

'EAST KIMBERLEY'

Kirby Marine Sea Rescue Air Rider

By MIKE BROWN



Kirby Marine has been building "Air Riders" from the drawing board of Gavin Mair's Global Marine Design for 15 years.

Not large numbers of them because they are complex and time-consuming vessels to build, with corresponding premium price tags. For some tasks, though, they are the logical, or even the only vessels for the job.

Nominally cathedral or tri-hulls, "Air Riders" actually deliver on all the promises the type has made, where most have disappointed their owners to a greater or lesser extent. Instead of power hunger, "Air Riders" have shown great efficiency, and their quality of ride in heavy seas is excellent. These properties are combined with extreme toughness, and with the roominess given by their near rectangular plan form.

Western Australia's volunteer sea rescue groups are almost standardising on RIBs (also built by Kirby Marine), but when the East Kimberley Volunteer Marine Rescue Service was re-equipping they called for the "Air Rider's" special qualities. Based at Wyndham on Cambridge Gulf, the group operates over long distances in often poorly charted waters with tremendous tidal ranges and streams. The chances of accidental

groundings are high, making inflatable tubes less attractive, and the large populations of crocodiles probably psychologically disposes people to all-metal hulls.

The new vessel was designed to be the smallest that could fulfil all the East Kimberley group's requirements. Early design studies were based on an existing 7.3 metre model, but Gavin Mair increased the length to 7.9 metres to get the LCG in the right place and to give enough planing surface to cope with the loaded displacement of three tonnes.

Good communications are vital on this vessel's missions, and the overhead console houses an HF, a 27MHz, and three VHF radios, including one capable of communicating with aircraft. Navigation electronics include Raymarine plotter, sounder and radar operating through the Navnet system, with multi-screen capability.

The navigator's double seat has a reversible back allowing monitoring of towing operations. In the normal position it faces a small chart table, with a tube let into its side for chart storage.

The large cockpit has a central island box seat that, besides the seating and storage roles, can be used as an extra bed. On extended rescues, swags in the cockpit are likely to be the accommodation favoured over the cabin. Living arrangements generally are basic and favour the open air. There is an after deck shower, and rudimentary cooking can be carried out, but everything not directly related to the sea rescue task takes up minimum space and displacement.

Power is provided by a pair of 149kW Honda four-stroke outboards, the customer's choice. On early trials before final propeller selection they delivered 41 knots, illustrating the ability of ram air in

the tunnels to lift the hull and reduce wetted surface. The trials weather was also rugged enough for the hull to demonstrate its soft riding capabilities. This was no surprise to anyone as "Air Riders" have long been chosen for just that reason, but it was reassuring for the owners as crew comfort on long missions was a priority.

The Hondas can expect to be used for long tows. A tow post is located ahead of the transom, alongside the racks for two jerry cans. Range and fuel consumption will be constantly on the crew's mind, and more jerry cans can be stowed in the island box seat to supplement the 550 litre main tank.

This Kirby Marine product marks a huge step up and forwards for sea rescue in the Kimberley.

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'East Kimberley' SPECIFICATIONS

Type of vessel: Sea rescue vessel

Home port: Wyndham, Western Australia

Builder: Kirby Marine Fabrication, Western Australia

Designer: Global Marine Design

Owner: East Kimberley Volunteer Sea Rescue Service

Length: 7.90 metres

Beam: 2.70 metres

Hull draught: 0.47 metres

Displacement: 3 tonnes (loaded)

Construction material: Aluminium

Main engines: 2 x Honda four-stroke outboards, each 149kW

Radar: Raymarine

Sounder: Raymarine

Plotter: Raymarine

Radios: HF, 3 x VHF, 27 mHz

Fuel capacity: 550 litres

Fresh water: 50 litres

