I am told there is already a significant amount of interest being shown by the professional and commercial sectors for a multitude of applications.

The pricey Iguana Expedition 31 offers is a completely new perspective with its innovative approach to amphibious vehicles- and it works.

Having sampled over 30 very well presented boats at the HSBO, there was only enough space in *Maritime Journal* to describe some of the more interesting craft and those listed are four quite different examples from a varied cross section. By PAUL LEMMER

The Iguana 31 has an impressive trick up its sleeve

