

Party Boat

The Sealegs 7.5m Hydrasol is a brand new hull fitting between its two very successful predecessors. It has been designed to address a substantial hole in the New Zealand RIB market, and Richard Milner reckons it's a very nice package.

TEXT BY RICHARD MILNER



SEALEGS 7.5M HYDRASOL

Being able to drop the boat on its side makes getting on and off very simple.

I have experienced the Sealegs as a cameraman at several high-performance regattas where they indeed come into their own.

The single riskiest part of an on water cameraman's job is the transition of equipment from the beach in the waves and wind soaking wet to the boat to spend countless hours shivering from the most always damp experience and the Sealegs has always made this a dry and enjoyable experience. However, I have always thought that for casual weekend boating they were more a status toy than a genuine contender for the average kiwi family, who just uses a trailer at a boat ramp. How wrong I was.

Our test started at the sunny and envious spot of Takapuna boat ramp. Little did I know due to the trailer length of a 7.5m boat Takapuna wasn't ideal to launch this boat, so the team from Sealegs had put her in the water at Browns Bay and skedaddled around to Takapuna. I arrived to find all eyes focused in one direction. A beautifully finished social orientated party boat with all the trimmings sitting on her hull bathing in the January sunlight. I have to admit my first impression was wow.

We quickly loaded the equipment I needed, which with the drone and camera bag does take up quite a bit of space, and usually, it's a nail-biting experience on a RIB as I'm always cautious of getting the gear wet. Not today though as this boat has two huge bins under the rear social seats and everything was quickly stowed away to remain dry throughout.

Impressive Layout

We quickly and effortlessly got on the water. The day was pristine, and I had the usual slight feeling of guilt where it would have been nice to test this machine on a typical Auckland fresh sou'wester, wind against tide day.

Once we were on the water, it struck me how amazing the layout is. It's a wide boat at 2.71m, which allows you to move around the console with ease. So many boats you have to walk on the tubes, bum shuffle around or walk on a tightrope to move from the helm forward. This is a welcome change from classic RIB boating and is a true testament to how the team took a fresh look at what they wanted. Not just the usual refinements on top of the last design like so many other manufacturers, but a clean, new and exciting design.

The basic layout is typical of large RIBs. Forward there is an anchor locker, with plenty of room for a manual anchor and large warp. It is not possible to have a through hull system as that's where the wheel is. The centre console has a 2x1 layout at the helm and a two-person cushion on the front of the console with storage underneath. Moving aft, we are treated to something truly special. An oversize T top covers the helm and the social area to keep kiwis safe from the harmful UV.

There's also a well appointed sink with 20l of freshwater, fridge, rubbish bin and drawers stocked with glassware, utensils and everything you need to have an enjoyable day on the water. The fridge will



even hold a wine bottle standing and the drawers I'm sure will house a nice bottle of rum or gin if that's your fancy. Aft there are two large bin seats with backrests which allows four people to enjoy a comfortable afternoon tucked away in the bay of your choice. I really can see myself in Garden Cove having popped over to the winery for some Pinot Noir and cheeses having a good company relaxing afternoon. Hang on a minute I'm on a RIB... This isn't a Gin Palace... but is it.

It is about now I'm starting to see what Sealegs have tried to achieve and to be fair they have done very well. Gone are the days of a quick ham and cheese sandwich or the good old One Square Meal. We have now got the ability with these new lifestyle's of Keto, Vegan and seafood and eat it where you can prepare your meals, enjoy good company and soak up the views on a RIB.

By day the social area has all the sunshade you need, and into the evening and night, there are mood lights, LED deck lights and of course the all-important underwater swim lights. It's genuinely a superyacht slimmed down into a practical boat. When you run out of supplies there is no need to get the chinos wet, you simply put the wheels down, drive up the beach, wander into town, restock and repeat. Exceptional.

Foolproof

Down to business. The helm is well appointed, and straight away I'm struck by the lack of levers. Sealegs

of yesterday had a complex array of levers and having watched volunteers master them slowly was always something of a putoff. As was the aesthetics of something closer to a bobcat. Not anymore. A simple custom designed push button panel runs all the hydraulics. With a brief instruction from Sealegs, I was underway in and out of the water. Simple to use, foolproof to operate. Fantastic.

The helm seats move up and down and have shock absorbing technology in them. The helm houses an MFD, Fusion stereo, VHF and all the much needed toys. Interestingly the large engine box that was on Sealegs of yesterday has gone and is now housed in the centre console. The Hydrasol option with a Briggs and Stratton 35hp petrol engine is comfortably housed and breathes through Hydrophobic material on the sides of the console and exhaust through a hull fitting, so there are no nasty fumes. In a stroke of brilliance, both the wheels and the outboard use the same fuel source, so no mistakes at the end of the day running out of gas before you come out of the water. There is an electric Electrosol option as well which is powered by a 7kwh battery and a 1.5hr runtime which should be enough for a weekends use.

On the water I was surprised at the getup and go she had. At 1900kgs, the 7.5m Hydrasol RIB is not the lightest on the market, and I was curious to see how it handled. We had three POB and a fair amount of gear, so the boat was typically loaded. In my typical all or nothing fashion, once clear of the ramp and 5 knot zone it was time to stretch her legs. Throttles up,

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SEALEGS 7.5M HYDRASOL



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its holeshot was a little over 7 seconds with the Yamaha 200hp. Once we were on the plane trimmed 3/4 down at 4000 rpm we had a very comfortable 22 knots. The engine was ticking over nicely, the boat felt rigid, and the ride was to die for. A short hop into the Gulf we found some wake from fishing vessels and a container ship and true to form the Sealegs did not disappoint. It effortlessly cut through the container ship wake offering a dry and safe entry and exit from the waves. There was no banging typical of alloy RIBs, but the weight and excellent sound deadening with the beautiful U Deck Floor added to the experience. Into the turns, she performed with grace and was as agile as can be expected from a 7.5m boat. The helm station is not hugely tall, offering excellent all-round visibility for the skipper. At WOT the boat produced 37 knots at 80l/hr.

A Great Experience

Into the beach, we effortlessly put the wheels down, came up the sand and lowered the boat onto its side. This brings me to another great point. When diving, offloading the catch or for the smaller or less able boaties being able to drop down onto one side reducing the height to climb in is very special indeed. A real consideration for many of us from a practical purpose to the ahh ageing boaties. On the water, a side mounted and fitted boarding ladder is an option and if at the beach you can climb aboard in the raised position by climbing on the wheel and the using the step built into the transom.

Time for a coffee I thought. Again an experience that you wouldn't normally consider. Many hours spent on RIBs would normally have me reaching for the thermos as having to anchor and wade into the beach for a good coffee would typically be in the too-hard basket. Not with a Sealegs though.

Back at the ramp driving the boat on the trailer is a simple and effortless affair and without the queue for the ramp a much nicer experience. I was out on my boat a week or so later at Gulf Harbour sitting in a queue for over an hour pondering how amazing it would be to have just launched at Stanmore Bay and driven a Sealegs onto the trailer and have been warming the BBQ up by the time we even reached the sea wall. Never mind the 2km walk to the car to fetch the trailer.

Overall I was very humbled to have experienced the Sealegs 7.5m Hydrasol. It has responded well to the needs and wants of the modern Kiwi boatie. It has creature comforts with great social areas. It responds to American and European designs with nicely appointed seating, cold storage, equipment storage, sunshades, sprung seating while underway and lighting for extended hours of boating. For a RIB it's a stroke of excellence. The centre mounted engine for the wheels is also smartly designed to assist with the boats centre of gravity, Nicely appointed floors and finishing makes this a genuine contender for the family day boat community. Unfortunately, there is no loo, but with the wheels one is never far away.

In my true fashion, I did note there was not a rod holder to be found. Sealegs assures me they can be fitted and a bait board is an option as well. For the social version, I could easily see some canvas covers made for the plush seating for the boys fishing excursions. A commercial option with seating for up to 8 and an all-rounder version that removes the entertainment suite and replaces with a rear facing two person bench seat are also available. I know which version I would pick hands down – the Social Version. 🍷

SPECIFICATIONS

Boat Design Name:	Sealegs 7.5m Hydrasol
Year Launched:	2020
Builder:	Sealegs
Designer:	Sealegs
LOA	7.94m (Wheels Up) 6.97m (Wheels Down)
Beam:	2.71m
Construction:	5mm alloy hull/Hypalon
Height on Wheels:	2.70m
Deadrise:	21 deg
Displ (Dry):	1700-1965kg
Max Speed:	37 knots
Max Speed (Land):	7.5 km/h
Fuel Cap:	180 litres
Water Cap:	25 litres
Engine:	Yamaha 200
Deck Tread:	U-Deck
Ent System:	Fusion
Price of Boat:	\$NZ199,000 +gst
Contact:	www.sealegs.com

FUEL & PERFORMANCE DATA

Fuel capacity: 180 litres

RPM	Knots	L/h	L/NM	Range(NM)
1000	3.5	1.7	0.490	330
1500	5.2	3.1	0.600	270
2000	6.4	5.5	0.860	180
2500	7.7	13.8	1.800	90
3000	10.2	18.8	1.900	85
3500	14.8	23	1.600	100
4000	22.1	31	1.500	100
4500	26.4	39	1.500	100
5000	30.5	50	1.700	95
5500	34.0	66	2.000	81
5800	37.0	80	2.200	73

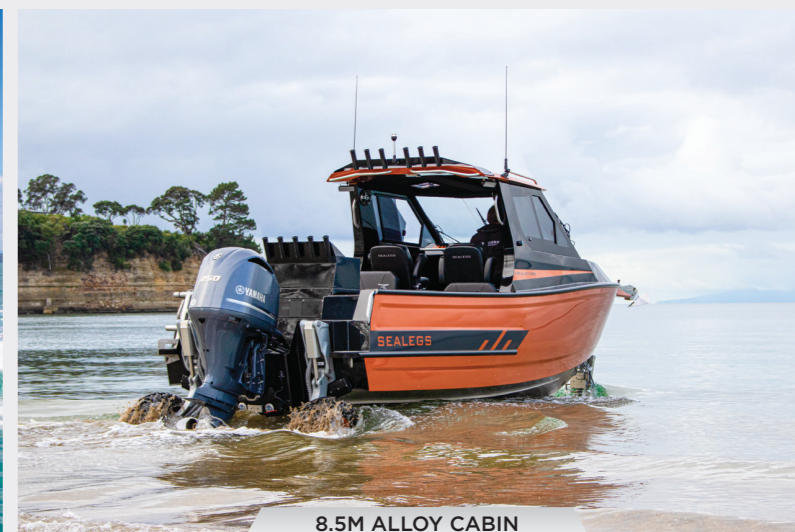
Range is calculated on 90% of the fuel capacity.



7.5M HYDRASOL RIB



6.1M SPORT RIB



8.5M ALLOY CABIN

15+ Years | 1000+ craft | 50+ countries

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6.1M RIB 7.1M RIB 7.5M HYDRASOL RIB 7.5M ELECTROSOL RIB 7.7M DTUBE 8.5M CABIN 9M RIB

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