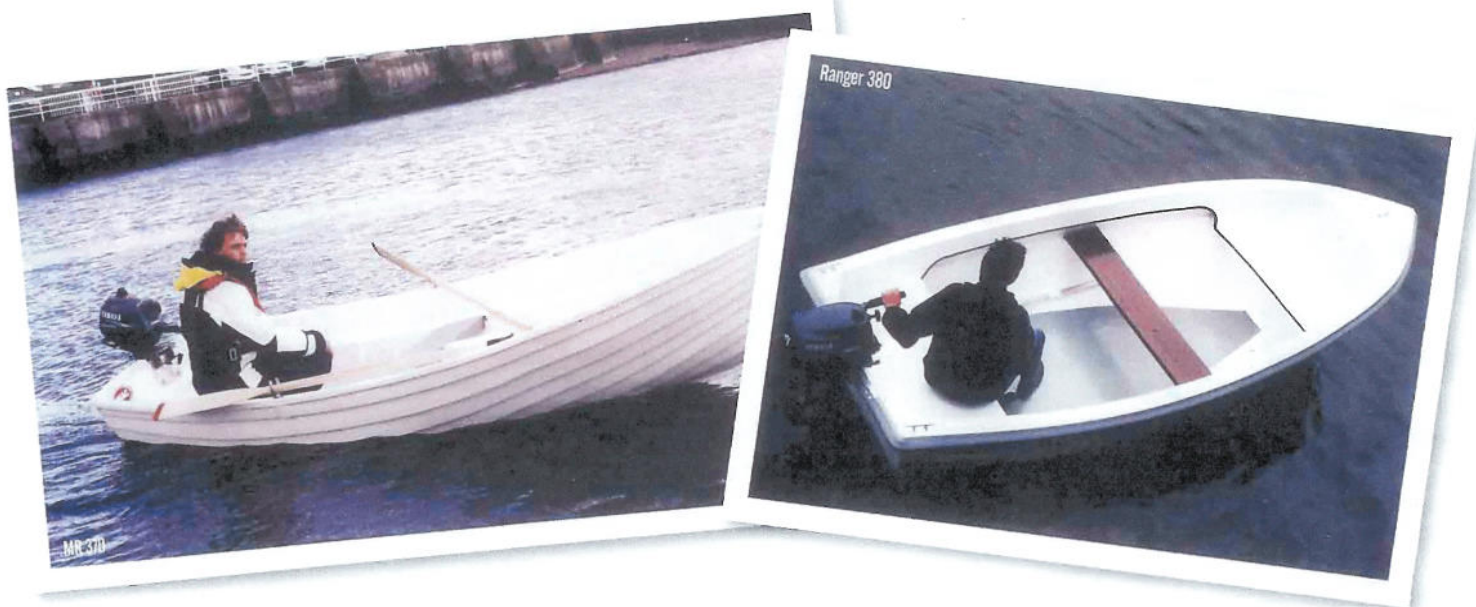


MR 370 v RANGER 380

We tend to forget when reviewing more glamorous craft that a vast number of 'ordinary' hard working small craft are constantly sold and used in this country, so here Irving Stewart looks at two alternative choices for those looking for a smaller boat.



These encompass everything from tenders and small aluminium craft to wooden rowing boats and even totally indestructible polyethylene workboats.

Such craft can be spotted wherever there's access to water. In every marina, slipway and harbour you'll see countless battered tenders, whilst on rivers and lakes there are whole fleets of small craft for hire - people simply love to get afloat.

Even in council yards all over the country you'll find battered little boats used to clear pools - even in sewage farms! Perhaps we've been remiss, over the years, in not reviewing many such small craft - but we'll certainly do so in the future!

In this feature we look at two very different approaches to providing tough, stable and easily managed craft able to withstand decades of hard work either as family hacks, fishing boats or as part of hire fleets.

OUTHILL RANGER 380

Over the decades Outhill, one of our longest established advertisers, has produced a whole range of family craft, but in recent times this Midlands based company has become the foremost supplier of consoles and seats to the British marine industry. What may not be generally known is that they're also responsible for countless dinghies that form the backbone of hire fleets all over the country.

Despite the roaring success of his other products Bob Moulston, the 'boss' of Outhill, has always had a love of boats and getting afloat (too infrequently he recently admitted). Over 20 years ago a major boat operator asked him to come up with a dinghy that would survive a long, hard life in a hire fleet.

He promptly put his thinking cap on. Bob looked at the existing craft available and realised that, whilst they offered pleasing lines and were easily rowed, many lacked

the stability and space required by a hire craft often used by an inexperienced family seeking a safe first time afloat.

And so the Ranger 380 was created. Beamy and with in-built floatation it offered stacks of space, robustness and the ability to take a small outboard. Breaking away from tradition Bob utilised an integral deck moulding which gave additional rigidity, a flat (laminated-in ply) floor, in-built floatation and moulded (vandal proof) seating.

He also added a keel which endowed the craft with straight line stability, especially with inexperienced rowers, and offered protection for an outboard which is always open to damage on hire craft.

Such a craft was more complex than a simple single skinned GRP moulded rowing boat, but its durability easily outweighed the additional cost factor.

Over five hundred boats, and two decades, later Bob's Rangers are still the



Ranger 380



backbone of many hire fleets and the property of umpteen private proud owners. The design hasn't needed changing, which bears out Bob's original thoughts - and the fact a large hire fleet is contemplating swapping their fifteen year old Rangers for

identical new models is further testament to their success.

MAC MR 370

Way up at the other end of the country, in Dundee, a young Antipodean entrepreneur, Julian Dale, imports rather unusual but highly

WE 'PRESS GANGED' A FAMILY WALKING DOWN THE TOWPATH AND PUT THEM ON BOARD, COMPLETE WITH KIDS. THEY DISAPPEARED AROUND THE NEXT BEND AND (EVENTUALLY) RETURNED GRINNING FROM EAR TO EAR

effective Mac Revolution roto moulded polyethylene craft from his native New Zealand. Hardly conservative craft!

Dinghies aren't really his scene, but when a local gamekeeper asked if he could get a totally bombproof dinghy for use on an estate Julian asked the Kiwis if they made such a boat. "Sure," they said, "but they are not very popular over here. How many do you want in the next container?"

Soon Julian unpacked the first Mac polyethylene clinker style dinghy to hit these shores and realised he may just have a winner! He called his customer and arranged for a trial. The mere fact that the boat was delivered in the back of a van and simply chucked out onto the beach seemed to prove a point.

There were no worries about scratching or cracking the gelcoat, no risk of impact damage and no need for a trailer. Giving it a severe thump with a brick hammer also impressed the gamekeeper!

What also stunned the local guys is that this boat comes as standard with »



MR 370



» in-built floatation, provision for a dagger board and a mast fixing location - absolutely ideal for the larger lochs or English lakes. You can even get a fold down cuddy, so a little night fishing can be done in comfort and you can sail silently home!

To cut a short story even shorter, Julian is now busy populating the local estates with these little dinghies, and their reputation for being unbustable hasn't escaped local fishermen who soon adopted the 'Kiwi' method of launching a Mac - simply shove it down the slipway or just chuck it over the harbour wall into the water and let it fend for itself.

TESTING TIMES

We tried both of these boats in their 'natural' environments. Not so much chalk and

cheese, but more a case of Cheddar and Red Leicester. Firstly, the Mac MR 370 was tested in Dundee where the wind was howling the sea into a froth, and that was before you got out of the harbour! Then the Outhill Ranger was tested in the relative tranquility of the Avon at Stratford. Both behaved precisely as they were designed to do. The MR 370, with a single guy aboard, ploughed its way around the harbour with ease and then faced the rough water outside with apparent abandon. Fitted with a diminutive 2.5hp Yamaha four-stroke it behaved perfectly turning in just over 6mph - not bad at all for such an economical little engine!

Later, in Stratford, we tried the Outhill Ranger with a 4hp Mariner two-stroke and were surprised to discover that it would easily exceed the river's speed limit, by a very wide

margin. Its handling was precisely as Bob had originally planned. Either with oars or a motor the boat went precisely where you intended which, when used by hundreds of people who've never been in any boat before, is precisely what you need!

To prove a point we 'press ganged' a family walking down the towpath and put them on board, complete with kids. They disappeared around the next bend and (eventually) returned grinning from ear to ear. At no time were they concerned about the craft's stability - or indeed of being afloat!

Bob has built a larger version of this craft with a small inboard diesel, for himself, but that's a story for another day!

WHICH IS FOR YOU?

So there you have two alternatives to a classic open single skinned, and narrower, dinghy or rowing boat. Both are well able to withstand extremes of hard work over long periods. The 'winner' is a matter of personal choice with each offering features not found on the other.

● The Mac is slightly shorter, a smidgeon narrower and CE rated D for five people, and it can be sailed.

● The Ranger 380 is a bit longer, wider, 50kg heavier and 'prettier'. It's C rated for four people. ■