ribEXTREME 650 SR

Words by Anton Pretorius
Pictures by Dean Castle

Regardless of ever-changing boat trends, Rigid Inflatable Boats still remain an integral part of the South African seafaring community. Although they often conjure up images of exciting ocean adventures, they also bring to mind thoughts of being cold, wet and sometimes uncomfortable. However, Honda's RIB Extreme 650 SR is drier than the Sahara Desert and comfortable too! And not only is this inflatable the most spacious in its class, she's also fast – VERY fast!

Leisure Boating travels to Knysna to test Honda Marine's RIB Extreme 650.

About Falcon

A couple of years back, Falcon Inflatables entered into an agreement with Honda Marine Knysna to put together an exclusive range of high-quality RIB's under the RIB Extreme brand name.

In 2006, the RIB Extreme 575 graced our pages and it was declared an absolute winner. And the 650 SR is no stranger to *Leisure Boating* either, so with minor improvements to its overall construction and finish, the RIB Extreme 650 could well be the ultimate seafarer's RIB.

Swellendam-based Falcon Inflatables is a family-owned business that has been manufacturing inflatables and RIB's since 1985, making them one of the most experienced and established inflatable manufacturer's in the country.

Falcon started exporting their products to Europe in 1989, and today, they export nearly 70% of their production globally. This has now brought about stricter quality control standards to the industry as all their crafts are manufactured to International ISO 6185 technical specifications and obviously considered very advanced.

Conditions

The Knysna sun can be unforgiving, and especially when there is a slight cloud cover and a blustery wind blowing. A sweltering hot 28°C temperature and a strong breeze made for really rough offshore conditions – the kind of weather the 650 SR simply loves!

As we approached the treacherous Knysna Heads, the water's surface tumbled like the inside of a washing machine below us. But there was no need for any seasick tablets, as our craft remained ultra stable throughout the entire evaluation.

General Impression

First impressions really do last! And two aspects of the 650 SR that stuck in my mind was her ability to keep us safe from any sea spray and her lightning quick turn of speed in tough conditions.

Measuring 6.5m and weighing 740 kg, the RIB Extreme moves nimbly for a hefty craft.

There is storage space aplenty on the RIB Extreme in the form of under-deck hatches for hoarding equipment.

As the sea released its wrath on our 6.5 m (21 foot) RIB, we remained dry as a bone as the pontoon placement on the hull is designed to deflect all water spray down and away from the boat – even at speeds of 90 km/h plus.

You wouldn't say so, but as far as RIB's go, she's a little weighty. Weighing in at about 740 kg (with motors and rigs), the 650 SR still sits solidly on the surface, though. Not once did we experience any kind of rocking, slamming or ploughing. The 650 SR proved to be really stable in extreme conditions, hence the name!

Her blue, grey and white colour coding is unique to the series of RIB Extreme inflatables. And accentuated by Italian-imported stainless steel grab rails and long contours, the 650 SR is a real good looker. In my view, Falcon Inflatables should be lauded for having got the aesthetics spot on with this offering.

Deck Layout

The 650 SR is rumoured to have one of the most spacious deck layouts in its class. The non-skid, full-wet deck offers plenty of room to move from bow to stern. And with a beam of 2.5 m, the 650 SR is equipped with sufficient seating for a maximum of ten passengers.

Designed to be rally practical, the 650 SR utilises every inch of its 4.95 m inside length. A large under-deck hatch can be filled with watersport goodies and lifejackets, while under every seat is some form of storage space.

The bow provides a triangular, cushioned seat housing storage for the anchor, ropes, and chains, and also features stainless steel bow rails for safety. Further seating can be found in the form of a stern bench and a single seat in front of the console.

The centre console is equipped with simple instrumentation including rpm and trim gauges for each motor, and is protected by a tinted plastic windscreen. The skipper can settle into a comfy thee-seater bench with an adjustable backrest, with again lots of storage space underneath.

Another great feature is the optional stainless steel boarding ladder that's attached to the pontoon of the RIB. The ladder makes boarding and disembarking an easy job.

Performance

The 650 SR is one of the fastest and most powerful inflatables I've ever had the pleasure of being on board! For such a large boat, she really shoots across the surface – thanks to a pair of Honda four-stroke 90 HP V-TEC motors.

Registering a top speed on this craft was well-nigh impossible, as no other chase boat that day (and we had a couple!) could catch up with the 650 SR. Honda Marine Knysna's principal dealer Dave Hoets, reckons she's capable of more than 90 km/h (48 knots), revving at 6 500 rpm on the rough ocean surface, while jumping onto the plane at the drop of a hat.

The best way to describe V-TEC is akin to a supercharger on your car, when you get to certain revs, a little 'black magic' happens, and suddenly you have 102 HP instead of the 90 HP that you bought! Thanks to Honda's Lean Burn Control, the motors also proved to be very fuel-economical.

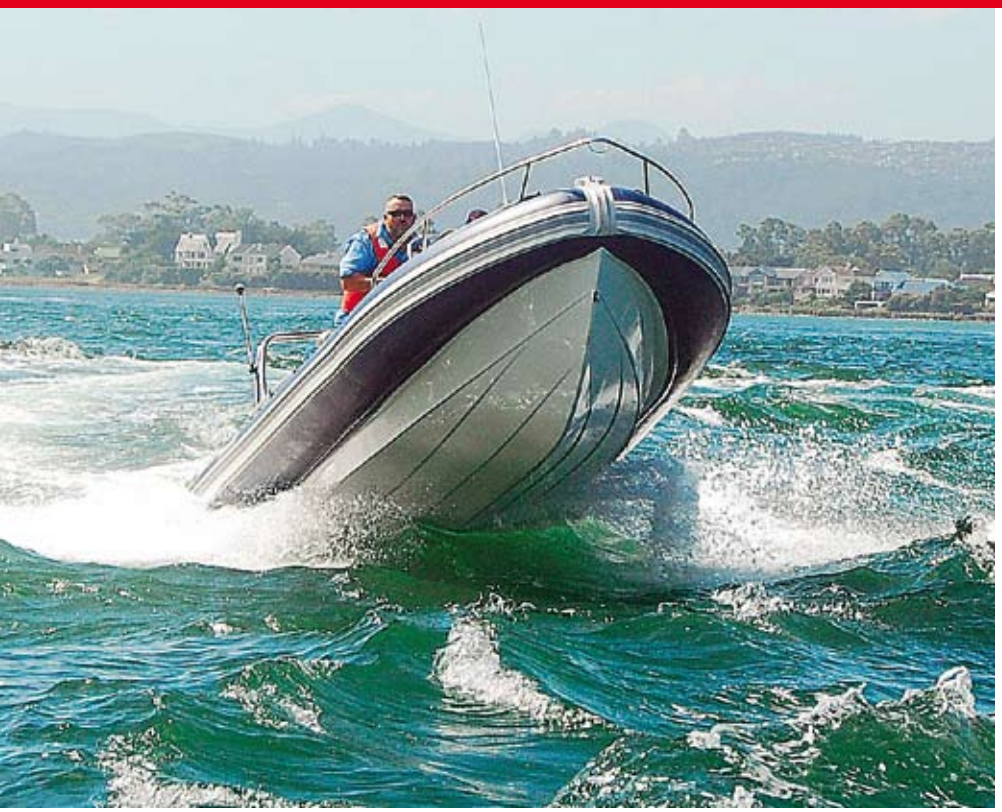
Travelling14 n.m out to sea, took us less than 15 minutes with the lightening fast 650 SR. Travelling at 4 000 rpm, the 650 SR made light work of the rough waters. We registered a good cruising speed of between 60 and 70 km/h (32-37 knots) at 3 500 rpm.

Handling

The 650 SR's deep-V mono-hull is designed for a smooth ride and good cornering stability. This was evident in the way she mastered the heavy chop without effort.

The centre console features user-friendly instrumentation and is protected by a tinted plastic windscreen.

Boarding and disembarking on the RIB Extreme is made easy by means of a boarding ladder.



Even in extreme ocean conditions, the RIB's hull gripped the water firmly and turned crisply.

Designed to deflect all water spray down and away from the boat, we stayed 100% dry while on board. The RIB Extreme 650 SR's hull is also very forgiving, which came in handy for this slightly rusty skipper.

This big RIB also turned crisply and on a dime, it seemed. Veteran skipper Derek Meintjies of Honda Knysna showed off the 650 SR's impressive cornering ability. Assisted by the craft's hydraulic steering, I was amazed at how firmly the hull grips on the water while cornering.

The RIB Extreme 650 seems very much at home on the notorious Knysna waters. Now, imagine the possibilities with this craft on any given ocean surface. Activities like fishing, skiing, diving, seafaring and cruising, to name but a few, will keep you contented for hours with the RIB Extreme 650 SR.

Launching and retrieving the RIB was done effortlessly and quickly.

Conclusion

When I first started out as a boating journalist, the idea of a sea-faring RIB had never really appealed. But the 650 SR has altered my perception of inflatables forever – while raising the bar in terms of inflatables.

Capable of carrying a maximum load of nearly 2 000 kg, and safe in the knowledge that you're covered with a three-year tube and a five-year hull warranty – and well within a reasonable price range – means the RIB Extreme 650 should definitely appeal to most fans of inflatables.

And let's not forget its eye-catching style, its easy handling capabilities, powerful motors and of course, the activities possible with this superb craft. I don't know about you, but I know what's at the top of my Christmas wish list!

For more information, contact Dave Hoets at Honda Marine Knysna on (044) 382 4090 or drop him an email on info@hondamarineknysna.co.za ■

At a glance

LOA	6.5m (21-ft)
Beam	2.5m (8.2-ft)
Weight	740 kg
Engines	2 x Honda four-stroke 90 HP (as tested)
Max Load	1 983 kg
Max passengers	12 (manufacturer recommendation)
Top Speed	Exceeds 90 km/h (48-50 knots)
Price	R310 000 (all-inclusive)