

ARTICLE REPRINT - contains amendments

ARCTIC BLUE

ON TEST

HUGO MONTGOMERY-SWAN DISCOVERS A NEW BRAND OF RIB POISED ON THE THRESHOLD OF MAKING A DEFINITE NAME FOR ITSELF IN THE NORTHERN EUROPEAN MARKET.

I have to admit that the very first time I saw these RIBs featured in an advertisement, they caught my eye. Somehow they just looked right, both in their basic form and the detail that could be ascertained from the pictures. With my interest duly aroused, I wanted to know more. However, it's been about a year I suppose, from that initial mental 'clocking', to their UK launch at RIBEX 2005, where I was able to put these Polish built RIBs through their paces. Was my positive anticipation rewarded, did the Arctic Blue live up to my expectations? Well, we'll see!

Background

Poland has earned itself a fine reputation when it comes to boat building; in fact, some of the world's leading brands outsource their product manufacturing to this country. Norwegian, Geir Arnestrad, is the man responsible for the entire concept and design of Arctic Blue - and an impressive CV he has too. Not only is Arnestrad a world-class race boat

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designer, but also a former world champion, little surprise therefore, that he chose to give the Arctic Blue a stepped hull design. Besides the Olsen family who own the company, another key figure in the Arctic Blue story is the British businessman, Geoffrey Whittaker. It was he who astutely recognised the Arctic Blue's suitability to our home waters and hence has taken up the sole distributorship of this brand throughout the British Isles. Nevertheless, as no doubt he knows, whilst the market continues to expand, it takes a particularly good product to make its mark and establish itself alongside the competition. So, what is this new RIB and what does it have to offer?

Overview and Fitout

The materials employed and overall fitout of these Arctic Blue RIBs are of very high quality indeed. Not only the GRP work, but also items such as the upholstery, locker fittings, laminates, stainless steel and teak decking are all of creditable quality and finish.

Close inspection reveals no evidence of savings trying to be made, or any lack of attention to detail, especially to areas that are hidden from normal view. One example of this was the interior of the helm console where the usual ugly array of wiring had been carefully concealed behind a removable fabric covered back panel. The interiors of such areas as the anchor locker and engine bay, for example, had likewise been the focus of similar attention.

It was obvious from the internal hardware in these RIBs, that Arnestrad has knowledge of other forms of craft, understood the importance of ergonomics, and was seeking to achieve something different to the mainstream. Among the many features that suggest this would be the case are the helm station and the main seating for cox and crew. The helm console is large by any standards and so provides good protection as well as storage, and plenty of space for navigational items. It is of crucial importance in all high performance craft that the helm position does justice to the craft; in the case of the Arctic Blue, it is very good indeed. The wheel and the throttle are close to hand, and nothing has to be stretched for; this allows the boat to be driven to the limit and controlled with fingertip accuracy, even in adverse conditions. Features such as the footplate that allows one to brace oneself appropriately and drive the boat hard, and the high screen that protects those behind it from the effects



of wind and spray, all contribute in their own way to making the driving experience a pleasure rather than a wrestle with the elements. I do have one criticism, however. It is the fact that the curvature of the screen occurs just at eye level when one is in the standing position and this makes forward vision unnecessarily difficult. A well-presented dash along with plenty of grab points, courtesy of the console's stainless steel finery, top off what is a well appointed and well thought out unit.

The main seating directly behind the helm console allows one to sit or stand. By simply moving a lever, the seat section either locks into place or swings down to provide what is effectively a very secure lumbar wraparound. Thanks to the snug and highly padded wraparound design, the seating makes the user feel very secure, whether seated or standing. In fact, this seating would be well suited to extended voyaging. Additional seating comes in the form of a small, cutaway bench seat to the front face of the engine box and an occasional seat to the front of the helm console. Both the helm console and the main seating unit allow access fore and aft along the deck. Speaking of the latter, the deck's scupper are small deck-drains. I'd like to see these being much larger.

Though equally suited to outboard power, the 8.5 metre supplied for test was fitted with a Mercruiser 320hp diesel engine. This proved a very sweet power pack indeed, but

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we'll come on to the performance side of things in a moment. But as regards the installation of the motor, it appeared well thought through and there were no signs of untidy wiring or hurried work. There is plenty of room within the engine housing, it appeared water-tight, and good design showed up in the method of air intake and the accessibility to serviceable parts. I really liked the engine housing's curvy lines; I thought them very reminiscent of modern superyacht styling and it is this detail that gives the Arctic Blue much of its character.

These boats do carry a fair amount of 316 grade steel, not only to the aft raked stern arch but also to the side rails that provide additional onboard security. These have no doubt been added to compensate for the fact that the deck is set high and therefore one tends to feel somewhat on the boat, as opposed to being in it. I'm not sure whether these rails really work, but I like the look of them nonetheless, and I appreciate the thinking behind the concept.

Storage both underdeck as well as within the consoles/main units themselves, is generous aboard the 8.50m test boat. This is very necessary, especially where the needs of the leisure market are concerned. Besides all this stowage, a large raised GRP dry storage unit can be added up in the bows if so required, although the test model did not feature this particular addition.

The CE rated deck drains do not channel any shipped water into the ▶



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bilges on this craft. The deck drains in fact ship all water directly overboard through drainage discharge pipes (fitted with control valves), located within the engine compartment and thereafter via drainage ports positioned port and starboard. Further to this, an electric, auto activated bilge pump fitted within the engine compartment, (coupled to an alarm operation indicator fitted to the vessel's steering console panel), allows the pumping of water from both the engine housing and if necessary, the remainder of the craft.

There is a further emergency standby manually operated bilge pump fitted within the engine compartment which discharges water in the same manner as the electric bilge pump.

Performance

Weighing in at just over two tonnes, these are hefty vessels. But thanks to the steps in their hulls, they not only lift onto the plane with minimum bow rise, but also run very level when over 'the hump'. Coupled to the Mercruiser 320 with its Bravo One, the Arctic 8.50m takes just under 9 seconds to get onto the plane from a standing start. Once up and away she literally eats up the ocean making little of the approaching seas and throwing any spray firmly away from her hull. The 8.50's surefootedness is nothing short of breathtaking. She simply refuses to loose even the slightest degree of slip through the hardest of turns and it quickly becomes apparent just how valuable the lumbar supports to the seats truly are. Such is her ability to keep herself 'planted' to the water's

surface, that it takes all ones strength to keep with the boat if not held firmly within the confines of a seat.

With its hydraulic steering, helping the Arctic Blue at speed is a true pleasure both in terms of her responsiveness and her ability as a deep-sea performance craft. With this moderate sized powerpack she would make an ideal cruising vessel, which when pushed, would deliver a turn of speed in excess of 55 knots. At all speeds however, her hull remains soft riding, efficient and highly stable. A highly experienced helmsman would quickly appreciate that he had a very interesting hull beneath his toes, and a novice driver likewise, would quickly begin to gain much confidence in the hull's impeccable manners and commendable degree of tolerance. All in all, she is a really great boat to helm.

Conclusion

The cost of the Arctic Blue is extraordinarily competitive, especially when one considers the list of extras that come as standard. As well as the price being keen, the quality of finish along with the vessel's overall styling is very high indeed. Furthermore, this is a craft that really 'works' and handles beautifully into the bargain. It certainly has the potential to be another fine ambassador for the RIB cause and of attracting new interest from other areas of the boating world to the joys of ribbing. For all these reasons, the Arctic Blue will be a very worthy and exciting new addition to the market.

HMS

ARCTIC BLUE 27

ARCTIC BLUE 27 PACKAGE

Inboard model RIB complete with engine/drives "turn key" petrol engines. MX 6, 2 MPI V8 320 HP Bravo One engine. **PACKAGE PRICE £45,375 inc VAT**

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Fuel tanks 2 x 150 litre
Bow sea water trim tank 1 x 60 litre
Tube/collars in hypalon (7 chambers) - colour options
Electric and manual bilge pump
Navigation, engine compartment, internal console and cockpit lights
Racing steering wheel and console control board
Racing type seats to helm
Self-drain cockpit
12v tube/collar pump
Automatic fire extinguisher (in engine chamber)
Auto/reset fuse switches
Ladder to the bathing platform
Bulwark rails to tubes/collars, cleats and water-ski hooks
3 x piece controls in stainless steel

Arctic Blue reserve the right to change/amend the price list & specification without prior notice.

TECHNICAL DATA

Length Overall: 8.65m	Number of Seats: 6/7
Beam Overall: 2.48m	Engine Size: 175-500hp
Fuel Tanks: 2 x 150 ltr	Max Speed: 35-75 knots
Trim Tank: 60 ltr	Weight (no engine): .. 1250kg

CLASSIFICATION

*Detail Information supplied by manufacturer/dealer

OFFSHORE	● RACING	●
LEISURE	● PATROL	●
COMMERCIAL	● EXPEDITIONARY	●
INSHORE	● CRUISING	●
DIVING	● MILITARY	●
RESCUE	● SPORTS	●
COASTAL	● ALL WEATHER	●