



SEALEGS AMPHIBIOUS BOAT

by Mark Anders

Test-driving what may well be the ultimate surf assault vehicle

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Zealand Coast Guard, Mumbai Police, and the Royal Thai Navy. This summer is the first time the Sealegs has been available to the U.S. market.

I tested the Sealegs in Massachusetts' Duxbury Bay where there's a huge tidal swing and plenty of thick mud that, in some places, makes it impossible for folks to launch their trailered boats during the bottom end of the tide cycle. But we just gave the old tide chart the finger and drove right on through the mud and muck-- and into the sea.

As for performance stats, the Sealegs is powered by a 150 hp Evinrude ETEC outboard motor. Top speed: 48 mph. With the three legs and wheels folded up and out of the way, this boat drives as well as other high-performance RIBs. It has inflatable Hypalon rubber tubes and a 5mm marine-grade aluminum V-shaped hull that cuts through rough water easily. It's also selfbailing, which would be handy for launching (and landing) through rough surf. There's plenty of room in the boat to store boards in the gunnels, with adequate room for four guys and all your gear to ride comfortably.

On land, the Sealegs gets around on its aluminum hydraulic "legs" with 25" knobby tires. Top speed: 6 mph. The AWD system is powered by a separate onboard 24 hp, 4-stroke Honda GX670 motor. I was surprised that the entire Sealegs drive system adds just 330 pounds of extra weight to the boat.

The only downsides I could see are that running the AWD system is loud as hell (like your home lawnmower) and it can only drive on land for around 30 minutes continuously before needing a break to avoid overheating. That said, the Sealegs is a pretty burly off-road performer, capable of crawling up and down steep grades of loose rocks, soft sand, and such. Just imagine the possibilities for surgical surf strikes in tough-to-access coastal zones in places like Panama, Chile, Nicaragua...the list goes on.

Okay, but how much does it cost? \$139,900. Ouch. The smaller, and slightly less capable, 6.1-meter rear-wheel-drive model comes in at around \$85,000. Sure, that's loads of money but who says surfers can't dream?

If you've been following this gear column, then you've probably heard me talk about my internal marketing B.S. alarm system. The thing goes off whenever I hear about something that sounds gimmicky or too good to be true--like when I first heard about the Sealegs amphibious boat.

When I finally saw a photo of it, the alarm got quieter. Then, I test-drove the thing: Holy crap, coach! B.S. alarm completely silenced. The Sealegs 7.1m RIB is a 23' 5"-long rigid inflatable boat (RIB) with three retractable all-wheel-drive "legs" that enable the craft to be launched without a trailer and give the driver freedom to land or launch the Sealegs just about anywhere without worry of getting stuck when the tide falls out.

I've always been a big fan of boat-in surf spots, so when I saw this, my mouth began to salivate wildly and mind started spinning with the possibilities. The Sealegs could indeed be the ultimate surf assault vehicle.

The craft hails from Auckland, New Zealand, where it was first launched back in 2004. They've made 500 boats so far--half of those are driven by pleasure boaters while the other half are used by coast guard and military units across the globe, including the New