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WICKED Weekenders

One Channel Island, one day, two RIBs. But do they really stack up as fuel-efficient cruisers?

Text: Jack Haines Photos: Lester McCarthy

Mid-Channel and we're surrounded by a panorama of emptiness. There are no ships to disturb the horizon, it is simply a place where the sea and the sky meet.

A Hunton 1005 RIB is running alongside us, leaping over the waves, its twin 300hp Yamaha V6s howling away on the transom. I'm on a Goldfish 29 Mark II with Goldfish dealer and Round Britain Race competitor James Sydeham at the helm. We're doing 30 knots side-by-side through seas which would force much larger boats to slow down.

I ask James how fast he would be going if this were a race. Bad move. In place of an answer he simply presses the throttle forward. The 380hp diesel engine summons more power from its mountainous reserves of torque and the Goldfish surges forward. In seconds we're hammering along at 50 knots. My feet leave the deck and I land with a thump. James throttles back and we drop down to our 30-knot cruising speed. We're not here to race these boats – we already know how quick they are – but to see whether they also stack up as fast, efficient cruisers. Why burn thousands of litres of fuel taking a 50ft flybridge to the Channel Islands when you can get there in half the time, stay in a nice hotel and have a whole lot more fun in a quick, capable RIB? Well, that's the theory at any rate so now we're putting it to the test with the aid of two long-legged cruising RIBs and the added twist of getting there and back in a day. After all, any boat that can get you from Poole to Alderney in time for lunch and then back to Blighty for an evening pint can't be all bad.

Nerves are jangling a little in Poole before we set off as the wind whips the water inside Salterns Marina into a swirling frenzy. Force 5 is predicted but it feels more like a 7. Take a moment to focus on the boats themselves though and the nerves start to settle. Both Hunton and Goldfish have long racing pedigrees and a reputation for bulletproof build quality. The Goldfish looks like a weapon of war with its near-vertical bow and five (that's not a typo) steps in its slippery hull. The Hunton 1005 may lean more towards the superyacht tender market with its chunky T-top, sociable seating and sand-coloured upholstery but it's still a Hunton at heart and in hull. The Goldfish is powered by a single 380hp Yanmar DMAX designed for the boat, the Hunton by a pair of smooth but punchy 300hp Yamaha outboards. All three power plants are getting a thorough workout as we blast across the halfway mark; the throttles on both boats ping back and forth rapidly as we hop between the crests. The Goldfish drops in to the wake of the Hunton and we are hit by the warbling, soprano howl of the twin Yams.

The owner of the Goldfish keeps the boat in Salterns and uses it for just the kind of thing we're doing today. He has taken out the rear



Customs
Raising the Q flag (yellow) before a courtesy flag indicates that you are ready to clear customs and immigration.

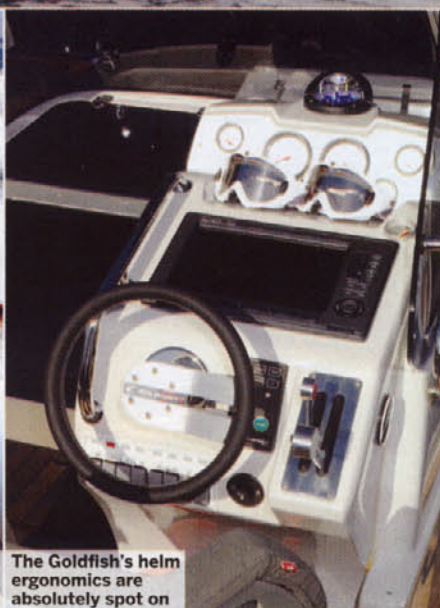


Why burn thousands of litres of fuel taking a 50ft flybridge across the Channel when you can get there in half the time, stay in a nice hotel and have a lot more fun in a quick, capable RIB?

Jack's racing stance clearly needs work!

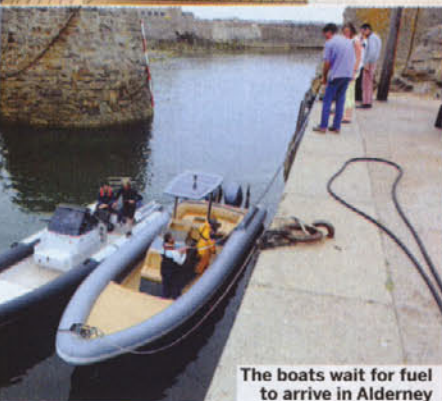


Hunton's Martin Payne relaxes as we cross halfway



Furuno plotter dominates the Hunton's helm

The Goldfish's helm ergonomics are absolutely spot on



The boats wait for fuel to arrive in Alderney



A spot of lunch overlooking the idyllic Bray Harbour

Could these big, fast RIBs be the key to expanding your cruising horizons?



Alderney to Poole in just over two hours, using 147 litres of fuel: these boats dish up a thrill that no sports cruiser could ever match

two leaning posts so now only helmsman and navigator (MBY staffer Chantal on this trip) get proper support whilst I am left standing behind. At least the leaning posts have sturdy handholds on the back for me to hang on to. Thankfully the ride of the Goldfish is astonishingly accomplished and remarkably dry considering the narrow tubes and low freeboard. The bow slices through the crests like cheesewire and the running angle of the boat is tabletop flat. Knees bend and hips flex in perfect sync with the hull's rhythm through the waves; the boat fits like a snug pair of jeans.

The sea starts to flatten as we slip into the lee of Alderney and the race is on to be first to the mouth of Bray Harbour. The Hunton pulls ahead, outboards shrieking. James edges the Goldfish out of the 1005's wake and pushes the throttle to the stops. Progress is shockingly rapid but so refined at the same time; it's a bizarre feeling, almost as if we're being drawn to the island by an irresistible magnetic force. We're neck and neck as we pass the end of the submerged breakwater. Considering the weather and the pair of soft journalists on board our time for the 62nm leg was two hours, five minutes and six seconds.

The big Hunton needs fuel, so both boats sneak into the picturesque inner harbour. They may be just another swanky tender in St Tropez but beneath the towering stone walls and ageing fuel pumps of Bray Harbour these RIBs look decidedly unearthly. Tanks

brimmed with duty-free diesel and low-duty petrol the boats are lashed to a buoy and the crews head ashore. Both boats are showered with praise by the locals. Geoff Hunton, one of the crew members on the 1005, gets plenty of attention from those who know their boats – and there are plenty of them on Alderney. One islander has a Hunton RS43 customised with a hardtop for his daily commute to Guernsey.

Over lunch teams Goldfish and Hunton chat warmly about the attributes of both craft. There is no rivalry here, just a mutual respect. Hulls, engines, drives and racing are chewed over in glorious detail. As a boat lover, I am utterly entranced. Back at the boats and I make an attempt at paying the harbourmaster for our two-hour stay but he won't have any of it.

For the return journey I take my place at the Hunton's helm. It feels massive compared to the Goldfish. It's not just the extra 3ft length but the diameter of the tubes (it is a foot wider than the Goldfish) and the thickness of the mouldings that make the 1005 feel so sturdy. The drive train is similarly meaty; the cable throttles are cranked up to their highest resistance so that you don't alter the revs wildly when things get bumpy. Whereas the driving experience in the Goldfish feels smooth and sanitised, the twin 300hp Yamahas need bossing. You have to really work the throttles, dropping the revs as the boat dives in to a trough then slamming them home to make sure you don't drop off the plane.

The sea is considerably rougher than this morning and after an hour of driving my body aches, my eyes sting and my head is throbbing. The adjustable hydraulic chairs the owner has chosen look great but leaning posts would be far more appropriate in this weather. Despite this, it is a remarkably easy boat to drive fast. Leap off a wave and the boat just lands softly and carries on. On the run in to Poole, Chantal, who has never driven a high-speed RIB before, takes the wheel and opens the throttles all the way. An ear-to-ear grin spreads across her face aided by the near 60-knot wind blast.

Our time on the way back is two hours, 15 minutes and two seconds, with an average speed of 23.5 knots. So can this form of credit card and toothbrush boating be a viable option? The answer is yes but with a few significant reservations. Neither boat is cheap – the Goldfish costs just over £170,000 and in this spec the Hunton comes in just shy of £200,000 – and you can get a hell of a lot of sports cruiser for that. On the other hand the Goldfish used a miserly 147 litres of fuel for the 62nm trip and even the twin petrol-powered Hunton gobbled a not unreasonable 276 litres. So while this may not be the answer to slashing your boating bills, it is a way of downsizing without downgrading your enjoyment.

Whether it's blasting across a sheltered bay at 60 knots for the sheer hell of it or popping across the Channel for the weekend, these two boats deliver a thrill that no sports cruiser could ever match. **MBY**

THE DATA

GOLDFISH 29 MARK II	HUNTON 1005 RIB
LENGTH 29ft 10in (9.10m)	LENGTH 32ft 8in (9.96m)
BEAM 8ft 10in (2.72m)	BEAM 9ft 10in (3.00m)
DISPLACEMENT 1.6 tonnes loaded	DISPLACEMENT 2.5 tonnes loaded
DRAUGHT 3ft 0in (0.90m)	DRAUGHT 3ft 0in (0.90m)
FUEL CAPACITY 97 imp gal (440 litres)	FUEL CAPACITY 88 imp gal (400 litres)
WATER CAPACITY 5.5 imp gal (25 litres)	WATER CAPACITY 18 imp gal (80 litres)
TEST ENGINES Single 380hp Yanmar DMAX	TEST ENGINES Twin Yamaha 300hp V6 outboard
FLAT OUT 62 knots	FLAT OUT 58 knots
PRICE FROM £138,564 inc UK VAT (Single Yanmar DMAX)	PRICE AS TESTED £198,575 inc UK VAT (twin Yamaha 300hp V6 outboards)
PRICE AS TESTED £171,090 inc UK VAT (Single Yanmar DMAX)	CONTACT Hunton Powerboats TEL +44 (0)1794 515236 WEB www.hunton.co.uk
CONTACT Salterns Marina TEL +44 (0)1202 709971 WEB www.goldfishboat.com	



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