

'We hadn't appreciated just how much more fun messing about in boats can be when you don't have to worry about collisions'



INCREDIBLE INFLATABLES

BORED OF YOUR RUN-OF-THE-MILL, INFLATABLE DINGHY? **JAKE FRITH** LOOKS AT SOME MORE EXCITING WAYS OF GETTING TO AND FROM THE SHORE

During a long cruise, especially with young family aboard, it can be a challenge keeping everyone occupied in an anchorage once the excitement of the day's passage has drawn to a close.

A standard inflatable is only so much fun for exploring upstream under oars and it's frankly sociopathic to blast up and down under outboard, or worse, let children do so once the sun has approached the yardarm. So with fingers crossed for an Indian summer, we decided to take a closer look at some inflatable vessels that you could hide down the quarter berth of the average family cruiser.

To what extent are these tenders though? Well, looking at the diverse collection of boats and boards we assembled on the beach at Netley, it's clear that comparing their use purely as tenders would be a distinctly one-sided battle. That's because the DinghyGo is the only one specifically designed as a tender, with oars, and outboard friendly transom.

I've often wondered though, whether inflatable tenders as we know them are the right choice for everyone. Inflatable kayaks have been around for years now and some are pretty efficient and fun to paddle. They are finding increasing use as yacht tenders nearly everywhere except the UK. I've also idly pondered whether an inflatable stand-up paddleboard could be pressed into occasional one-man tender duties, albeit on flat water and with limited carrying capacity, using a drybag for cargo.

We kept in the back of our minds those with larger boats who might have space for a traditional tender for more workaday functions, plus one of these fun craft. That's our excuse for testing the planing Tiwal, and we're sticking to it!

The real test here is not which of these craft makes the best tender, but which of them would hold our interest for the longest. Which could offer the most fun, but also deliver on it for a reasonable period of time? Read on for the results...

Coming in such a variety of shapes and sizes, the latest crop of inflatable craft tick a lot of boxes, but could any of them work as a tender?

TIWAL 3.2

£4,990

French company Tiwal, which, like DinghyGo, is currently seeking UK dealers, has employed dropstitch inflatable technology to create this impressively rigid 3.2m planing dinghy. There are two choices of size for the custom-made North sail: a 5.4m² for strong winds or lighter crew and a 7m² for heavier crew or lighter winds.

We rigged it with the bigger sail, which was straightforward, but due to the complexity of the boat, it took the longest to rig. An optional rechargeable electric pump (£270 extra) made short work of the inflation stage, but we found the manual pump option wasn't too much of a bind. We felt that not many people would be keen enough to rig and derig it daily on passage, but if you were to be moored up somewhere breezy for a few days, the Tiwal would come into its own left rigged or partially rigged.

The boat is technologically impressive, getting its rigidity from an elegant aluminium framework forming the mast support, hiking wings, and providing rigid mounting points for rudder and daggerboard. It struck me that Tiwal could exploit this framework for a broader range of products in the future – perhaps high performance hulls, or even a sandyacht or ice yacht.

In terms of excitement generated on the day, the Tiwal led the field, with all testers universal in their desire to take the helm. And it didn't disappoint: the Tiwal was a stiff, fun little craft to sail, with



Above: There were claims the Tiwal planed, but it wasn't caught on camera
Below: Assembly was complex and rigidity excellent

pinpoint reactions. Lighter sailors made it up onto the plane for brief periods in the slightest gusts and in a touch more wind it would have been a complete hoot.

Some testers found that the format of the Tiwal as a board that the sailor sits on made for the minor annoyance of lines, principally the end of the mainsheet, slipping off the deck. We were all fans of its soft deck though, which made moving around very comfortable.

It's also a great boat for righting after a capsize, its smooth, low stern making slithering back on a doddie. We found the boom-less sail gathered a little at the clew sheeting point due to a slightly ill conceived and over-complex mainsheet system, but the overall shape was acceptable. The sail would also have benefitted from a couple of camber inducers on this light day, as

getting much draft into it was a struggle. In common with the DinghyGo it suffered slightly from a sticky daggerboard slot.



VERDICT: ★★★★★

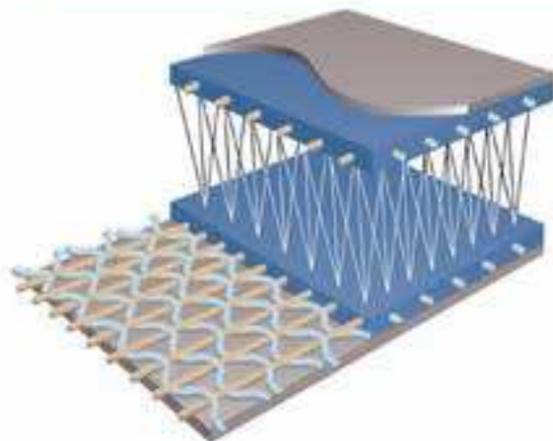
The Tiwal is startlingly stiff and exciting for an inflatable. Our testers were unanimous on how much fun it was. Not just fun to jump on and have a go, but maintaining long term interest as we honed our techniques.

While it would keep a teenage boy (or a grown up who should know better) occupied for a whole summer, it's less of a family-friendly all-rounder than some others here. And at up to £5,000, it is not a cheap option, either.

► www.tiwal.com

SAILLING TODAY

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WHAT IS DROPSTITCH?

First gaining favour for floors of conventional inflatables, dropstitch is a construction technique where an upper and lower layer of an inflated chamber are held together at a set distance by strong fibres all at slightly different angles. This means that a board-type shape can be created and pumped up to a high pressure. As the pressure increases the fibres stop the board from growing into a cylinder; instead it just gets stiffer and stiffer. In this test, only the Sevylor kayak and Dinghygo did not employ dropstitch technology.