

review

Sealegs 12RC

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When many people think of Sealegs amphibious boats, they imagine something like the original 6.1-metre RIB that kicked off the range in the mid-2000s – something smallish to buzz about in then drive back up the beach to the boatshed. But the concept, and the company, has come a long way in the last 20 years, and the latest craft to hit the water sets a new standard in terms of what an amphibious alloy RIB can be.

FLAT OUT FINESSE



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Kupe is the second 12-metre Cabin RIB (12RC) the company has launched, and the first destined to stay in New Zealand. (In October 2022, *Boating NZ* checked out the first 12RC, which went off to France.) This craft is named after the great Polynesian explorer Kupe, said to be the first to discover the islands of Aotearoa, and next summer it's off on its own voyage of exploration around the motu.

The 12RC is a collaboration between Sealegs, Hall Marine Design (HMD) and boatbuilders PureKraft, the last two based in Papamoa in the Bay of Plenty. Hall's marine designer Simon Middleton worked with Sealegs to design the 12m, PureKraft built the hull and superstructure and the whole thing

was painted by Super Yacht Coatings in Tauranga, then the amphibious kit and hydraulic systems were installed by Sealegs. Five more 12 metres are currently in the order books, for local and overseas clients, and for commercial and recreational use.

The boat generated a lot of interest when it was on display at the recent Hutchwilco NZ Boat Show, and we were pleased to be able to put it through its paces on the water before it was handed over to its new owner. Some refinements have been made since the first 12m; compared to boat number one, the cabin has been both raised and extended aft, to provide increased space and headroom. *Kupe* also has a lot of optional extras, from long-range fuel tanks to radar and Starlink, for optimal long-range cruising and coastal voyaging.

The whole process of building a boat like this takes around 18-20 months – and it’s worth taking time over, because one of the first things you notice when climbing aboard is the incredibly high level of finish. All the welds are covered and the aluminium painted to such a standard that nothing about the finished product says ‘alloy boat’. The interior upholstery, in black and gold, with elaborate honeycomb stitching, is immaculate. The teak-look U-Dek in the cockpit, through the cabin and up on the foredeck, is striking (and contains neat details, such as a fish-measurement scale debossed into the cockpit floor). And everywhere you look there are little details: conveniently placed handholds, storage options, LED lighting: this boat is optioned to the max. As Sealegs’ Nicholas Glanfield put it, “There’s not many boxes [the owner] didn’t tick – in fact, he invented a few new ones.”

But enough on the aesthetics: the engineering side of the boat is just as impressive. It takes a lot of careful planning and design to take a boat this large, weighing around eight tonnes fully loaded with fuel and water, and make it perform not only at sea, but also on land, in its three-wheeled configuration.

The 12RC is fitted with Sealeg’s System 100 amphibious kit, powered by a 94hp turbo diesel engine, a four-cylinder inboard running a 49cc hydraulic pump. This unit produces 14,000Nm of torque, more than enough grunt to get *Kupe* on and off the beach or up the boat ramp without drama. The system also has a differential lock, which can be engaged at the push of a button; if one of the wheels gets bogged and starts to spin, the diff lock will provide torque to all the wheels evenly so they rotate at the same, slower speed, enabling the boat to be driven out.



ABOVE Rounding Rangi Light and pulled up on the beach at McKenzie Bay, below. The helm console has quite a lot going on, but operating the vessel is simple, at sea or on land.

OPPOSITE The plush interior is finished to a high standard.





The boat is certainly eye-catching, with its shiny white topsides, dark tinted windows...

The inboard is mounted in a central unit at the transom, the lid of which hinges up to reveal the manifold. This unit has a live-bait tank and storage drawers built into it, and there are upholstered seats on either side.

Power on the water is supplied by the largest outboards I have ever seen: a pair of new-generation, low-emission Mercury Verado V12 600hp engines, each 7.6 litres displacement and naturally aspirated, fitted with 24.5-inch contra-rotating duoprops. This is one of the first such twin V12 setups in New Zealand and with their sleek black cowls and polished stainless-steel props, they add to the wow factor when the 12RC is out of the water.



The boat is certainly eye-catching, with its shiny white topsides, dark tinted windows, carbon-look tubes and bronze 'swash'. From a distance, as it surges in towards Takapuna Beach to pick us up, *Kupe* looks like a 'regular' sized aluminium powerboat, but once it gets close, the amphibious gear is deployed and it starts to drive out of the water, you realise how big it really is.

'Behemoth' is a word which springs to mind or, perhaps more nautically, 'leviathan'. As the boat sits on the beach, knots of people and dogs gather to stare at it, as if it were a giant squid which had washed up. You don't usually see a 12m powerboat literally sitting on the sand (unless something has gone badly wrong), which really makes you appreciate its size – and the size of those outboards. Out of the water you can get a good look at the hull shape, too. As with other Sealegs models, the hull shape is pretty simple, with a single flat chine and no spray rails, the conventional vee leading back to a flat on the centreline aft.

In amphibious mode, the boat can either sit up high on its three wheels, in driving mode, or 'squat' at the back, to make it easier to board. To fully 'park' the boat – say, for overnighting on land – the back wheels can also be dropped right back so that the hull is sitting on the sand, the front wheel fully lifted up into the seagoing storage





position. *Kupe* doesn't have a boarding ladder, so this ability to squat makes it easier to scramble on over the wheels at the transom, utilising the well-positioned hand-holds. (There is also an option of an electrically driven swim platform which extends out the side of the hull, but that box didn't get ticked, to save weight.) This 'squat' function also makes it easy to drain any water out of the bilge.

Once onboard, it's time for a quick look-around inside before we head off out to sea. About half the boat is cockpit,

There is excellent headroom in the cabin...



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LEFT *Kupe* rocks Sealegs' System 100 amphibious kit, the company's largest such system.

RIGHT Sarah shows off the scale of this vessel.

BELOW A 94hp turbodiesel powers the hydraulic pumps. Access to the vessel's pumps and other systems is good. The bowthruster is electric.

and compared to a launch of a comparable size, there's not a lot of interior space, though what there is beautifully finished. There's an elevated seating area to port, with a table that drops down to form a king-single-sized berth, and a galley ranged along the starboard side, with single sink, two-burner ceramic-topped diesel hob in a solid-surface benchtop, and storage below in neatly finished, ply-fronted cupboards. There's a Dometic fridge under the bench, and an additional chiller under the cockpit seat at the back on the cabin.

There is excellent headroom in the cabin, tinted glass windows all around for great visibility, and a pair of tilt-and-slide electric sunroofs to let in light and air from above. (We get the opportunity to test the large hand-holds between them once we head out into the chop.) The cabin can be opened up to the cockpit with a folding glass door to starboard and a half-height window to port behind the settee, which drops down out of sight at the push of a button.

Forward, a sliding door closes off the bow cabin, where there is a v-berth. Under the port side squab is the electric head; this is as 'bathroom' as it gets. There's no sink here, and the rainhead-style shower is outside in the cockpit.



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This 12RC will provide a fantastic, high-speed, practical platform for coastal adventures...



The forward seat-back of the settee flips over to make a front-facing 'co-pilot' seat, which has its own Garmin screen in front of it to monitor tank levels, fuel usage and other systems. The helm seat opposite is adjustable both in height and the seat cushion; the front panel can be folded up if you want to steer standing up.

In front of the helm are two massive 16-inch Garmin screens. To starboard are the outboard throttles, the iDock system which synchs with the bow thruster, and a joystick for fine manoeuvring of the Mercurys. The toggles and levers for the Sealegs amphibious kit are also on the dash; in future models this will all be fully push-button. Also at hand are the bow thruster toggle, anchor windlass control and Zipwake auto trim tab panel.

Having given the dog walkers of Takapuna Beach their thrill for the day, it's time to head out. It's looking a bit lumpy out in the Rangitoto Channel, with some reasonable surf running in on a leftover northeasterly. We're hoping for some flatter water over by the Rangi shore, to really put the boat through her paces. There's quite a chop as we launch, but the 12RC powers confidently into the waves. Suddenly the ride goes smooth and we're afloat. Wheels up, diesel off and the Verados take over.

In the confused slop, about 20 knots is the most practical speed, but once we're in the lee of Rangitoto and can open up she cruises at a comfortable 30. Downwind in smoother water we can get up to 40 knots, towards her top speed. With the aid of the Zipwake auto trim tab system the ride is very smooth and level at this speed, without the bow riding too high.

The boat is light and responsive to helm without being too sensitive, easily manoeuvrable and turns without too much heel. Although at times the sea is pretty bumpy, a boat this heavy and powered-up isn't about to get pushed around. From the elevated helm position the sensation of speed is suspended: 20 knots feels like nothing and 30 is still easy, though we do launch off





LEFT Sealegs 12RC is an impressive vessel, on and off the water. The Kubota turbodiesel is neatly packaged.

BELOW The full scale of the 12RC is best appreciated on the beach. The surf rolling in on Takapuna Beach posed it no challenges.

a few waves and have to back off a bit for the sake of the passengers.

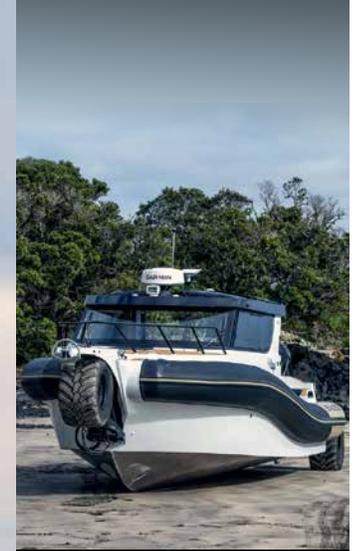
At higher speeds those V12s are burning a fair bit of fuel, however; from around 120lph at 20 knots, consumption rises to around 140lph at that comfortable cruising speed of 30 knots, then around 220lph at 40. If you've got the right conditions and just want to go flat out, at around 54 knots, you'll burn through the 800-litre fuel capacity in two hours.

We blast around by the lighthouse to get the shots we need, then power up the beach at McKenzie Bay, scattering the seagulls and crunching up the volcanic rock and sand beach. It's easy to imagine what a great adventure

it will be to power off around the coast of Aotearoa, finding new and isolated spots to drive onto the beach and 'squat' for the night.

Getting back from Rangitoto to Takapuna takes less than 10 minutes, and then we're the sideshow again, attracting a new crowd. That's one thing the owner is going to have to get used to: this boat is impossible to ignore.

This 12RC will provide a fantastic, high-speed, practical platform for coastal adventures, where choosing an anchorage for the night will be as easy as finding a beach to drive up onto. It certainly takes amphibious craft to another level, in terms of size and finish. **BNZ**



Sealegs 12RC

BASE PRICE
POA

PRICE AS REVIEWED
\$1.8 million

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SPECIFICATIONS

loa 12.3m

max beam 3.6m

air draft 3.5m (wheels down), 2.8m (wheels up)

construction 6mm marine-grade aluminium

power inboard diesel (on land) Kubota 94hp four-cylinder turbodiesel

outboards 2 x Mercury Verado 7.6-litre, 600hp V12 o/b, fitted with 24.5-inch contra-rotating duoprops

fuel capacity 800 litres (650 litres optional)

amphibious system Sealegs 100

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