

# STINGER 800 GT

**Alex Smith** heads for the expanding MRL fleet to test the latest and reputedly greatest incarnation of the Stinger 800 GT . . .



I have enjoyed some very cheerful times with MRL at Drivers Wharf in Southampton - partly because the famously engaging boss, Ed Pedley, has achieved almost celebrity status in the marine world and partly because his fleet of boats is always very quick to develop and adapt to new trends. Today, not only are MRL the sole importers of high-performance Predator and Stinger RIBs, but they also offer the altogether hardier looking Redbay Stormforce RIBs and Sea Champion fishing boats. And yet, if I were to pick any craft from the company's burgeoning fleet for a dedicated test, the 800GT, an uncommonly pretty RIB with a Verado 300 on the transom, would still be very high on the list.

**“ THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST COMFORTABLE, COMPOSED AND REASSURING RIBS I HAVE EVER DRIVEN ”**





On a good day, expect this space to be littered with sun worshippers

⚡ IT IS DIVIDED QUITE CLEANLY INTO TWO HALVES - A BACK END BUILT FOR DRIVING PLEASURE AND A FRONT END RIGGED FOR LOUNGING IN THE SUN ⚡



## A TALE OF TWO HALVES

When you step on board the 800 GT, you quickly realise that this is not your everyday boat. Rather than soft optioning its way into yet another hackneyed regurgitation of the accepted RIB formula, the design team has conjured up a very distinctive layout and it is divided quite cleanly into two halves - a back end built for driving pleasure and a front end rigged for lounging in the sun.

## THE DRIVER

Forward of the three-man aft bench (which is framed between the thick stanchions of the radar arch and equipped with strong stainless grab handles), things are beautifully arranged for the keen driver. Here, instead of allowing the demands of deck space and seating to bully the console off to the side, where it really doesn't belong, the helm is slap bang in the middle of the deck. Better still, it is equipped not with the commonplace two-man jockey units you might expect but with a couple of splendidly engineered shock mitigation seats from KPM Marine.

We first saw these things at the 2010 Sports Boat and

RIB Show and stylish though they are, their purpose is to make you more secure and comfortable so you can get on with the all-important job of driving. You can pick just about any form of helm seating you like (including an electric drop-down bolster) but if you can afford it, these shock-mitigation seats will add a fresh dimension of pleasure to a day on the water. You just plant your feet against the angled footbrace, jam yourself back and relax into the experience, as the seat's lateral 'wings' hold you in place and every impact is pleasantly nullified. As a proper driver's environment, the helm station on the 800GT is very hard to beat.

## THE LOUNGER

As for the front end, the layout is equally committed to purpose - and the purpose is plainly sunbathing. You get the same vast bow expanse that we have previously seen on the ten-metre Stingher - and again, you get a two-tiered plateau of Flexi-teek decking, allied to huge storage spaces and a set of cushions to turn the entire front end into a lounging area. At a stroke, this eliminates two of the

## WHO IS STINGHER?

*With ten years experience on the race circuit, the owner and designer of Stingher RIBs, Guiseppe Risolo, operates four factories, producing more than 400 hulls per year. Based in Milan in Northern Italy, the current fleet comprises seven boats of between six and ten metres in length and the test boat, the 800 GT, is bang in the middle of the Stingher fleet, with three boats above and three below. Stingher RIBs have now become fairly prolific throughout Europe, with 52 dealers in the UK, Italy, Belgium, France, Spain, Holland and Greece.*





Stainless steel fittings work well with the Flexiteek

## POLISH AND IMPERFECTION

It is immediately evident that the bulk of this boat is beautifully finished. The Flexiteek trim is just right - classy, practical and very cleanly shaped and laid. The stainless steel catches and hinges are also lovely and could be transferred directly onto a bespoke superyacht without the slightest difficulty. Hard though I look, I cannot find any evidence of the use (or more accurately, the lazy misuse) of self-tapping screws - and that's perhaps only the fourth time I have been able to say that in the last decade of testing boats.

There is impressive attention to detail in the features list too. You get LED strip lights in the storage spaces so you can actually see what you're looking for and you even get a solar panel on top of the radar arch to help keep your batteries topped up. The fabric on the aft bench and the 'suicide seat' is also lovely and the cables, pipes and wires are all neatly trunked, routed and secured.

Even so, despite the general excellence of fit and finish, there are a couple of thematic inconsistencies that don't quite make sense to me. For instance, while the general theme on board the 800 is given an exalted air by the proliferation of teak linings and uncompromising stainless steel rims, rails, catches and hinges, the pale white plastic handle below the suicide seat is a strange, isolated and unwelcome departure. And as for the folding plastic cup holders on either side of the aft bench, they also scream out in radical contrast to the beautifully sculpted stainless steel examples on top of the carbon fibre dash.

But the biggest idiosyncrasy for me is inside the impressively deep and bright heads compartment. Here, you find a fabric partition providing easy access to a very neatly arranged array of fuses, wiring and electronic equipment in the back of the dash - and that's a great idea, but it's really not that well executed. The fabric is attached to Velcro strips, which are rather shabbily stapled to bare vertical soft wood sections. Now of course, these are not fundamental issues, but they do take that nth degree of shine off an otherwise excellent fit-out.

most common RIB difficulties - that of inboard space and dry storage. And not only does it work well but it also looks great.

The downside of this design is the fact that there is no place where the seats face one another, and that means that, as a social gathering point (particularly if you want to eat on board), its versatility is limited. As if in recognition of this truth, there is no table fitting on the test boat, either for the common dining space in front of the aft bench or for the area behind the forward sun deck. In short then, if you prioritise the pleasure of the driving experience and the ease of lounging afloat in the sun, the Stinger 800 is a heavenly creation. If you don't, there are better options around.



Sitting atop the radar arch, the solar panel is a practical addition



The 'wings' of the seat will keep you comfortably in place





STINGHER 800 GT

WHY YOU WOULD

- Incredible boat to drive
- Enormous storage capacity
- Top helm seats
- Generous features list
- Competitive price

WHY YOU WOULDN'T

- Poor finish in heads compartment
- No communal dining area

PERFORMANCE

RPM	Speed (knots)
1,000	3.9
1,500	6.0
2,000	8.1
2,500	11.5
3,000	18.0
3,500	24.2
4,000	27.5
4,500	31.0
5,000	36.0
5,500	38.6
6,000	43.5
6,300	44.5

SPECIFICATIONS

Length overall	8.0 metres
Length internal	7.4 metres
Beam	3.0 metres
Weight	1,230 kg
Max power	431 hp
Fuel capacity	400 litres
People capacity	12
CE Category	B
Engine	Mercury Verado 300
Price as tested	£72,000 (inc VAT)

NOTABLE EQUIPMENT

- Mercury Smart Craft electronic gauges
- Electronic steering and throttle
- Garmin 750S touchscreen GPS/sounder
- Garmin 100i VHF/DSC radio
- Pair of Scot Seat shock-mitigation jockey seats
- 400-litre stainless steel fuel tank
- 80-litre fresh water tank with electric shower
- LED deck, engine bay and locker lights
- Carbon fibre dashboard and wheel
- Twin battery installation
- Flexiteek decking

CONTACT

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THE DRIVING MACHINE

Get this boat underway and any minor imperfections are wholeheartedly forgiven, because in terms of its on water performance, this really is the finished article. For a start, the helm station is fantastic. The throttle and the carbon fibre wheel are both beautifully set up - accurate and well positioned with lightness to the touch and controllability at all times.

Reassured by the robust cuddle of the shock-absorbing seat, you put the power down and that lovely surge is instant and unremitting. There is urgency at every point in the rev range, right through to a top end of about 45 knots - and while speeds like this on an eight-metre hull with a 300hp outboard might seem a little on the modest side, I can promise you that 45 knots is plenty for most leisure users - especially with the exquisite handling this boat delivers. Push her through a fast turn and a very solid heel enables you to find that grip and power through. On the straight, trimming out and shifting the waterline back as you up the pace, the same is true. The hull lifts high from the water's surface and the cleanliness of those hull mouldings sees the water being shed with great efficiency. If you want proof, just keep the engine revs below 4,500rpm and check out your range. With a cruising speed of between 18 and 30 knots, you can expect to achieve between 220 and 270 nautical miles, and that's with a ten per cent safety margin still sitting in the 400-litre tank.

This is a great driver's boat so you will want to explore the top end, and here, virtually flying with the engine revolutions at 6,300, the boat exhibits another trait common to Stingher RIBs - that of graduated obedience. If you want to settle the hull back down you can do so with the greatest ease, not by coming off the gas but by easing back the trim. Come in a notch and the hull grips a little more. Do it again and the reassuring contact between hull and water's surface is further increased. All of which makes this one of the most comfortable, composed and reassuring RIBs I have ever driven.

VERDICT

This is a competitive sector of the RIB market. There are plenty of very capable, leisure-savvy craft of a similar length and price from the likes of Cobra, Ribquest, Humber and Capelli. And there are also some more expensive luxury craft from the likes of Hunton, Revenger and Scorpion. But this is not only the best Stingher RIB I have ever driven, it's also one of the most relevant. At eight metres in length with a 45-knot top end, beautiful handling and the looks, finish and features list to tempt a buyer with fairly exalted expectations, it treads the line between sporting performance and user-friendly leisure with great aplomb. It's a quick, comfy, dry boat with lots of poke, a fine helm, a generous useable range and great controllability and composure. Of course, its layout means it won't be for everyone but if you're after a high-class, Mediterranean-style driver's RIB on a mid-range budget, the 800GT is a genuine delight. ■