

# SEALEGS

# 7.1

There has only ever been one Sealegs model available to the UK boater - until now. Alex Smith tests the new King of the amphibious range, the Sealegs 7.1 . . .



# TESTED

## Sealeg 7.1

**S**tepping up onto the tyre and over the transom, I can't help feeling faintly proud. The slipway gallery, sitting in its usual position, watching the traffic going to and fro and enjoying the launch and recovery entertainment, has switched its attention entirely to me. I say me but actually I'm incidental. All attention is fixed entirely on the boat I happen to be standing on and, when you take a look at it, you can see why . . .

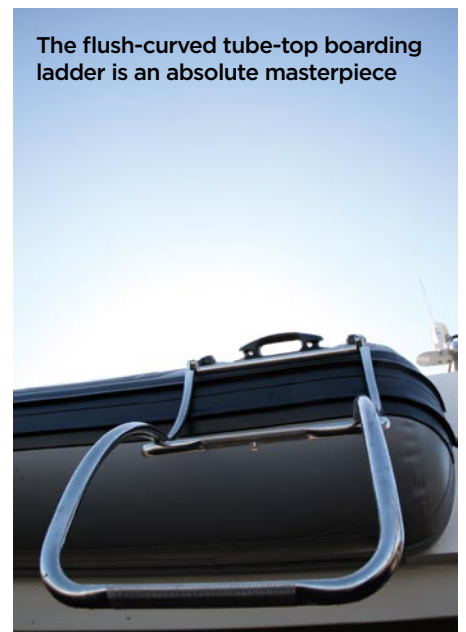
### WHERE DOES IT FIT INTO THE RANGE?

*Manufactured in New Zealand and imported into Britain by Amphibious UK, the original 6.1-metre Sealegs amphibious RIB has been a big success, particularly in the military and commercial markets, where its suitability for dive, rescue and flood relief work is extremely welcome. Following on from the success of the original 6.1 metre craft, the new 7.1 has become the flagship of a very small but highly capable amphibious fleet.*

With its wheels in the 'down' position, the Sealegs 7.1 stands a lofty 2.4 metres high (just under eight feet) so it's a very useful feature that the screen is hinged, allowing it to be folded flush with the forward edge of the helm console. That brings the height down to a more manageable two metres, enabling it to be driven straight into most garages or lock ups.

And as we drive down the slipway under our own steam, it becomes patently obvious that this is not a boat where any old part will do. Everything here is custom built for purpose. Take a look at the aft ladder and you see what I mean. There [▶](#)

**The flush-curved tube-top boarding ladder is an absolute masterpiece**





The quality of engineering behind these hydraulically operated 'legs' is astonishingly good



is obviously no room on the transom for a boarding ladder because the outboard engine is framed by a pair of wheels with large diameter tyres. The solution is a brilliantly conceived tube-top ladder which curves flush with the Hypalon and folds out to stand proud of the tube.

#### Deck configuration

This boat may be called a 7.1 but that's the distance from the back of the aft wheel to the front of the forward

#### WHY ALUMINIUM?

*Some people swear by aluminium while others just swear at it. The Kiwis fall into the former category with a fine tradition in building ally boats. Aluminium is light and strong, easy to work, simple to repair and very durable. On the downside, it's not especially cheap and, when used fairly thin for boats at the bottom end of the market, it has a tendency to be quite noisy underway. No chance of that here.*



The fuel tank is above the deck to make way for the generator's under-deck exhaust pipe

wheel when both are locked in the 'up' position. The actual size of this boat in real terms (from prop to forepeak) is more like 6.4 metres. And yet the Sealegs seems to make excellent use of this length with a helm console positioned quite a long way forward and a bank of three bench seats aft of that, leading back toward the transom.

In all of these seating positions, the passenger is treated to a feeling of security very rare on a RIB of this size. That's partly due to the proliferation of grabrails, which fall naturally to hand whether you're standing or sitting, and partly due to the immense weight of build in evidence here. Even small children get a great little seating position in the back of the helm seat, with plenty of support and protection and the luxury of an aft-facing stance immediately in front of the forward-facing adults. This particular element of the layout may be an accident of design rather than a deliberate feature, but it's a very effective setup for the burgeoning boat family regardless.

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Don't even think about the Gibbs Aquada or some clumsy great V-bottomed bus/boat contraption you tried on holiday. They're just modified road vehicles. This is a real boat; a proper driver's boat in every respect. The fact that it can also take you up a beach or a slipway is just a very welcome bonus.



### Principles of build

Perhaps New Zealand has a surplus of stainless steel, because the diameter of the aft framework that wraps around the fuel tank seat pod is huge. And it's not alone in its delicious advocacy of the overkill principle, as you immediately appreciate when you take a look at the hydraulically operated wheels. They are so over-engineered that

These things are designed to put up with 1,000 hours per year, in season and out, for years on end

they will apparently lift six tonnes if called upon to do so. Obviously that's never going to happen but it's good to know . . .

In fact the proliferation of commercial customers for Sealegs boats sees these things manufactured to standards much more exacting than the average leisure

The low-draw, high-intensity LED nav lights are another good touch



boat. They are designed to put up with 1,000 hours per year, for years on end, in season and out, in all kinds of conditions and with heavyweight loads. Carrying your kids and your picnic hamper on board for 50 hours a season is like throwing a fairy cake at a navy. It won't even come close to challenging this boat's hardy resolve.

Interestingly, the layout of the 7.1 sees the fuel tank above deck. That's obviously not ideal either for in board space or for the boat's handling dynamics. It puts weight higher up than is ideal and leaves much of the below deck area underutilised, but in fairness there's a very good reason for that. The exhaust pipe from the generator funnels its hot gasses away to the transom directly

beneath the deck and, naturally enough, a hot exhaust and a fuel supply are not particularly comfortable bed fellows so, in a rather ingenious move, the Sealegs designers have incorporated the tank into the aft seat. 'Why don't they just re-route the exhaust?' I hear you cry. Well it could in theory be done but it would be a major overhaul for a relatively minor benefit so chances are they will stick with what they have.

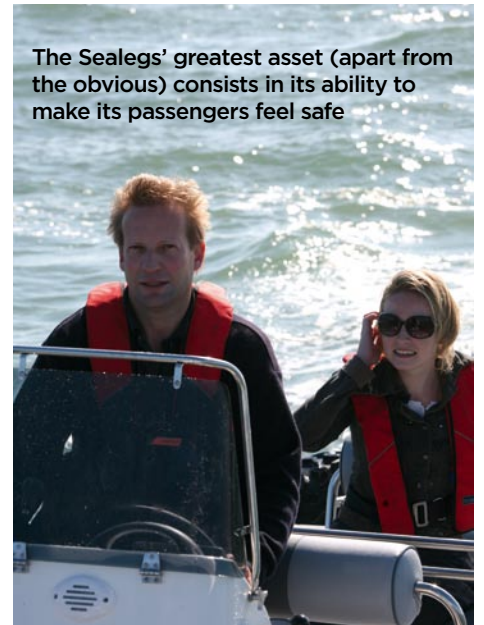
Elsewhere, there are only a couple of very slight issues to think about. The forepeak hatch doesn't open when the tubes are pumped hard, there is no access to the back of the dash gear without removing some screws and, if my experience of saltwater is anything to go by, the wholesale use of poppers ▶

### WHAT ABOUT ON LAND?

*The function of the 24 hp Honda generator (an uprated version of the original 15 hp unit) is to lift and lower the wheels and to drive them once in contact with the beach or the slipway. The two aft wheels and the one forward wheel can be lifted or dropped independently, allowing you to assist your passengers in embarkation by lowering one end of the boat on a beach. As for the boat's ability to make distance on land, well it is obviously not road legal but it's good for 6mph and it will handle most terrains within reason. You do have to pick the right kind of beach, as it will struggle for traction in deep shale at a steep angle but it will happily tackle most terrains you are likely to come across, allowing you to drive straight out of the water and up onto dry land in preparation for your beach party. It saves faffing, it keeps you dry, it makes you largely immune to tide miscalculations and it allows you to beach at will without the slightest concern for you hull or your prop. It's a very impressive system indeed.*



The updated 24 hp Honda generator is easily enough to power a fully laden Sealegs up a beach



The Sealegs' greatest asset (apart from the obvious) consists in its ability to make its passengers feel safe

might see you looking for alternative fastening methods in a couple of years time, when salt and corrosion have done their thing. Even so, this Sealegs 7.1 is a very impressively built boat, with an immense feeling of security for the family boater and a layout that really does work.

### Underway

When you put the throttle down, the response from the 150hp ETEC is extremely gratifying. The boat pops up onto the plane in very short order and at very low speeds. Acceleration thereafter remains impressive, particularly considering the fact that we

have 80 litres of fuel on board, plus three adults. We gather pace at a rate far in excess of my expectations but it's the ride quality that really hits home. Trim her out a fair bit and a gentle ride gets even gentler, with an elevated, high-riding attitude, a waterline way aft and a point of re-entry at the back end of the hull offering the softest of kisses each time the boat comes down from skipping off a crest.

Despite the boat's excellent manners, I have to confess that I managed to stuff the Sealegs. It seems implausible I know but I did everything wrong. A big trough appeared at exactly that moment that I looked over my shoulder at a rather lovely



Don't be apprehensive. The extra controls are very simple to use.



A fuel flow rate of 22 litres per hour at about 21 knots is a very sound return

### ROCK SOLID RESIDUALS

The Sealegs amphibious system has been around long enough and proven itself often enough to have left the 'novelty' label way behind. That means that, when you come to resell a Sealegs boat, you won't be stuck with a Delorian or a Sinclair C5. Quite the opposite in fact. You will have a boat with residuals far more robust than the market average for a seven-metre RIB. After all, not only are they built like granite and engineered to painstaking standards but the fierce loyalty of the Sealegs customer base sees these boats hitting the used market with such rarity that potential buyers sometimes have to fight it out. They aren't cheap to buy but, if you can afford the initial outlay a Sealegs can provide ingenious and enjoyable sports boating at a very affordable price.

boat in full sail. I came off the throttle a touch to compensate for the fact that I wasn't looking and I plunged us straight on into the back of a huge green one, sending all aboard into salty raptures.

To the boat's enormous credit, the water drained from the deck almost instantly and, despite the soaking, all working parts remained fully active, from the electrics to the outboard and the little Honda generator in its central housing. It certainly proves that no boat is stuff-proof but, with the squared off nose, the generous diameter of tubes and the fact that the fat front tyre behaves like a buffer on a buffer, the Sealegs is very comfortable indeed with a following sea. Only the most talented of helming morons could possibly have brought about such a bizarre and unexpected moment and I feel oddly proud to be that moron. Sincerest apologies to Nick Fox (Director of Amphibious UK), to my long-suffering missus and to the boat for a very shabby helming display.

Even so, the greatest recommendation

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Once you're on the water, it becomes plain that there is no discernible compromise here at all



for the Sealegs is the fact that my girlfriend loves it. Even at 36 or 37 knots, turning hard as some lumps rolled in at the beam, she grinned without concern, because the Sealegs is just so solid, so well built and so very planted and composed underway that it is difficult to feel anything but confidence. She is, despite the extensive use of aluminium, a very heavy boat and although the throttle response is very sprightly, she never errs toward flightiness. With a magic ride and strong points of support for bums, hands and feet everywhere you look, it's as polished a performer as the family man could want.

### Verdict

The original 6.1-metre Sealegs we tested back in 2006 was a very good boat but the new 7.1 is better in almost every way. It shares the same unerring quality of ride and maturity of handling and yet it's quicker on pick-up and longer legged at the top end. The fixtures and fittings have come on too, with high-end touches like the curved tube-top ladder, the classy cleat insignias and reworked seating that makes the very most of the limited deck space. It's not cheap by seven-metre RIB standards and if you want to take it further afield to different cruising

grounds, you will need to fork out for a dedicated trailer. But then this is hardly your everyday seven-metre RIB . . .

There is no craft on the UK market that carries off the amphibious boat trick with anything like the same degree of excellence. In fact this is the only amphibious leisure craft I have ever seen that really nails the marine element without any discernible compromise in boating dynamics. It is so good that I have been able to judge it entirely on its merits as a sea boat and, even in direct comparison to the conventional RIB market, it stands out as a safe, robust, entertaining and thoroughly likeable leisure boat. Its performance, allied to its unique versatility, its rock solid residuals and its splendid practicality make it far and away the best amphibious leisure boat you can buy. ■

### PERFORMANCE

RPM	Speed (knots)	Fuel flow (lph)	Range (nm)
1000	5.0	2.5	324.0
1500	7.2	4.8	243.0
2000	10.0	10.5	154.3
2500 (plane)	14.7	16.0	148.8
3000	19.5	20.0	158.0
3500	20.5	22.0	151.0
4000	23.1	28.8	129.9
4500	29.0	44.0	106.8
5000	31.5	54.0	94.5
5500 (WOT)	36.0	58.1	100.4

### SPECS

LOA	7.1 m
Beam	2.56 m
Weight	1150 kg
Max Power	150 hp
Max payload	700 kg
Max people	eight
Fuel capacity	180 litres
Deadrise	21 degrees
Engine	Evinrude ETEC 150
Price	£60,938.50 / Price as tested: £71,180

### WHY YOU WOULD

- Soft ride
- Passenger confidence
- Fantastic build
- Amphibious versatility
- Excellent fit-out
- Strong residuals

### WHY YOU WOULDN'T

- Limited storage space
- Noisy generator
- Dedicated trailer costs extra

### CONTACT

Nick Fox at Amphibious UK  
02088 705514  
[www.amphibiousribs.com](http://www.amphibiousribs.com)  
[www.sealegs.com](http://www.sealegs.com)