

X-PRO DEFENDER 535 AND 415 ALUMINIUM

It was always going to be just a matter of time before China started to produce RIBs that were to be taken seriously ... **Words: Paul Lemmer**

i **DEFENDER 535:** Prices From: £6,999 (boat only) £11,999 with 50hp Suzuki **Tested:** £13,999 with 70hp Suzuki 4-stroke. **415 Aluminium From:** £4,499 (boat only) **Tested:** £6,999 with Suzuki 15hp electric start and cover **CONTACT:** Sea Swift Boats Ltd, Unit 3 Sandygate Business Park, Kingsteignton, Devon TQ12 3XF. **TEL:** 01626 366985 **WEB:** www.seaswift.co.uk



We know from other craft we have tested that China is capable of making quality products that are serious contenders to the market. Of course, one can find fault with craft from any part of the globe, and no one is claiming that inexpensive RIBs are free from certain criticisms, but then, look how long it took the UK RIB industry to establish itself!

With the exception of a few makes, Chinese-manufactured RIBs are based on Italian designs, and by virtue of this their interiors are laid out in a Mediterranean style, as opposed to that of craft from northern Europe. Also, in the majority of cases, the smaller RIBs sport medium-V hulls rather than

deep V, again mirroring the Mediterranean concept, but for the majority of families these Far Eastern craft have proved that they offer acceptable engineering standards and good value for money in what has become an increasingly competitive RIB market.

So to the subject of our test, with two completely different

types of RIB from the Republic of China, both imported by Sea Swift Boats Ltd, who are based in Devon. We were fortunate to have had the opportunity to test both these craft on the same day and in the same sea conditions, and while one was typically Mediterranean in layout, the other most certainly was not – and furthermore was

not even made from the same materials!

The Defender 535 is very similar to many Mediterranean RIBs, having a narrow steering console with a large windscreens plus forward ‘suicide’ seat and single helmsman’s leaning post arrangement to starboard; however, unlike many craft of this size, the helmsman’s



WHAT WE THOUGHT

535 Defender

POINTS WE LIKED

- Appearance
- Light weight = low power needs = less expensive

POINTS TO IMPROVE

- Seating: this has since been replaced with a new design.

WHAT WE THOUGHT

415 Aluminium

POINTS WE LIKED

- Appearance
- Safe handling
- Ride
- Finish

POINTS TO IMPROVE

- Seat cushions to thin



I thought the craft looked well suited for the UK, appearing more practical and tough than some craft on offer from overseas.

position is amidships rather than right aft. The benefit of this layout is that when the helmsman is on his own, his weight is further forward, thus having a positive effect on the balance of the craft when heading into choppy seas. Behind this is a 'cosy' two-person rear bench seat with good handholds for the passenger/s, but the most interesting feature of the layout was the rather unusual one-person seats facing each other in the bow. Just who would want to sit here facing a fellow passenger when at sea is somewhat puzzling, and when questioned over this, the X-Pro representative agreed that this arrangement was an unsuccessful experiment and would not be adopted on future models. Right forward is another seat on top of the anchor locker (only suitable for low speed on calm water), but with revised seating in front of the steering console and another alongside the

helmsman there could be seating for six adults, and X-Pro confirmed that they will endeavour to offer this set-up on future models.

The combination of large-diameter, well-finished, dark-grey buoyancy tubes, a substantial stainless steel double A-frame (UK sourced), decent lifelines, good moulded grab handles and a neat GRP bow mooring moulding all enhanced this affordable RIB, and overall I thought the craft looked well suited for the UK, appearing more practical and tough than some craft on offer from overseas.

Fitted with one of the latest lean-burn Suzuki 70hp, this 5.35m RIB was adequately powered rather than overpowered, and the craft gave a steady and sure-footed performance rather than a nail-biting experience. The hull looks fairly conventional from the bow, sporting an attractive sheer and a reasonable V, but the shape changes quite

SNAPSHOT [A quick look onboard the 415 Aluminium](#)



ONBOARD: Revised 535 helm leaning post/seat/grab rail arrangement



ANCHOR LOCKER: strong welded crane/davit lifting points in 415

SPECIFICATIONS



X-Pro Defender 535

TECHNICAL DATAMETRIC

Length overall: 535cm
Width: 212cm
Weight: 240kg
Persons capacity: 10
Max HP: 75
Recommended engine: 60hp
Deadrise V @ transom: Variable
Tube diameter: 52cm
Number of chambers: 6
Max. load capacity: 1500kg
Tube material: 1600 DTEX PVC
CE category: C
Warranty: 3 year hull, 4 year tubes

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Family console, driver's bolster, full cover, steering system, battery and fuse panel, front locker, pump

Extras on test craft

Rear stainless heavy-duty A-frame with bench seat and navigation lights: £1,299

PRICES (INC VAT)

From: £6,999 (boat only); £11,999 with 50hp Suzuki 4-stroke
As tested: £13,999 with 70hp Suzuki 4-stroke and A-frame

SPECIFICATIONS



X-Pro 415c Aluminium

TECHNICAL DATAMETRIC

Length overall: 420cm
Width: 178cm
Weight: 104kg
Persons capacity: 7
Max HP: 30
Recommended engine: 15-30 hp
Deadrise V @ transom: 24 degrees
Tube diameter: 50cm
Number of chambers: 5
Max. load capacity: 700kg
Tube material: 1600 DTEX PVC
CE category: C
Warranty: 3 year hull, 4 year tubes

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Jockey console, full cover, steering system, battery and fuse panel, front locker, pump

Extras on test craft

Rear stainless heavy-duty A-frame with bench seat and navigation lights: £1,299

PRICES (INC VAT)

From: £4,499 (boat only)
As tested: £6,999 with Suzuki 15hp electric start and cover

CONTACT DETAILS

MANUFACTURER OR UK DEALER

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 Devon TQ12 3XF
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The safe handling 535

radically towards the transom and ends up with unusual flattish 'hooked' sections either side of a central 'keel' section.

Under way, the hooked aft hull sections would appear to assist the craft to get quickly onto the plane, and I felt they acted like trim tabs, forcing the bows down no matter how much upward trim I applied to the motor! Initially I thought this a strange sensation, particularly as the faster the craft went the more the bows remained resolutely depressed; however, after a few minutes I began to realise that this was a great safety feature for the uninitiated and it certainly kept the sharper V bows cutting the waves in a reassuring and smooth manner. On the turns and in the short, steep following seas, the craft proved very well mannered and surprisingly dry, and by the end of the test I was quite taken by this well-priced package.

Our second brief test was on the aluminium-hulled X-Pro 4.15m, a unique little craft that like its bigger 'half-brother' looked both tough and purposeful with its large-diameter buoyancy tubes and surprisingly deep V hull. Fitted out with a smallish GRP two-man sit- astride 'jockey' console, there was nothing more to the package, except for the diminutive Suzuki 15hp outboard motor, decent lifelines

down each side of the tubes, two stainless steel towing rings on the bow and a sensible keel guard to protect the alloy hull from damage when beaching. It was immediately obvious that the console had been sourced elsewhere and had been quickly fitted to the craft for the test; having a very thinly padded seat cushion, this was as basic as one could get other than tiller steering, yet the package felt 'just right' and punched well above its weight under way!

Once again, this X-Pro gave the impression of being purposeful rather than stylish, yet the finish of both hull and tubes was to a high standard

and there was a reassuring feel and look about her. The simple, no-nonsense approach somehow appealed to me, and the overall light weight of the package meant that she was both easily handled ashore and easily driven afloat by the economical 15hp four-stroke outboard.

At rest afloat, the combination of light weight and a deep-V hull meant her tubes were slightly clear of the water, and when one stepped onto the craft from the pontoon there was an initial heeling a couple of inches before the tubes touched the water; this slight 'nervousness' was only apparent with one



415 planing with four adults with only 15hp



has plenty of competition in this sector of the market, the smaller aluminium-hulled craft would appear to hold a unique position in the hotly contested RIB world. Both boats deserve to succeed for their good finish, safe handling and the value for money that they offer, but for me, the X-Pro 415 harks back to the original ethos of what RIBs were originally designed for: tough, durable, seaworthy craft that are capable of punching well above their weight when the going gets tough.

[Paul Lemmer](#)

person aboard, the craft feeling much more stable with two crew, and any lateral movement disappeared the moment the craft was under way.

In the steep, uncomfortable chop that prevailed, the X-Pro 415 Aluminium seemed to revel in the conditions and she was a delight to handle, being incredibly soft-riding and sweet-handling up/down wind and across the waves

– in short, a delight to drive. The performance too was surprisingly nimble, probably because of her light weight and decent hull shape, but what really surprised us was the way she still planed with a four-adult crew – a combined payload of around 325kg!

Lightweight, hard-wearing, easy to handle, economical, well made and evidently a great little sea boat, it was difficult

to fault this practical package, and with better seat cushioning this craft would make an ideal tender, small family runabout, or a tough commercial craft for a multitude of purposes.

To sum up: it would seem that the boys behind X-Pro RIBs have struck just the right balance between no-nonsense practicality and handsome good looks for their RIBs, and while the bigger GRP-hulled craft

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