

Practical motorboating

Powerboating has rarely been more affordable or more popular. Jake Kavanagh has some top tips for beginners and old hands



Honda Marine

The coronavirus pandemic has focussed attention on the joys of motorboating, and the freedom it offers for family 'bubbles'. And there is huge downward pressure on boat prices – fully specified packages in particular – meaning some options are cheaper and therefore more popular than they have ever been.

But there are so many sailing areas – coastal and inland – and so many types of boat on offer from trailable RIBs and hard-shells to inland models, it can be hard to choose, especially for the first-time buyer. So what is behind all this buzz and what should potential buyers look out for?

"Boat sales are off the charts," says Kip Wasilewski of the US marine electronics specialist Carling Technologies. "In the States, going out on a boat is seen as the acceptable way to escape lockdown while still keeping everyone safe."

In the UK, Honda Marine's European sales manager Andy Partington agrees. He has also seen an explosion in new boat sales from the Mediterranean to the Baltic as the mass market for overseas holidays by air has all but evaporated.

"The sale of small motorboats is booming," he says. "This has been largely driven by the 'staycation' with people having time on their hands, but with a need to stay isolated."

As with a similar trend in camper vans, the boom in boat sales reflects the fact that a boat is a self-contained unit. It can carry a small kitchen (galley) and a toilet (heads) so you don't need to use any public facilities and risk contamination. With the right equipment and some benign weather, you can even go boating right through the winter.

Which boat is best?

Unlike a modern motor vehicle, which is mass-produced from components made specially for each model, a boat is a sum of parts sourced from several competing manufacturers. This isn't a problem in itself but could be confusing to a newcomer who is spoilt for choice and may involve a baffling list of optional extras: 'Do I fit a Yamaha, a Honda, an Evinrude, a Suzuki...and how will I know if it's the right engine for my boat?'

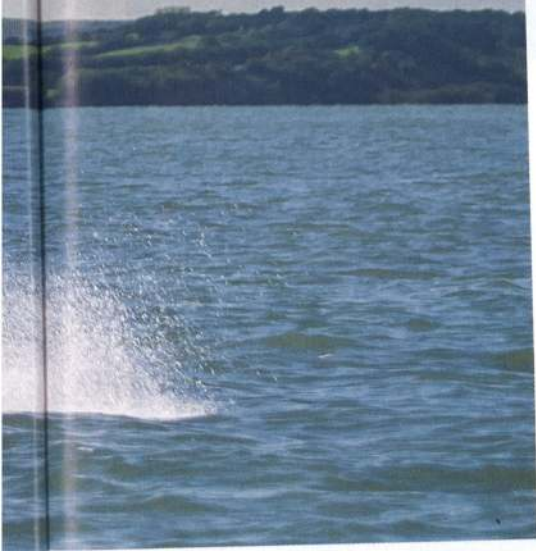
To avoid a mismatch, boatbuilders and engine manufacturers have tended to

partner up to offer a range of engine options they both know is a good fit. One example is Honda's alliance with specific models of Italian hard-shell manufacturer Ranieri, EU/Chinese RIB builder Highfield and Dutch inland specialists Maxima. This gives customers a selection of boats intended for use with Honda engines and



By working with engine manufacturers the boatbuilder can design the boat around the needs of various engine options. This is the installation of an 8hp Honda on the smallest Maxima boat. Note the correct allowance for steering ram travel, plenty of slack in the service lines for full lock, the accessible fuel primer bulb and the waterproof boot at the cable entry point into the hull.

Honda has recently launched a 'boat building alliance' to ensure that its range of engines is perfectly matched to dedicated brands of boat, but with the emphasis on an affordable, sail-away packages. This is the 4XC 19CC from Ranieri powered by a Honda 100hp outboard.



Low running costs

Modern marine engines have been refined to the point where they are exceptionally quiet, dependable and frugal with fuel. Fuel prices have also tumbled and are expected to remain relatively low for some time. As trailable motorboats are invariably equipped with petrol-powered outboards, owners can refuel at competitive supermarket prices.

The periods between routine engine services are also much longer, helped by the fact that the average leisure outboard clocks little more than 50 hours in a typical season.



Outboard engines continue to get lighter, quieter and more economical. This latest Suzuki 6hp 4-stroke has rubber mounts on the fuel tank, an easy-to-see oil inspection window, a removable strainer in the fuel filler and larger carrying handles. Much of the metal ducting has been replaced with composite to save weight.

How much fuel?

As a boat is enjoyed at its destination far longer than the time taken to get it there, UK motorboats clock a relatively low number of engine hours per season. Even so, engine manufacturers find it

hard to give exact consumption figures as there are so many boat/engine combinations. Fuel usage can certainly also be reduced with good trim, minimal top hamper and a clean hull.



Modern petrol outboards are more economical than ever and can be refuelled from any garage or via jerrycan for competitive forecourt prices



Our most frugal boat on our test was powered by a Honda 8hp, and sipped fuel at about 1.5lit/hour at gentle river speeds



We also took a spin in the Highfield Patrol 860 which, with twin 250hp V6 Hondas, was still surprisingly frugal for its performance. At 28 knots she burns a total of 1.8lit/mile, and the 500lit fuel tank gives a range of about 350 miles

guarantees a close technical relationship resulting in boats that are perfectly configured for the power they are packing.

"These new ranges are designed to make buying and using a family boat easier and more rewarding," says Steve Morris, head of power products at Honda UK. "This is achieved by providing all the necessary features as part of the standard package and by simplifying the options list. We're trying to provide our dealers with a very straightforward boat in a particular configuration that keeps things simple both in terms of construction and engine rigging."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



As a freelance technical editor, Jake Kavanagh has visited many international manufacturers to see motorboats and engines being built. He has marvelled at the latest

technical innovations, especially in hybrid power, and reckons motorboats allow yachtsmen to continue to escape onto the water when flogging sails and canted decks simply become too much effort.

Honda Marine

TESTED: COASTAL BOATS

We tried out the most affordable models from each of the three Honda 'Alliance' ranges (turn over the page to see the Maxima inland motorboat). In each case Honda technicians had been to each boatbuilder's facility to find the best way to match up the engine mounts, fuel tanks, wiring looms and steering cables. We also looked for any neat design touches that would work on similar types of boat.

HIGHFIELD CLUB 46 TEST

This 4.6m RIB has PVC tubes attached to a commercial grade and eco-friendly aluminium hull and was aimed squarely at the sailing club support boat sector. However, packing a 50hp outboard (it can take a maximum of 80hp) it also proved a great deal of fun for zipping around the coast. The jockey seat has room for two adults and our test boat was also fitted with a substantial tow hitch, apparently robust enough to pull upright a capsized 32ft racing catamaran. The metal deck makes it easy to attach extras such as large eyelets or cleats.

As Honda's Steve Morris explained, these are tough little boats. "Whether



ABOVE Highfield Club 46 with 50hp Honda outboard
LEFT Substantial stem post for mooring and towing

they're being rammed up beaches on the Swedish archipelago, cruised among the rocky outcrops of the

Italian Riviera or taken out around the coast of Britain, these boats will take a tremendous amount of pounding without the slightest complaint."



Honda Marine

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	4.6m	15ft 1in
Beam	2.1m	6ft 11in
Weight (boat only)	298kg	657lb
Deadrise	20°	
Tube diameter	0.47m	1ft 6in
Power	BF40 or BF50	
Fuel capacity	40lt	10.5gal
People capacity	9	
Load capacity	944kg	2,080lb
Price inc VAT	from £14,909 with BF40LRTZ	



Honda Marine

RANIERI 4XC 19CC TEST

Built in Italy, there are six boats in the 4XC range from 5.8m to 7.3m. The smallest boat on our test day was the Ranieri 19CC, powered by a 100hp Honda. Based on the Voyager 19S, one of Ranieri's best sellers, this proved a very capable motorboat. The new CC (centre console) features a wrap-around aft bench with a step-through transom and deep-set walkways on both sides of the helm, making it a safe boat for families with young children. The boat

also has an infill for the sunlounger, a reversible helm seat and plenty of accessible deck space. You can also run it up a beach and disembark over the bow – a very Mediterranean feature.

"Ranieri boats are very practical and easy to maintain," says Ian Redding of Devon-based dealers Reddish Marine. "You can use them for sunbathing, beaching, waterskiing, snorkelling, fishing, even diving. For the family boater who wants a bit of everything, they really do tick every box."

Ranieri 4XC 19CC powered by a 100hp Honda BF100 outboard

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	5.55m	18ft 1in
Beam	2.18m	7ft 2in
Weight (boat only)	520kg	1,146lb
Power	BF40 - BF100	
Fuel capacity	90lt	24gal
People capacity	7	
Price inc VAT	from £28,979 with BF100LRTU	

From sail to power via RIB

Regular PBO contributor Gilbert Park describes his journey from sail to power via a series of adventures on a RIB



For my 60th birthday we decided to go to Padstow in our campervan and tow our beloved Drascombe Lugger *Mitch* behind it. We

hadn't used *Mitch* much of late but booked a pontoon mooring for the week we were there. As I look back now at the picture of that mooring I can see the writing was on the harbour wall. In front of us were two RIBs and they looked so easy to use and moor. Mooring up was one of the stresses we found with *Mitch*. Damage to the fragile, green gelcoat was always a risk and, when it happened, it cast a cloud over the day.

We'd enjoyed sailing for many years, but while running before the wind is relaxing there is always the trip back, for which we usually started up the outboard. Then there is the time taken to get the boat on and off the trailer and set up all the rigging.

A few months later we were in southern Ireland, again in our campervan, but this time with our 3.5m Tinker inflatable and 2hp 2-stroke outboard. We could walk along the bay at the campsite at Eagle Point and easily see the town of Bantry, with a well marked channel leading up to it, about three miles away. An expedition was called for! We loaded up the Tinker with all we needed, donned our lifejackets and off we went in the sunshine. We enjoyed lunch, a pint of real, heady Guinness, explored the town and then back in the boat to the



van. Five minutes after arrival we had a cup of tea and some of my mother-in-law's cake in our hands, the boat and engine had already been washed and we were planning what to do for the rest of the day.

We were both hooked on RIBs.

Where to next? We agreed to try out RIBs seriously with a two day RYA Level II Powerboat Course at Anglia Sea Ventures in Ipswich. We learned in a 5.2m Ribcraft with a 60hp engine. We liked the boat and decided we'd look for the slightly smaller 4.8m Ribcraft. We saw *Cobalt* for sale driving home that evening and she was ours very soon after. *Mitch*, much as we loved her, had to go and was sold back to the brokerage.

We visited all over Chichester Harbour and had the use of a garage that the boat just fitted into. Our confidence grew with trips to the Isle of Wight for lunch becoming common. We even spent Christmas there.

I had always wanted to sail to the Isles of Scilly from Penzance, so it was a Day Skipper Course for me at Emsworth School of Navigation. Hard work, but worth all the time and every penny. A conversation with the

We used *Cobalt* to explore a lot of places that we wouldn't have been happy doing in a larger boat. Here she is ready to dry out in Wareham



Mitch, our Drascombe Lugger on the pontoon in Padstow. The RIB moored in front was a portend for the future for us



Another Birthday, this time in St Peter Port, Guernsey. I'd spent the day changing fuel filters using my present – a set of spanners! We dressed our Seaward 25 Sea Otter overall for the occasion and cracked a bottle of the fizzy stuff

insurer set the limits at Force 5 winds and 2m high waves – more than we would wish to be out in. We decided to do the RYA Intermediate Powerboat Course together in our boat. I also did the Advanced Course.


The Scilly Isles trip was a roaring success – the outward bound leg was a bit rougher than we'd have liked, but the return leg was flat calm and we only used 25lt of fuel!

After that we explored the Dorset Coast going all the way along to Lyme Regis. But I think the writing on the wall for this boat came in Weymouth. It was a long walk, uphill, to our B&B, carrying a load of gear and then another long walk to get petrol.

We needed a boat we could stay on.

In addition, my back had started playing me up. An X-Ray showed a compression fracture of my thoracic spine possibly as a result of flying the boat off a few waves on the way to the Isles of Scilly. With some regret, as we'd had a lot of adventures and never felt unsafe, *Cobalt* was sold.

The next boat was a Seaward 25, and apart from my wife's hatred of the diesel cooker, we coped just fine in it for several years. We went all over, Dorset, Devon as well as a month on her exploring the Channel Islands and the Cotentin Peninsula.

So after that it was onto bigger motor boats: we now have a Merry Fisher 855 in the UK. Looking to the future we loved sailing but motorboats are more sustainable for us as we age. 

TESTED: INLAND WATERWAY BOATS



ABOVE Sociable and comfortable seating
LEFT Maxima 490 with 8hp Honda outboard was fun even on a rainy day

MAXIMA 490 TEST

Built in the Netherlands, the Maxima 490 is described as 'A modern entry-level model, but certainly not in terms of execution.' Our test boat was equipped with an 8hp outboard, which was ample for cruising quietly along the non-tidal Thames whilst sipping fuel. However, the underwater profile of this beamy little dayboat means you can fit a 40hp version and even

indulge in some wakeboarding and waterskiing. The fitout was basic but comfortable, and the canvas hood proved useful on an unseasonably dreary day in June. A nice touch was the classic rope fendering around the gunwale, ideal for locks. The emphasis has been on the seating arrangements, with a very social U-seat forward, and you could probably camp in her overnight with a little ingenuity. Available with a long list of optional extras.

SPECIFICATIONS

Length	4.90m	16ft 1in
Beam	1.90m	6ft 3in
Draught	0.40m	1ft 4in
Weight	375kg	826lb
Number of persons	5/6	
Clearance height	1.02m	3ft 4in
Maximum power	40hp outboard engine	
Price inc VAT		£ 11,244

An outboard doesn't actually need to be 'outboard'

A neat design aspect of the larger Maxima range we tested is the way the outboard is hidden away beneath a cowling, or 'bun.' On the Maxima 630, this allows the entire stern area to be utilised, including the provision of a sunlounger with steps down to a bathing platform. Any cowling needs proper ventilation or there is a tendency for the engine to draw in its own exhaust instead of clean air.



Maxima 630 has its Honda outboard hidden inboard

Switching from sail to inland

Regular PBO contributor David Berry describes his pandemic switch from sail to power



One of the ramifications of the pandemic is our inability to use our Moody Eclipse 33 *Aderyn Glas* in Greece. This is exacerbated by the short term visa rules

from the EU which limit us to 90 days in any 180 – the same as non-Europeans such as South Africans, Australians and so on. So what could we do to keep the webbing between our toes through the summer months?

We considered buying a coastal cruising yacht for UK waters but, frankly, we'd done all that and the Bristol Channel is not such a good place to sail. So, what's left? We'd taken a canal boat on the Llangollen canal for a week in the summer and loved it! So we began to look around for one that suited us. We wanted a GRP boat, not a narrow boat, since it would be easier to maintain. We toured the local canal (Monmouthshire and Brecon) looking into all the clubs and marinas and scoured the internet brokers. Then, we visited Goytre Wharf to view a boat we'd found online and asked the guy who was showing us around whether there was anything else that he knew of and the universe was good to us.

We were shown a Dawncraft 27, which has a centre cockpit and an outboard motor. Now normally I wouldn't want an outboard, since, to me, controlling a boat with an outboard is like trying to control a wonky shopping trolley with



A hire boat holiday on Llangollen Canal was a hit for David Berry and his wife, Ann, who were unable to travel to Greece where their Moody Eclipse *Aderyn Glas* is kept

David Berry

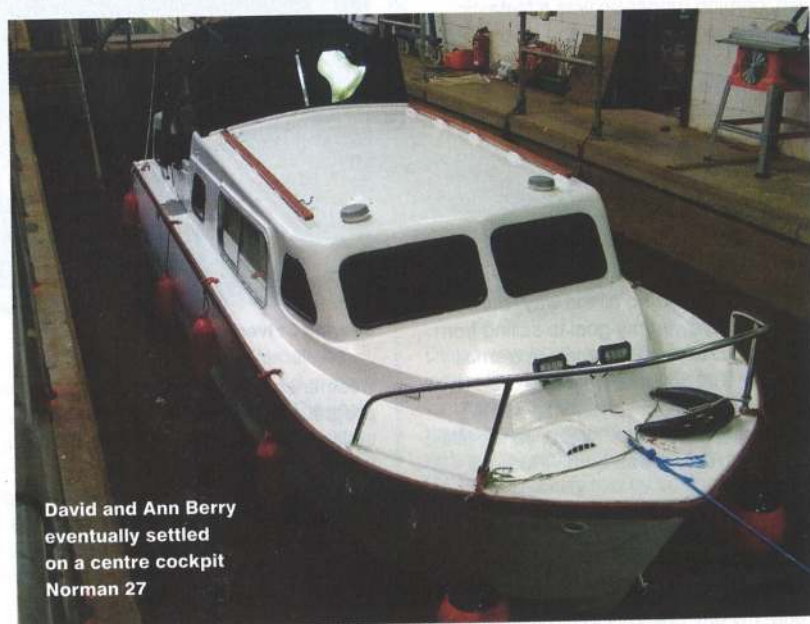
one finger. But I'm always willing to learn. She was pretty and the previous owner had obviously loved her and yet there were enough things for me to change to get me out of bed in the long, cold COVID winter. For a start I couldn't stand upright in the saloon because there was a very sleek ceiling of tongue and groove pine. For another there was no heads compartment; so ripping the T+G down and constructing a toilet went onto the jobs list.

There was so much I didn't know about the boat, right down to things like where the starter battery lived and, oh by the

way, is there a house battery and how is it charged? There is a rear cabin which we wanted to make the Master's so that had to be reconfigured so that we could sleep across the boat rather than in the two berths along it. And hopefully that would allow us to construct a chemical toilet compartment in the corner of the cabin. I started a logbook and made a list. Then we photographed everything and held our breath until the survey was completed. We paid the boatyard to service the motor in the belief that it would provide a baseline which would see us through the first year. So gear oil, engine oil, filters, spark plug and impeller were all changed as was the anode.

Meanwhile I checked the shore-power fittings and determined to tidy up the wiring at some early opportunity (working so long for the Navy I'm a bit fussy). Ann considered a fridge and we decided we could live without one and I considered a significant solar panel and house battery. I also wanted a battery charger which would run from shorepower. Ann looked at curtains and the cockpit cover and the jobs list grew again.

Then the survey found 'major structural issues with the hull' so we decided it would be sensible to pull out of that deal despite the money already spent. Instead we carried on searching elsewhere and have now bought a centre cockpit Norman 27 that the surveyor was much happier with.



David and Ann Berry eventually settled on a centre cockpit Norman 27

David Berry