



ALL DOUBLE DUTCH

I was invited down to Ijmuiden in Holland to try out two models of a brand-new Dutch RIB builder, Blue Spirit, and as I live there, I did not think to take my passport...

To cut a long story short, after the sea trials were over and we were back at the dock, I ended up being seriously quizzed by two Dutch customs and immigration officers, who suspected that Blue Spirit co-owner Bruno Tideman and I could be up to no good, smuggling illegal merchandise or persons into the country! It's the first time that has ever happened to me, so from now on in, I will always bring my passport along on a RIB International boat test. You never know where a RIB might take you!

Seriously, though, we ribsters all know that a well-found and -prepared RIB has no trouble going across the English Channel and along the North European

coastline in most weather conditions, provided it has the necessary navigation, communication and safety gear. I know that large RIBs and inflatables are used to carry illegal immigrants across open seas in the dead of night, due to their speed, low profile and ability to carry large loads and land on a beach. Such are the versatile characteristics of RIBs, and this was obviously not lost on our friends from the Dutch customs. However, I digress...

Blue Spirit have only been in business for a few months but they have already built two impressive GRP demo boats - a 7.5m outboard and a 9m inboard - and will be delivering their first order of two boats to their first customer in June this year. Blue Spirit partners Bruno

Tideman and Herman Vroege have a combined experience of over 50 years in designing, building and preparing workboats, rescue boats and RIBs.

Focusing almost exclusively on the military and commercial market, I was expecting to see and test

two typically configured RIBs in grey and black, basically equipped and ready for sea. Both boats were minimally fitted out, but I was surprised to see shock mitigating jockey seats fitted as standard. I was astounded by the announced selling price of 400 Euro's each! Having had considerable experience with shock mitigating seats during my time at Zodiac with Ullman, Shockwave and others, I immediately started to examine the seat's mechanism and its foundations with some degree of scepticism. That started a detailed



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examination of both boats before we even put to sea, as my scepticism was further increased by the bargain basement selling prices of the complete boats. More on that later.

The boats are manufactured in GRP using classic hand lay-up techniques with balsa and Coremat for stiffness, lightness and strength. I had previously checked out Blue Spirit's website (www.blue-spirit.nl) and found laminate specs as well as other detailed technical information, including pricing. (This is a pleasant departure from most RIB builders' sites where getting this sort of information can be a challenge.) Everything seemed to be well made and finished, in line with the intended use and target market. Each boat has a moulded hull and moulded deck, with in-built fuel tank

for commercial RIB users, where down time due to rips and tears in an inflatable tube costs time, money and inconvenience. Blue Spirit seem to have sourced what appears to be a good-quality foam collar option, at a very reasonable price.

Both boats had a central steering console positioned slightly aft in order to give as much room forward as possible. Both were fitted with handrails and windshields, with fascias large enough to fit a large screen for GPS/plotter/radar etc. The aluminium handrails were too thin to provide a comfortable grip, and their positioning meant you had to be standing to use them. The co-driver had no handle when seated on the jockey seat, but the builder was to address this in production boats.

On the 7.5m outboard, the console had a small door

Blue Spirit have only been in business a few months but have already built two impressive GRP demo boats.

cavities and covers, bow locker and tube cradle for the mechanically attached removable buoyancy tubes. On the outboard model, there is a nicely finished and fully functional moulded-in outboard draining well. A Hypalon-coated 1670 decitex inflatable buoyancy tube is standard, with an optional solid-foam tube available as an upgrade for severe commercial work. Again, detailed specs are available online. In my experience, a well-designed and built removable buoyancy tube, despite adding extra cost due to the complexity of the attachment method and associated finishing details, is a worthwhile feature for a RIB intended for the sometimes harsh working environments of the commercial user. I am also a fan of foam collars

on the forward face, large enough to provide crouched access to a space big enough for a toilet. On the 9m, the mid-engined Cummins diesel was nicely tucked in to the engine compartment forward of the steering console, with the engine cover hinging aft.

The console has a forward-facing door giving plenty of storage space

The buoyancy tube is mechanically attached around the bow area and completely removable for efficient repairs or replacement

We set off into a rather flat North Sea. Luckily some high-speed pilot boats were out too, leaving some good wake to test the hulls in. I drove both boats at full speed in and out of some pretty steep waves without discovering any suspicious behaviour or shipping any water over

BLUE SPIRIT 7.5 AND 9.0M

FIRST LOOK

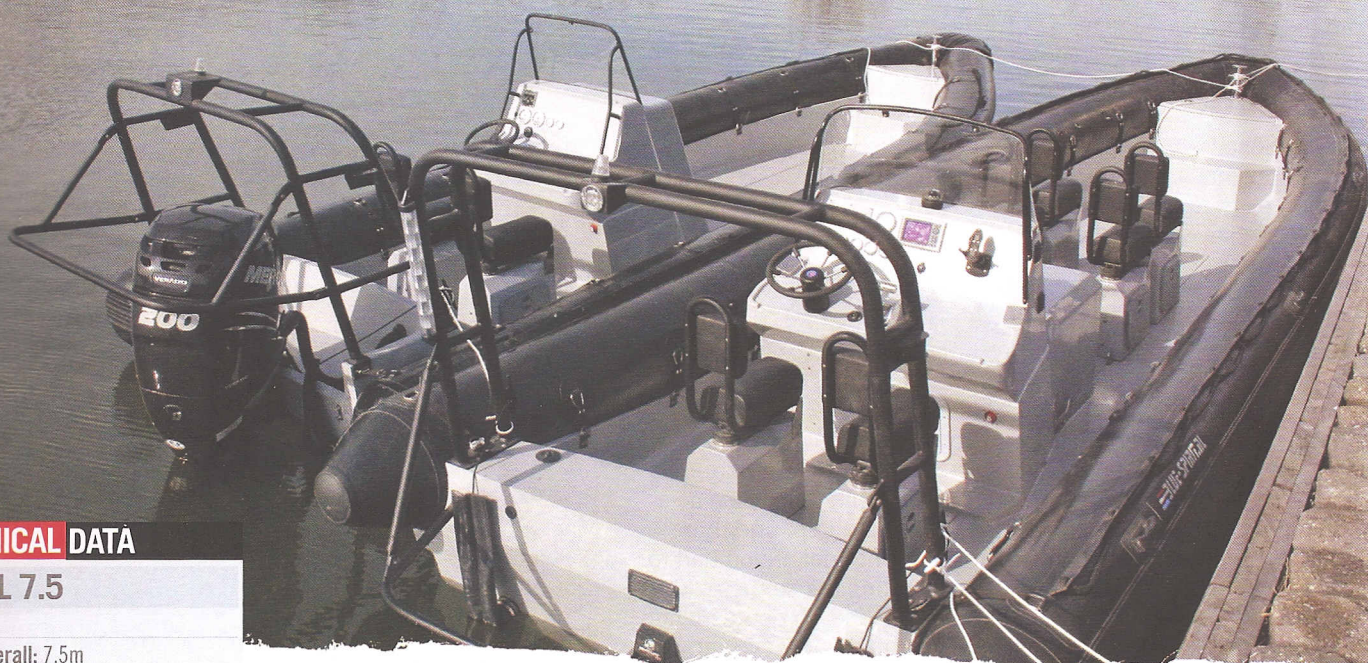


Both boats have a central steering console positioned slightly aft providing maximum forward deck space as possible.



Both were fitted with handrails and windshields, with fascias large enough to fit a large screen for GPS/plotter/radar etc.





TECHNICAL DATA

PATROL 7.5

- Length overall: 7.5m
- Width: 2.42m
- Weight: 1250 kg
- Persons capacity: 9
- Max HP: 300 hp
- Recommended engine: 200 hp
- Deadrise 'V' @ transom: 22°
- Tube diameter: 420 mm
- Number of chambers: solid foam
- Max load capacity: 2800 kg
- Tube material: Closed-cell foam covered with polyurethane (PU)
- CE category: B
- Warranty: 2 years

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

- Hull, deck, & inflatable buoyancy tubes
- Bow locker
- 200-litre fuel tank
- Steering console
- 2 shock mitigating jockey seats
- Bilge pump
- Navigation lights
- Switch panel

Extras on test craft

- Aft radar frame
- Engine guard

PRICES (INC VAT)

- Start from: £14,500
- As tested: £40,500 (with Mercury Verado 200hp)

MANUFACTURER

- Blue-Spirit.nl
- Werkendam, Holland
- T: +31183500765

the bow or gunwales. Both hulls performed well, cutting through the 1-2m waves quite effortlessly with a very solid feel to them. The hull design is a classic deep V, but with a chunky hard chine just below the tube cradle and a large single spray rail underneath that. The combination of these shapes threw the water far away from the hull as we shouldered our way through the waves, and one felt the full forward section being very buoyant, with no tendency to get swallowed up in the troughs. The buoyancy tubes are modestly proportioned to the hull and sit high enough out of the water at most trims. All in all, it all seemed to work well together.

The hull shape on the Patrol 9m shows the chunky chine and heavy spray rail, with the buoyancy collar clearly out of the water

Hydraulic steering and shift controls on both the Mercury Verado 200hp and the 350hp CMD diesel sterndrive make for effortless and secure control. The windshield was working very well to deflect the wind away from our body and faces. What was missing for me was a leaning bolster for support when driving standing up through hard

PERFORMANCE FIGURES

Blue Spirit Patrol 7.5

Knots	Secs	RPM	Lts per hr
0 to 20	6.0	2900	18
0 to 30	8.0	3100	26
0 to 40	12	5300	35
0 to 42	14	5800	41

The attractive price-to-quality ratio should make the government/commercial buyer want to shortlist Blue Spirit.

turns and waves. The jockey seats were fine for driving while seated, but too low to offer support when standing. The rudimentary suspension system in the jockey seats seemed to work well for my weight (about 90kg), but I did not have an opportunity to 'bottom it out'. Bruno Tideman, who weighs 100kg, claims he hasn't discovered that point in the seat's suspension system where there is no more 'travel' either. Two driver/crew shock mitigating seats are standard equipment. The 9m Patrol has a good-size console that fits with the inboard engine

cover. The self-bailing deck and high sides give a good impression of feeling secure inside the boat, and when I tried a severe backing-down manoeuvre, there was minimal water ingress over the transom. Overall, I could not fault either of the boats' performance in the test conditions of the day.

PERFORMANCE FIGURES

Blue Spirit Patrol 9.0

Knots	Secs	RPM	Lts per hr
0 to 20	12	2400	22
0 to 30	16	2950	35
0 to 40	32	3700	61
0 to 44	35	3850	66

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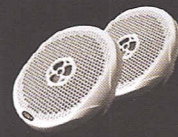
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position to the aft to suit the application. The builder can configure the layout to suit almost any application, given the ample deck space available for seats and/or cargo.

I visited the factory in Werkendam, just near Rotterdam. Blue Spirit have a 1,000-square metre workshop with 12 staff where the RIBs are assembled. It was a busy place, with several special RIBs in construction. There was a 9m RIB with a full wrap-around inflatable (and partly foam) collar powered by a 260hp Volkswagen Marine diesel coupled to a Hamilton waterjet. This boat is fitted with a Baudoin Wash-System expressly made for cleaning the sides of superyachts and will make its debut at the Monaco Boat Show next September. Partner Herman Vroege also showed me the world's first (he claims) waterjet-powered hybrid RIB using the Steyr 256hp diesel electric unit. When the electric drive system is used, the boat will cruise at 9 kilometres per hour. There were several other custom RIBs in process, and clearly this workshop produces some excellent and innovative craft. The Blue Spirit RIBs are assembled here from components of their own design and specifications, purchased either in eastern Europe or Asia at very well-negotiated-Dutch-style pricing. This explains the excellent value-for-money pricing that is sure to attract buyers. The assembly, finish and attention to detail are all up to the usual high Dutch standard.

There is an ISO 9000 series accredited quality assurance system planned to be in place by 2011, which will be important for helping to control the consistency of the quality and design of components arriving from overseas, as well as to support the planned construction of a range of SOLAS rescue boats.

Simple but efficient method

of retaining the removable foam buoyancy tube

The Blue Spirit business plan seems simple and transparent: make it easy for the customer to assess the product on the website with a pricing configurator and detailed technical data. The sharp pricing should make them want to come to Amsterdam, where Bruno will demo the boat and then do the short hop for the factory visit. The attractive price-to-quality ratio should make the government/commercial buyers want to shortlist Blue Spirit for their next purchase.
Tim Flemming

TECHNICAL DATA

PATROL 9.0

Length overall:	9.0m
Width:	2.84m
Weight:	450kg
Persons capacity:	16
Max HP:	2 x 350 hp
Recommended engine:	350 hp inboard
Deadrise 'V' @ transom:	22°
Tube diameter:	520 mm
Number of chambers:	8
Max load capacity:	3500 kg
Tube material:	Orca 828 Hypalon
CE category:	B
Warranty:	2 years

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Hull, deck & inflatable buoyancy tubes
Bow locker
200-litre fuel tank
Steering console
2 shock mitigating jockey seats
Bilge pump
Navigation lights
Switch panel

Extras on test craft

Aft radar frame
Engine guard
4 jockey seats
Single lifting frame

PRICES (INC VAT)

Start from:	£24,500
As tested:	£65,400 (with CMD QSD 4.2 350 hp Bravo Three XR)