

Jet power to the rescue

New Naiad can work in shallows without risk of damaging underwater gear

■ Mike Brown

The Esperance Volunteer Marine Rescue Group has a huge area of responsibility, including the whole of the Recherche Archipelago and as far east as Israelite Bay.

Its boat needs range, speed and the ability to use both in sometimes very bad weather.

The conventional aluminium boat it has used for 16 years has sometimes come up short on those capabilities.

Its new vessel is a rigid inflatable from Kirby Naiad. At 12.5m, it's a good deal larger than other sea-rescue RIBs.

Its propulsion system is also different from all the others: twin 550hp diesels driving through water jets. Sea rescue generally has been hesitant to adopt jets, probably through worry that they could not cope with towing, worry the jets could be overloaded, or would not have enough thrust.

The experts point out overloading is impossible; the jet is simply a water pump, in this case each of them pushing out 1.2 tonnes per second. On trials, the boat had no trouble towing a 24 tonne barge and proved particularly adept at manoeuvring it alongside.

For intricate stuff such as this, the Blue Arrow mouse control (the boat goes in whatever direction the mouse is pushed) is ideal.

Great advantages of jet drive are the lack of appendage drag, plus the ability to work in shallows without risk of damage to underwater gear. More and more people are falling or being washed off rocks, with no chance of climbing back onto those smooth granite faces, and Marine Rescue now has a better tool for helping them.

It is possible in reasonable weather to drop a crew member over the bow. This exposure to abrasion hazards makes the choice of a foam-filled buoyant collar a no-brainer.

The layout provides a spacious wheelhouse plus a smaller cabin forward. The wheelhouse has a forward raked windscreen to reduce refraction of sunlight and to increase the internal volume. This is the working space for up to five people.

Three at the console in marvellously comfortable Ullman suspension seats, two behind them in slightly downmarket KAB seats, raised to give forward vision over those three heads.

The electronic fit-out reflects the sophistication of the volunteer rescue organisation. An outfit of Furuno radios, radar, plotter, infra-red vision and others fills the ergonomic console. There are both keypad and touch screen controls for most of these functions. Touch screen is great in the office,

most of the time at sea, and hopeless the rest of the time.

The other electronic item is the microwave, the only domestic appliance. The previous vessel had all the comforts of home — and they were almost never used.

All previous Kirby sea rescue boats have emphasised plenty of working deck area. This one stresses access to the entire propulsion system: an enormous hatch covers most of the area aft of the wheelhouse, effectively becoming a raised deck.

Motors, gear boxes and jets are all totally accessible, and the hatch top has discovered an extra use. It can take mattresses for medivac that the crew can also use for sleeping on extra-long missions. The after deck has a full awning that can join with clears to completely enclose the space for overnighting or for laying up. All this yet there is still enough clear deck for all towing and recovery work to be efficiently carried out.

The fore cabin is primarily used for gear stowage — oxyviva, defibrillator, retrieval gear and so on — but also for basic living purposes. A pair of V-berths can accommodate overnight the female component of mixed crewing, and it also has a toilet and holding tank. In these days of mixed crews the all-purpose bucket has been retired.

The fuel tanks have a 1480 litre capacity and they are feeding Cummins motors that have a reputation for low thirst. If extra endurance is needed fuel bladders holding up to 1200 litres can be loaded. Range is satisfied here, and the Cummins-Hamilton partnership delivers a cruising speed double that of the superseded vessel. Top speed is 40 knots but 28-32 knots contains the sweet spot for economy. Speeds the vessel is capable of maintaining in seriously poor weather.

LOWDOWN

ESPERANCE SEA RESCUE BOAT

Length overall 12.5m

Beam 4.1m

Fuel capacity 1480 litres

Fresh water 100 litres

Motors 2 x 550hp Cummins diesels driving Hamilton HJ322 water jets

Builder Kirby Marine, 24 Sparks Road, Henderson, 9410 2270



Twin Cummins 550hp diesels drive Hamilton jet units.

It's a deal larger than other sea-rescue RIBs.