

BOAT REPORT

AVON

S4.25 & S5.45

Rigid inflatables for leisure use are more sophisticated than ever, as a pair from the new Seasport range demonstrate.

WHILST most sectors of the marine industry have remained recession-bound, the past couple of years have seen a steady growth in the number of British rigid inflatable boat manufacturers.

RIBs offer a go-anywhere, four-wheel-drive kind of image at the smaller end of the market, and the majority are utilitarian in concept, being used as diving support boats and so on.

However, leading manufacturers Avon are now offering two distinct ranges: their original and much respected Seariders, still in the traditional workboat grey livery, and four new Seasport out-and-out leisure boats, from 11ft 4in (3.45m) to 17ft 10in (5.45m), available in white or in a smart but more practical lighter grey.

Much attention to detail has gone into the styling of the Seasports, with a complete inner moulding acting as both a hull-strengthener and a base for the fit-out — everything from the console to the seating and footwells.

We gave the S5.45 flagship and the mid-range S4.25 a couple of runs, first in Plymouth Sound during a busy Start Boating Experience weekend and later, in less hectic style, in Poole Harbour.

Avon S5.45

The biggest drawback with rigid inflatables is the loss of usable internal volume, due to the room taken up by their tubes. With this 18-footer, Avon have put a lot of effort into making the best use of available space, and the result offers the potential sportsboat owner a different but still practical alternative to the usual style of runabout.

Obviously, comfortable seating and driving positions are prime concerns. The S5.45 provides a sitting/standing-height console with a two-seater bench behind, with a small seat beside the console usable as a further perch. With the buoyancy tubes well equipped with soft-rope becketed line, however, and the console with a handy stainless steel grabrail to the console, an air-cushioned squat to port is

bound to be the preferred motoring position for at least a couple of occupants.

In the calmest of running conditions or at rest, the upholstered vee arrangement forward can be enlarged with cushion infills to create a sunlounging area. Lockers beneath are geared to take a couple of pairs of waterskis.

Also for watersports purposes, and to ensure the crew can move around unobstructed, the helm console is biased to one side. There is plenty of space for instrumentation and a compass, and beneath the helm seat is a storage locker incorporating the optional freshwater tank and pump which service the transom shower.

A watertight hatch in the console moulding gives access to a security catch which allows the top portion to hinge forward, supported by a gas strut. This exposes the fuel tank stowage, with room for either a pair of 5gal (24lt) removable tanks or an optional integral 21gal (98lt) one.

Unlike its similar-sized SR5.40M sibling in the Searider range, which can take twins, the S5.45 is fashioned to take only a single engine installation. Recommended power is 40hp-90hp.

The Mercury on the moulded transom of our test model weighed in at the maximum figure, pushing the boat onto the plane in a twinkle and giving a top speed of just under 37 knots trimmed-out with two up.

The hull has less of a vee than the SR5.40M but is a fair bit wider, giving an exceptionally stable and far from punishing ride. As most people will prefer to stand while driving, the proportions of the helm console are just the ticket, with its height and the small screen offering a measure of protection.

Avon S4.25

Catering for four, in two sets of forward-facing seats, this 14-footer has a definite sportsboat feel, but with the added confidence that comes from a three-chamber ring of in-built buoyancy.

Two of a kind. The Seasport range of rigid inflatables from Avon are designed for leisure use and have a definite sportsboat feel. The S5.45 (top) and S4.25 (bottom) are both capable of 35 knots with their most potent engine options.

The front seats are adjustable fore and aft, the footwells incorporating a drain to clear any enthusiastic wake-hopping splashes. The console has space for engine instrumentation and is fitted with a grabhandle for the co-driver.

There is an inset locker to the lower part of the console, and stowage beneath the seat-bases. Under the rear seats is room for two 5gal (24lt) removable tanks and for the battery box, the former space being vented, while there is the option of a built-in 12gal (54lt) tank. A neat, flush-fitting catch allows access to further stowage

behind the seat-back. An automatic bilge pump is fitted as standard.

Recommended power is 25hp-50hp, but our test boat comfortably handled a 60hp Yamaha. This gave a top speed of around 35 knots.

With the helm set well forward, we expected a rather unforgiving ride in squally conditions, but not a bit of it. A tickle on the power trim bought a commendably soft, dry ride. Keeping plenty of power on through the turns kept us well out of reach of the wave-tops, and prevented too much spiteful spray from coming aboard. □



Avon S5.45

Loa 17ft 10in (5.45m).

Interior length 14ft 0in (4.25m).

Beam 7ft 8in (2.33m).

Interior beam 4ft 0in (1.22m).

Weight 735lb (344kg).

Capacity eight persons/1760lb (800kg).

Engine power 40hp-90hp, single long shaft.

Price £5685 ex VAT without engine.

Enquiries Avon Inflatables Ltd, Dafen, Llanelli, Dyfed SA14 8NA. Tel: 0554 770371.

Avon S4.25

Loa 14ft 0in (4.25m).

Interior length 10ft 6in (3.20m).

Beam 6ft 6in (1.97m).

Interior beam 3ft 6in (1.07m).

Weight 390lb (177kg).

Capacity four persons/1544lb (700kg).

Engine power 25hp-60hp, single long shaft.

Price £3557 ex VAT without engine.

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