

Blue Water SAILING

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new & noteworthy

Walker Bay

The folks at **Walker Bay** have revitalized the hard dinghy scene with their line of injection-molded plastic sailing dinghies that are attractive, sturdy and very affordable.

We recently had the opportunity to sail the latest addition to the Walker Bay fleet, the Rigid Inflatable Dinghy. The Walker Bay RID comes in either a nine- or a ten-foot version, and the distinguishing feature is an inflatable tube that slides into a track just under the gunwale. Unlike the tubes on a RIB, which provide flotation under all load conditions, most of the time the RID sits in the water using only the lapstrake hull for flotation.

Unlike a RIB, this is a tender that is a nice row-boat, but the real difference happens when you set up the sailing rig. Most sailors have noticed that the fun quotient of a sailboat can seem to be inversely proportional to the boat's size: small boat, big fun.

The Walker Bay RID combines most of the best features of a hard dinghy and an inflatable. When carrying just a few people, the tubes are out of the water and the resistance to rowing or sailing is only that of a smooth, plastic hull.

Load the boat with provisions or perhaps a kedge anchor and 300 feet of chain and it will sink down to the tubes, and then the heavy lifting really begins. It will carry loads much like an inflatable will, but, unlike an inflatable, the anchor will not rub against and possibly damage the inflatable tubes. The RID's tubes aren't as large as those on a RIB, so the ultimate carrying capacity is probably less, but in the nine-foot model there was room for three people, and

much more usable space in the interior, in both beam and length, than a RIB. A few numbers should convince you: the Walker Bay RID 9's interior beam is 49 inches and the RID 10's is 53 inches. What size RIB has that much beam? The average nine-foot RIB has 28 to 32 inches of interior beam, and there are no RIBs less than 17 feet long with four feet of interior beam.

We have used a Walker Bay 8 for years, and found it so sturdy that long ago we ceased to include it in any maintenance schedule. It just works, perfectly, all the time. It doesn't break, leak, rust, corrode or need painting. If the rest of the world worked as simply and flawlessly as the Walker Bay dinghies, we could spend all our time sailing.

The new RID combines the advantages of an inflatable with the rowing and sailing qualities of the Walker Bay dinghy to make a dinghy that is like Baby Bear's porridge: just right.

We tested the Walker RID 9, an 89-pound boat measuring nine feet LOA with an outside beam of five feet, eight inches. The Bermudan cat rig of 39 square feet, sleeved onto the two-part, 14-foot, five-inch mast, has a large window and a ratcheting block for the main sheet.

It's the right dinghy to row out to your big boat, and you could hardly think of a safer boat for the kids to sail. The tube makes it nearly impossible to capsize, and a flotation bag installs under the center thwart.

It would not be fair to call it a performance sailboat, but a larger centerboard would do much to improve its pointing ability. The tiller, attached to a folding rudder, deserves special mention for ingenuity. It's a telescoping tube, and when it is at full extension, a flexible joint,



made of a cylinder of a translucent plastic, allows the handle to flex with no metal hinges to corrode.

The RID 9 is a rugged, simple, well-designed dinghy that just about does it all: it sails and rows well, and you can put a four-horsepower outboard on it to ferry loads out to the boat, and it is kind to your boat's topsides with its inflated tube. The four-chamber tube is rugged, made of 1100 Dectex and the seams are made of four layers of fabric.

The boat abounds with

clever ideas: a small wheel set in the keel to roll the boat down a launching ramp; stainless steel lifting eyes and large handles on the tubes. We would have liked a handle on the bow as well, but the nice thing about inflatables is that this is an addition that is easily done by an owner.

Walker Bay's latest, the RID 9, gets the *BWS* seal of approval. It does everything it's supposed to and does it well. Contact them at 888-449-2553 and tell them you saw it in *Blue Water Sailing*.

