



# Predator 599

Smaller can sometimes mean better, and some weeks ago we put this well-known belief to the test in the form of Italboat's attractive and capable Predator 599.

During the RIB show, RIBEX, in Cowes recently, I had the good fortune to have a quick spin in a friend's new Redbay 11m wheelhouse RIB, sporting the new external flybridge helm situated in a commanding position high on the cabin's aft section. With the exceptionally experienced RIB handler and Redbay boss Tom McLaughlin helming, we wended our way through the minefield of craft entering and leaving the Medina river on a typically busy Solent summer weekend; to my surprise Tom unexpectedly exclaimed how concerned he felt having all these craft around him. "You need eyes in the back of your head," he pronounced. Having cut my teeth on boats in the Solent area, I never gave a second thought to the congestion, which to me was quite normal but to Tom, who is based in the remote Northern Ireland town of Cushendall, this was mayhem; he

probably thinks the same about the M25 compared with the relatively deserted roads of his home town, and who can blame him! The point is, life would have been a lot easier for Tom in a small, manoeuvrable RIB instead of the large, expensive RIB he was piloting. With craft of all types and sizes heading in different directions, being helmed by people of unknown ability whilst trying to keep out of the way of the daunting Red Funnel car and fast Red Jet ferries, Tom was not only concerned for the customer's new boat but also for his passengers' safety. An 11m RIB is a big bit of kit, and without doubt a small 5-6m RIB, with its ability to turn, accelerate and stop quickly, would have been easier and less stressful to handle in the congested waters. This point leads us conveniently to the craft that we tested a few weeks ago, the Predator 599. Another craft from the large Italian boat manufacturer Italboats, who also produce the Stingher range of RIBs, the Predator 599 is marketed and distributed in the UK by MRL, based in Southampton. This particular craft was laid out in their standard leisure/sports configuration and was fitted with the latest Honda 90 VTEC 4-stroke outboard motor.

Once again, the Solent was our testing ground, and on this particular day the weather was horrible, with strong winds predicted for the morning and gales and rain forecast for the afternoon. If we had only the one craft to test then we could have done this in the morning, but we had three RIBs to evaluate which meant having to carry on later into the day, and to compound matters further the craft developed an electrical problem in the way of a loose battery terminal. This simple gremlin meant that, although the engine was able to carry on running, it was not charging, and after about an hour's use, the power trim starting misbehaving, and when the engine was stopped to investigate, the battery had discharged to the point where it could not restart the motor. Luckily we were in the company of other craft and the RIB was towed back to base, but if this had happened alone in a vulnerable situation, things could have been more serious. With no warning lights or other telltale signs that anything was awry, this simple loose connection could have caused some serious issues; so be sure your terminals are tight.

An hour after tightening the terminals, there was sufficient battery power to restart, allowing us to test the Predator, and we were immediately impressed by her good manners



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## PREDATOR 599

### TECHNICAL DATA METRIC

Length overall:	5.99m
Width:	2.63m
Weight:	460kg
Persons capacity:	10
Max HP:	166hp
Recommended engine:	90/115hp
Deadrise 'V' @ transom:	23 degrees
Tube diameter:	60cm tapered to 50cm
Number of chambers:	5
Max. load capacity:	900kg
Tube material:	Hypalon
CE category:	C
Warranty:	3 year hull, 5 year tubes

### STANDARD EQUIPMENT

- 150-litre stainless-steel fuel tank
- Hydraulic steering, bilge pump, electric switch panel
- Stainless-steel 'A' frame with ski eye
- Deck cushions
- Navigation lights
- Stainless-steel helm-seat grab rail

### EXTRAS ON CRAFT TESTED

- Honda 90 VTEC engine
- Lowrance GPS/Fish
- Icom VHF/DSC radio
- Radio/CD player
- Flexiteak decking
- LED deck lights

### PRICES (INC VAT)

From: £22,500 with Suzuki 90hp  
 Craft tested: £24,850

### PERFORMANCE FIGURES

Performance figures in MPH (knots in brackets).  
 No fuel-consumption figures available on test day.

MPH	Seconds
0 to 20 (17.40)	8.00
0 to 30 (26.10)	10.50
0 to 40 (34.78)	22.30

Top speed: 41mph (35.65)

### MANUFACTURER

**MRL (UK distributor)**  
 Southampton Dry Stack, Drivers Wharf, 146 Millbank St,  
 Southampton, SO145NQ  
 Tel: 023 8033 5333  
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in the now rapidly deteriorating conditions. With the wind howling and the sea beginning to boil, we pushed the 599 as hard as we could to get the test over and done with before the weather really turned nasty, yet despite the conditions she remained composed and relatively dry throughout. Unlike some continental RIBs, where the seating is biased towards the stern, there was no tendency for this craft to squat, either at displacement speed or planing, and she ran level even when heading into quite steep waves, with no tendency to fly her bows. In a following sea she ran true, displaying no tendency to stuff, and although the ride was firmish over the bigger waves it was never harsh, the craft feeling very robust and rattle-free. The Honda 90 VTEC was particularly refined and provided sufficient power to push the RIB to 35 knots, and in these fuel-cost conscious times this very economical motor would be a good choice if a 30-knot cruising speed is sufficient for your needs.

The interior is of the classic continental layout configuration, with everything very well finished, and presented in a simple, practical fashion. There is a stand-alone steering console, just big enough for two to stand behind, windscreen with stainless-steel surround and forward ‘suicide’ seat with storage beneath. Forward there is a stepped anchor/storage locker arrangement with a generous amount of space for all one’s paraphernalia in the spacious under-deck

locker, and right up on the bow a moulded GRP platform that carries a bow roller and cleat for mooring/anchoring purposes. Behind the steering console is a leaning post for the driver and navigator to brace themselves against, and attached to the back of the leaning post a very sensible wide and well-positioned stainless-steel grab rail for passengers positioned aft. Across the stern is a full-width, deep and well-padded comfortable three-person bench seat with dry storage beneath, and behind that a moulded splashwell.

Above the rear seat is an attractive angled double ‘A’ frame with navigation lights and, as we have come to expect with craft supplied by MRL, attractive Flexiteak decks and locker covers to add an air of luxury to the vessel.

To sum up, small can be beautiful, and in the case of the Predator 599, it is small enough to be towed by a medium-sized family car, yet big and seaworthy enough to be taken out in less than ideal sea conditions without frightening the family. The craft is eminently practical as a family sports RIB, with attractive lines, an apparently strong and rigid construction, allied to secure handling and plenty of space for a family of five or six with all their kit. It would seem that Italboats have once again hit the right combination, and MRL should enjoy the fruits of their endeavours.

**Paul Lemmer**