

POWER CRUISING

THE MAGAZINE FOR ALL WHO CRUISE UNDER POWER

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Q: WHAT DO YOU GET WHEN YOU CROSS A HARD DINGHY WITH AN INFLATABLE? A: A WALKER BAY 'RID'

My wife and I often leave the outboard in the cockpit of our cruiser and row our well-traveled 10-ft. Avon to shore, especially if we're not anchored too far out. We like the quietness and the idea of getting some exercise. Since most inflatables perform poorly with oars and are rowed only as a last resort, we sometimes wonder what it would be like to have a hard dinghy again. Thoughts of our old Dyer 9 bring back fond memories, and we are always attracted to hard dinghies with sweet-looking, sweeping sheer lines.

Having sold about 50,000 of its injection-molded, lapstrake tenders throughout the world, Walker Bay now offers a hybrid version of its 8- and 10-foot models. Each of the new boats features an inflatable collar that fits firmly

Walker Bay 310 RID

Tubes: 18" Hypalon or PVC
Warranty: Five years (limited).
Price without motor: Hypalon \$2,600; PVC \$2,200; Sailing Kit \$1,000
Contact: Walker Bay USA
888-449-253
www.walkerbay.com

in a track along the gunwale, providing added buoyancy and stability. When attached, the collar significantly increases the carrying capacity and horsepower rating for the hard dinghy.

It seemed like an intriguing idea worth investigation. As an added bonus, sailing kits are offered for both models, which made the concept even more appealing. We chose to test the 310 RID, which measures 10' 2" overall

in length and weighs 150 lbs; we used our 5-hp two-stroke, as the RID was rated for 6 hp.

To begin with, we found ourselves the recipients of many questions and stares from fellow cruisers who were curious about the boat. Comments ranged from the skeptical to the admiring: "What's that strange looking thing behind your boat?" Or, "That's one of the cutest, most friendly-looking little boats I've seen."

Because this package starts out as a hard-shell dinghy, it has a lot of interior room compared to most inflatables, which give up interior space to their large-diameter tubes. At its widest, interior beam is 53" (most 10-ft. inflatables measure about 30"), and its maximum interior length is 108" (about a foot longer than the typical 10-ft. inflatable).

The concept behind Walker Bay's hybrid design is that



its tubes come in contact with the water only when needed. I could stand on the gunwale amidships, and although the boat started listing, it stopped once the tube became engaged. My family of three and our large dog had room enough to sit comfortably while one of us rowed or used our outboard. (The boat's rated carrying capacity is four persons.) In a refreshing change of pace, you sit *in* this boat, not *on* it.

We especially liked the way the Walker Bay rowed, and we found ourselves leaving our outboard off even when we were a half a mile or more from shore. The 7-ft. wooden oars with their plastic, hydrocurved blades are beautifully made and very functional. We must have created quite a stir during a particularly windy day because two different cruisers ran their large inflatables to the beach to ask if we were in need of a tow back to our boat. While the seas were choppy and the wind was on our nose for almost a mile, we did just fine, and I probably burned off a couple of hundred calories.

While this boat is not designed to plane, our 5-hp Merc got us around quite satisfactorily. When running alone, I sat on the midship seat to balance the tender fore and aft, and I used a 30" long piece of PVC pipe as a tiller/throttle extension.

But the most fun came when we set up the sailing rig, which takes less than 10 minutes. Expecting the usual flimsy



GEORGE SASS, SR.

pieces and inexpensive hardware that are typical of many sailing kits, we were impressed with the quality of this gear. The aluminum daggerboard and rudder are veritable works of art, fitting perfectly and solidly in place. Sail shape can be fine-tuned with a clever vang system and outhaul, and the mainsheet is led to a block mounted on the midship seat. Instead of being an afterthought, this sailing rig was well thought out and well executed.

My wife and I sat comfortably on the floor behind the midship seat while she handled the tiller and I worked the mainsheet. We had a ball, and we especially liked the RID's feeling of security and stability compared to our squirrely Sunfish.

Using one of these boats would be a great way to teach kids to sail, and since many power cruisers have made the transition from sail, it could bring back good memories.

This is a practical, virtually indestructible boat that can be used in a variety of ways. It features a number of thoughtful details like a wheel built into the keel, cup holders in the aft seat and a level, non-skid cockpit floor that keeps your feet dry and enables sure footing. There's even a rowing footrest that's adjustable to one's leg length.

While hard-core inflatable proponents may consider the Walker Bay to be more of a novelty than a serious tender, we found it to be more than competent. It was simply a lot of fun.