



Off the Trailer



A boat for all occasions

The Brig Eagle 645
is much more than
a big boat's tender.

By David Toyer

Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBS) are now the boat of choice for tenders for cruisers and mega-yachts. Whether they be towed, stored on the foredeck or aft boarding platform, or hidden away inside transom garages, RIBS from as small as 3m and as large as 8m or more have replaced tinnies and even non-rigid and fold-away inflatables.

One brand that has been quick to establish itself and earn the respect of a lot of big boat owners is Brig. These strikingly clean looking, white and grey boats are appearing on more and more big boats and are starting to outnumber the older and more established brands,

The Brig RIB range, spanning boats from 3.4 to 6.45m, is imported and distributed Australia-wide by Sirocco Marine and, according to Sirocco's Neil Webster, the buyers generally fall into three categories. The largest category is those wanting a tender for their cruiser, followed by the experienced boatie after a toy - usually those with other boats who want a fun machine - and finally the waterfront home owner wanting a fun and easy-to-use machine to go to the beach, picnic, play or for a spot of skiing.

Neil adds that, from his research, most of the boats he has sold seem to be doing extremely long hours - one, he says, has clocked up over 1000 hours in two-and-a-half years. Some professional big-boat and mega-yacht skippers report that the Brig has been the best boat the owners have purchased - although one suspects their motivation is more about getting rid of the owner for a few hours than any comment on the boat itself...

SPACE-BASED

Leaving the boats aside for a second, the Brig story is interesting in its own right. In 1991, when the USSR started to break up and the Russian aeronautical and space agency programs were cancelled, the Ukrainian company that supplied all the Hypalon landing tubes for Russian space vehicles suddenly found itself with a large factory and a highly skilled work force, but no customers.

Using in-house designers, coupled with its vast experience in the use of Hypalon, it turned to building inflatable boats, and with such success that more than 44,000 Brigs have now been sold in almost 50 countries around the world. In fact, in



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many of those countries Brig is the market leader, with Europe, where boat ownership is around one in seven to one in nine per capita (Australia is one in 20), making up the largest portion of its market.

The Eagle 645 is presently the largest of their recreational RIBS and our test boat was powered by a suitably large Evinrude 225HO.

Though the hull is fitted with lifting hooks for mega-yacht tender use, this is a high-performance,

At rest or underway, the Brig Eagle 645 offers plenty of options for skipper and crew.





Above: *The compact rear lounge flips up for bilge access. Note removable ski pole.*

top-of-the-range inflatable that has a variety of uses way beyond that of a mere tender

With a top speed of 53 knots (almost 100km/h) and more than 35 knots (65km/h) at 4000rpm, there is more than enough power to do as you please - from towing skiers to zipping off to a favourite beach or just cruising the shoreline. There are a range of standard fittings and built-in components to accommodate these various uses, including a (removable) ski pole, folding boarding ladder and a hand-held transom shower (water is supplied from the 75lt freshwater tank).

While the 645 is rated to carry up to 13 people, not all would necessarily be seated in comfort. Conventional seating copes with around eight crew, while the remainder would be perched on the perimeter tubes. The lucky eight' have a choice of the rear lounge (which has use of a small fold-down picnic/snack table built into the back of the helm seat), while forward of the helm console there is more seating, most of which is over various moulded storage bins that can double as drink coolers or rope and anchor lockers.

SEATING OPTIONS

No matter where you're perched, this is a safe and stable boat for cruising around the harbour and Neil Webster, who lives on the waterfront, makes constant use of his Eagle 645 to zap off with the family to harbour beaches or restaurants, or to just spend time drifting about.

The optional alloy 'T top' and the Fusion sound system, with iPod compatibility, are necessities, and the I Command gauges locked in to the GPS give all the engine and navigation aids a skipper would need.

With a self-draining cockpit, and a large load capacity, married to exceptional stability at rest, this is also a boat that would appeal to diving enthusiasts.

The Eagle 645 is by no means a cheap option - it has a pricetag of just under \$50,000 for the boat, excluding engine - and as such it's like many things where quality does come at a price.

The most important feature of the Brig range is the Hypalon used for the tubes. Hypalon is a man-made fabric that is largely superior to polymer or PVC-based fabrics. Hypalon has superior resistance to ultra violet light and damage from chemicals, but comes at a very high cost when compared to the other fabrics and coatings that are used on some other brands. For Australian boaties, the very high UV resistance is critical, says Webster.

BUOYANCY BACK-UP

Each 550mm diameter flotation tube is divided into five cells, so should one ever be damaged and deflate, the boat will still maintain its stability and buoyancy. Each of those five cell bladders is also fitted with a pressure-equalising valve that

stabilises the pressure in all cells around the boat. This valve will close off should one of the tubes be punctured and deflate.

With the inflatable tubes able to withstand quite a lot of mistreatment and abuse, it's easy to see why RIBS are popular for tender work. For additional protection, they have their own wrap-around buffer rail, ensuring they won't damage other vessels when coming alongside.

With 225hp attached to the rear, I found the Eagle 645 to be an incredibly exciting craft to drive, particularly on a Sydney Harbour chop whipped up by a late afternoon breeze. The vee hull rides efficiently over the chop, with the tubes softening the ride and deflecting away much of the spray, while the Sea Star hydraulic steering made light work of direction changes. Of course, this power is more than the average boat user may need - something like 175 to 200hp might do the job adequately - and I'd think the Brig would still have a good turn of speed, nonetheless.

If you're in the market for a tender, or just want to inject a little (or a lot) of fun into your boating, you should give Sirocco Marine a call.

SPECIFICATIONS: BRIG EAGLE 645

Length:	6.48m
Beam:	2.5m
Weight:	450kg (hull only), approx 1000kg (incl motor, fuel and water)
Fuel:	200lt
Water:	75 lt
Tube diameter:	550mm
Load:	13 people
Test Engine:	Evinrude 225 HO
Price:	\$50,000 (plus engine)

For more information, contact Sirocco Marine
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