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**MARITIMO X60 SHOWTIME PERTH AND SYDNEY HAMILTON ISLAND RACE WEEK
MEDITERRANEAN SKI MARATHON CORROSION - THE SILENT KILLER DESTINATION EDEN**

Off the Trailer

INTRIGUING AMPHIBIAN

You can't be camera-shy in the new Sealegs 8.5m Alloy Cabin - this versatile amphibious craft attracts attention wherever it's launched.



By Mark Rothfield



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With a paparazzi of council workers, tradies and retired gents clocking its every move on their smartphones, the Sealegs 8.5m Alloy Cabin waded into Aussie waters for the very first time and casually powered away from the ramp.

Yes, it was a quiet Tuesday news-day in Sydney's ritzy Rose Bay, yet for once the lycra-clad, latte-sipping brigade in the nearby café were largely overshadowed by this intriguing amphibian.

Lookin' good on land and sea, from the rear and the front – the new Sealegs amphibious craft is practical and alluring.



On engineering merit alone, the new Sealegs runabout is irresistible to the average red-blooded male with a modicum of mechanical curiosity. Aesthetically, it cuts a fine figure as well.

What's most interesting, perhaps, is that we haven't seen a Sealegs cabin boat before, save for its 7.7m Cabin RIB and the Stabicraft 2100ST in an Amphibious by Sealegs version. These are niche outliers, really, whereas the 8.5m Alloy Cabin takes the Kiwi company deep into the plate-alloy territory beloved of fishermen, divers and camping folk.

There's enormous competition in this size from a plethora of skilled builders, so any new plate model must quickly stand on its own two feet ... or three feet, in the Sealegs' case. And indeed the 8.5 should, judging from our two-hour test on a petulant Sydney Harbour.

Australian sales manager Michael Rigby reckons he's been champing at the bit to sell a genuine offshore boat. And once in the brine, the 8.5 is certainly a proper contender, completely uncompromised by the amphibious appendages.

Not all its buyers will be beachfront home owners, although it's certainly the jewel in the crown if you're fortunate to have one. Many will be content to simply drive on and off the trailer wearing their shoes and evading the boat-ramp blues. Brilliant, too, for inhabitants of tidal areas.

As testament to the finish and fitout, a fisho at Sydney International Boat Show asked if he

could buy one without wheels. That would be sacrilege, however, for the hull was designed from the keel upwards to incorporate legs.

COMING ON STRONG

The bow and stern are appropriately strengthened to bear the load and there's an underfloor grid structure to keep the 22ft (6.7m) hull taut and true amidships. For both the underbody and topsides, they've employed 5mm plate.

The cabin, attractively finished with flush-fitted glass panels and a slim roofline, rests seamlessly on an old-school sheer line that sweeps down from the bow then flattens for the cockpit run.

A plumb bow allows the front wheel to hinge well clear of the waterline and rest just shy of the lengthy bowsprit. From here, the hull has a good amount of both rocker and curve in the forward sections before flattening to a 16-degree vee aft. A pod extension supports the motor and hydraulic paraphernalia.

There's just one strake and a chunky chine to provide lift, grip and hydrodynamic stability, which is all refreshingly simple and sensible in a world riddled with marketing gimmicks and meaningless



It's strange and magical to roll up the beach high and dry

acronyms – especially since it works with ease and efficiency.

Mated to a Yamaha F250 V6 outboard, the 2.2-tonne hull blasts onto the plane in just a few seconds, without bow lift or hesitation, and can maintain a minimum plane at 10 knots (18.5km/h)

with a fuel burn of 18lt/h. Acceleration is sweet throughout the rev band, as expected from the maximum-rated powerplant.

At 4000rpm with moderate out-trim, the 8.5 pulls 25 knots (46.3km/h) and seems happy as a hog in mud, taking waves in its stride while drinking modestly from the 250lt underfloor fuel tank. Top speed during our test was 38 knots (70.4km/h) – impressive in the choppy conditions.

While Rigby got fully airborne on a ferry wake during the photoshoot, the rocker and roll in the forefoot cushioned the landing. At the same time, Zipwake tabs helped provide a surefooted ride in cross seas, dynamically keeping the hull on an even keel. They cost \$3490 – money well spent.

It's not the quietest ride, and there's pedestal or pod seating for only two of the six-passenger complement – unless you count the cabin's V-lounges. Otherwise, it was hard to fault on our test day – the wind protection afforded by the cabin makes life a breeze, so to speak, as does the fingertip-light SeaStar Power Assist hydraulic steering.

Speaking of which, Sealegs offers EPS (Enhanced Power Steering), whereby magnetic sensors keep the bow wheel centrally aligned



Bow and stern camera vision is relayed to the Simrad NSS12 screen monitoring wheel deployment.



when raised, rather than continually turning with the helm. When the landing gear is lowered, wheel-steering locks in automatically.

READY FOR LANDING

Approaching shore, you summon a four-stroke 35hp Briggs & Stratton engine that resides in a transom hatch and powers the hydraulic pumps, sipping from the same fuel tank as the outboard. As a 50 per cent upgrade in standard horsepower, it gives the Sealegs 8.5 a 7.5km/h land speed and operating range of 3.5km, on a maximum incline of 14 degrees.

Legally, the Sealegs is a boat up until the high-water mark, although in Queensland they can apparently have a limited road registration akin to a farm tractor.

The bow wheel lowers first under the watchful eye of a camera projecting to the Simrad NSS12 chartplotter, plus there's an audible beep to confirm the ram is fully engaged. Next the two 26in aft wheels lower to provide a paddlewheel effect and drive when they finally touch bottom. The throttle is adjacent to the driver's hip, some 400mm behind the outboard throttle.

Hydraulic motors propel the all-wheel-drive system, with a diff lock being optional (\$4040) for soft sand or slippery mud. Braking is automatic but can be activated with an emergency stop button on the console.

It's strange and magical to roll up the beach high and dry, again to an appreciative audience of camera-wielding onlookers. Once ashore, the skipper lowers the wheels and can heroically transition through the open transom to a two-step ladder and then the beach.

To get forward while aboard, the 8.5 has nominal walkaround sidedecks with 3M anti-slip tread or, better still, access through a deck hatch.

VALUE ADDED

Layout-wise, owners can spec the hull virtually any way they want. Offshore fishing is the obvious market, and for that you can have a livebait tank, bait station, underfloor kill bin, outriggers and gunwale padding, along with cockpit shelves, rocket launchers on the cabin top and aft station, and a concealed Savwinch drum winch.


A plumbed marine toilet is a \$1990 option for the cabin, residing beneath the centre squab.

Lighting comprises a bow-mounted LED headlight for land use, LED nav lights and white/blue interior lights.

Maximum beam is just 2.3m, well within towing limits, which somewhat limits cockpit space relative to its opposition.

From a durability perspective, hydraulics are used in all kinds of equipment, in all kinds of environments, including power trim on outboards. The seals that keep oil in also keep water out.

An unexpected bonus comes when hosing down the hull – you can get underneath without worrying about trailer rollers and can lower the stern to drain the cockpit.

As tested, splendidly rendered in 'majestic blue' topsides and 'arctic grey', the Sealegs 8.5 Alloy Cabin retails for just under \$290,000 sans trailer. Not cheap, but good value for the right buyer. The leg componentry represents perhaps a third of that cost, and you can be assured of strong resale value because of the specialty value. The Sealegs 8.5 stands head and shoulders above conventional plate boats on land and easily holds its own on the ocean. 

SEALEGS 8.5M ALLOY CABIN	
Length:	8.45m overall
Hull length (without wheels):	6.7m
Beam:	2.3m
Deadrise:	16 degrees
Weight:	2230kg (dry)
Passengers:	6
Fuel capacity:	250lt
Power:	250hp Yamaha outboard; 35hp Briggs & Stratton inboard
Price (as tested):	\$289,600 (+ trailer)
More information: Sealegs Australia, phone: 1300 SEA LEGS (732 5347). Web: sealegs.com.	