

F&B 1999 Project Logbook . .

Top Quality AVON 'Rover' R3.11 (SIB) Is Proving To Be Very Useful



Like a number of the smaller, less spectacular boats in the F&B project boat team, the Avon Rover R3.11 is one of the unsung, but nevertheless vital elements in the project boat lineup. In truth, it has been working hard now in such a wide variety of jobs that we have almost come to take it for granted.

The Avon Rovers are a middle of the road inflatable featuring Avon's unique inflatable deck - a lightweight yet rigid system where air is pumped into a cleverly designed lower chamber that stiffens the bottom of the floor and forms a Vee'd keel underneath the inflatable.

However, by most standards, in an era of high tech, rigid bottom inflatables with fibreglass or aluminium bottom panels, jet drive power systems, centre consoles, etc, the Rover R3.11 remains a very traditional, "roll up" inflatable. It is, by definition, a portable boat, and as such has all the

advantages and disadvantages of this type of craft.

For F&B, the Avon R3.11 has a number of roles to fulfil.

Firstly, it is one of several tenders we use on the big boats. For example, when we know that *Genesis* is going to be in a location which requires anchoring well away from shore, the Avon works as a tender in the classic sense; ferrying crew and camera equipment backwards and forwards from shore.

In its **second role**, it is also a camera platform for those situations where we need to get a photograph of the main boat "working" offshore either fishing or cruising along. People tend to forget you cannot just step outside the boat and take its photograph. You need another boat to do it, and that's where the Avon has been absolutely priceless on half a dozen occasions now, including several rather difficult offshore shoots in quite rough seas.

F&B's Project Boats Policy - F&B maintains a number of 'project boats' principally to ensure the editorial team is able to keep up with today's rapidly changing boating world.

It allows us to form *our own* conclusions, develop factual reference information for readers, and most importantly, get a "feel" for the product - something you cannot do from a press release, brochure or a 30 minute zoom 'around the bay' in perfect weather. Most boats are kept for about 6-12 months, depending on their complexity, effectiveness, usage, cost, and how much interesting editorial we can develop for F&B readers from the project. When we're finished, project boats are (then) usually sold to F&B readers.



Quite stable, very safe, tough and easily powered, the Avon R3.11 can be rolled up and stowed away in the boat without a trailer.

Avon Inflatable . . . (Cont. from page 49)

In its **third role**, the R3.11 acts as our junior or portable fishing boat and it has been surprisingly effective in this role – but on the other hand, it has also been into some pretty amazing places, too.

Apart from these jobs for F&B, the Avon has also seen duty as tender and spare fishing boat for the Olsen's 7.4 m KevlaCat on several expeditions out of the Township of 1770, and as this report is written, is working with Mr and Mrs Wicks from Dalby in Qld, as a tender for their new boat, our very own ex-Genesis!

Typically, it will come back in a couple of weeks time when the Wicks take delivery of their own special fishing dory they are building to work with Genesis.

Design: The Rover R3.11 is a very useful size. We chose it very carefully because we wanted an inflatable we could use with our stock 15hp outboard. When you study the inflatable literature, you quickly discover that you need at least a ten footer to do that. In this case, the Rover measures 3.11 metres overall (10'2"), with a weight of 30.9kg (67.8lb).

It is rated for up to four persons plus a child, or a total load of 530kg (1165 lbs).

It is beautifully built, with the tough, resilient UV rated fabric that carries a Ten-Year written fabric guarantee. You

can't ask for much for than that, can you?

It is a very practical grey colour, and has a number of interesting features including the rigid fibreglass seat, clever rowlock stowage, tough towing bridle patches, drain plug and a choice of three different floors.

Floor One is the inflatable "deck" that we have. When inflated, the air chamber becomes nearly as rigid as a traditional plywood deck, but deflates quickly, and simply rolls up and is stowed away in minutes in its own tough canvas valise.

Floor Two is a marine ply setup, fairly easily assembled for maximum rigidity underfoot, and performance with the boat under a load.

Floor Three is a slatted deck (strips of 75 mm wide GRP inserted into pre-tailored slots in the floor fabric) which provides a quick and easy alternative to the somewhat harder to stow plywood floor, with more rigidity than the air chamber floor - whilst retaining the very important ability to be quickly rolled up and stowed away.

We thought about the different floor options at great length before deciding that in our case at least, the whole point was that we could quickly and easily roll up the boat and stow it somewhere on the foredeck; along the side deck in a walkaround; on the roof of "Genesis": or somewhere in the back cockpit. Where it was stowed was not so important as how quickly we could inflate or deflate the boat as a going concern, and the inflatable's weight - that's what finally ruled out the clever slatted floor.

Getting Underway: Having said that, obviously we have spent no little time working out the best procedures to launch the Avon. As we suspected, the best way is to have the boat about 25-40 % inflated; it then becomes a cumbersome, but soft and squishy unit that is easily stowed and bent or shaped into funny deck positions.

When it is rock hard, it is like trying to stow a rigid dingy – far better to keep it soft and malleable, whereupon it can be bent around corners on the side deck of a walkaround for example, or stuffed under the coaming, or any one of a number of options then become viable.

When it is completely rolled up in its valise, it forms a fairly big and very solid "sausage" - about 1200 mm long by around 600 mm diameter – and this is surprisingly hard to stow in a trailer boat. You are basically committed (then) to keeping it in the cockpit.

Obviously in a bigger trailer boat that does not necessarily present a problem, but more importantly, you then have to unravel the whole thing every time you want to use it, or conversely, deflate it and roll it up again if it has to be stowed that way.

None of this is particularly difficult, I might add, but it is just all a bit of a pain in the wot not if you have to completely unravel and/or repack the Avon each time.

We found our partly inflated system worked a treat. Apart from being able to stow it in many more cunning spaces, it can also (then) be simply picked up and thrown overboard! Where upon the Avon sits happily

beside the boat even though it has only got 25-40% inflation (*who's counting?*) in the chambers.

Amazingly, if you can work it so there's about 40 or 50% inflation, it is then really easy to get down into the inflatable with the bellows, and pump it up hard in just a couple of minutes.

Now depending on the amount of room you have available in the boat, pumping up the inflatable is a chore obviously better handled in the 'big' boat, or on shore.

Once again we found that it is much easier starting from a 25 to 40 % inflated position. Even in a small boat, we have always found enough space to either pump it up on the foredeck; around the rear cockpit, or in the case of walkarounds, whilst the boat was lying on its edge along the side.

Car Travel: Of course, for many people, inflatables of this quality make an excellent fishing boat in their own right. They have a number of very significant advantages in this role too, not least of which is that they do not require a trailer; there is nothing to store at home or in an apartment that can't be thrown in the bottom of a cupboard or apartment garage – or for that matter, left in the back of the four wheel drive.

It is wrong to think of a boat of this calibre and build quality as just a sort of "tender you have to something much bigger". This is an extremely useful boat for two people or two people and a child.

It is also one of the safest boating systems money can buy – this is the

Car-boot boating is a real proposition with a quality inflatable boat like the Avon R3.11. It takes about 15-20 minutes to set up the whole rig, park the 4WD, and start the outboard.



lifeboat you hope you have next time you're on the *Titanic* and it is sinking! Inflatables of this quality are extremely safe, easily handled and effective fishing boats.

They lend themselves particularly well to electric outboard motors and stealth fishing, and in this case, easily cope with a person standing and casting all day long. They also troll quite well, and whilst I wouldn't particularly want to row one home into a 30 knot southerly, almost no-one uses the oars for other than last minute manoeuvring around a bigger boat, wharf or launch ramp.

Given the recent release of Honda's brilliant little 2hp 4 stroke outboard and the on-going success of the little 3.5-5 hp Mercury/Tohatsu outboards (with their in-built fuel tanks), these outboards, combined with this inflatable, create an extremely useful and effective fishing boat that is more than capable of tackling any dam, river or estuary you care to name.

Disadvantages: About the only serious disadvantage of an inflatable is

The Apelco portable, 'lantern' battery powered, 200 kHz depth sounder was ideal for the Avon in its fishing role.

the obvious one that it needs to be pumped up to use, and then deflated to stow away.

However, given that this is a problem inherent to the inflatable philosophy, it doesn't seem fair to describe it as a disadvantage so much as it is simply a generic problem.

The only other real disadvantage, I guess, concerns their performance when there is a fairly stiff wind and bay chop to be dealt with. They tend to be extremely wet, and again, there is not much you can do about it, especially if the boat is only capable of displacement speeds.

If you are using one of the little 2-5hp portables, the R3.11 will be struggling to get above six or seven knots. However, if you can manage a 9.9-15hp outboard, then the boat gets up on plane and positively flies. However, there is no gain saying it – in choppy water, all inflatables are wet, and I am afraid that is just par for the course. The Avon is no better or worse in this sense than any others, but at least it does include a sensible tonneau for the foredeck area to keep clothes and cameras nice and dry.

Conclusion: We have had the Avon in the field now for nearly 18 months and it has been a terrific worker during this time. As noted in the beginning, if anything, we just take it for granted now, knowing that it is tough, safe, dead simple to use, flies with a tiny outboard, and will hustle quite big weights of cameras, batteries, etc and two adults with the 15hp outboard on the transom.

In a few words – an excellent quality utility boat for a very wide variety of circumstances.

Cost? Our version - the lightest - carries a r/r of \$3,850. It costs \$3,750 with a plywood floor, and \$4,895 for the roll-away model. (Note - they have a couple of Rollaways on special at \$3,995 - a good deal - PW)

For more technical information or the name of your nearest stockist, please give Neil Solomons of Sydney Inflatables a call on (02) 9544 7899 or fax (02) 9544 7009 or e-mail avonboat@avon.com.au or see the website www.avon.com.au

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