

Grand Golden Line 850

Alex Smith heads for Wills Marine in Kingsbridge to test the new flagship of the Grand RIB fleet.

After 15 years in business, Ukrainian inflatable builders Grand Marine oversee an increasingly comprehensive fleet. In addition to a four-line range of inflatable tenders, they offer a compact aluminium RIB, an entry-level 'Silver' line of RIBs from 8 to 18 feet in length and a premier 'Golden Line', defined by its greater size, more lavish materials, more complex deck furniture and more sophisticated levels of styling. Until recently, the flagship of that Golden fleet was the beamy, 12-man G650, but now, courtesy of Wills Marine in South Devon, the UK public has access to a new standard bearer.

Known as the G850, it immediately appears to be a major step forward,

boasting 2 extra metres in length and a transom capable of accommodating 50% more power in a single rig or twice the power in a twin-outboard configuration. The test boat comes with the recommended power plant – a single colour-coded Evinrude G2 300 outboard – and in tandem with its textured Hypalon tubes, swept fibreglass mouldings and crimson-trimmed upholstery, this sensibly priced family platform has more than a hint of the high-end chase boat or superyacht tender about it.

A game of two halves

Step on board and the layout of the 850 feels very clear and simple. It uses a forward lounging area and an aft dining area, with a central helm console dividing

the two and a set of broad peripheral walkways linking everything up.

At the front end, the long, elevated lounging platform offers plenty of storage, plus quick access to the heads compartment through the leading edge of the console. The scale of the heads itself is very impressive, as is the ease of entry; and in addition to the upward sweep of the 850's bow shape, you also get the security of elevated steel rails built into the top ends of the tubes to help hem you in as you recline on the cushions. In practical terms, the seamanship necessities of the anchor locker have not yet been attended to. There's no cut-out for an anchor line to emerge from the lower locker and no roller to guide that line over the upper nose cone





Evinrude's G2 300 is a lovely match in every regard

Specifications

LOA: 8.5m
 Internal length: 6.4m
 Beam: 2.95m
 Internal beam: 1.75m
 Weight: 1200kg
 Tube diameter: 60cm
 Deadrise: 25 degrees
 Fuel capacity: 300 litres
 Carrying capacity: 2430kg
 People capacity: 12
 CE category: B
 Power: < 400hp
 Engine: Evinrude G2 300

Package price

£84,995

Contact

www.grandboats.com
 www.willsmarine.co.uk

RUNNING THROUGH A FOLLOWING SEA AT PACE WITH AROUND 70% TRIM IS VERY PLEASING INDEED.

– but this is a brand-new boat and the guys at Wills Marine have assured me that the issue is fully in hand.

Head aft to the boat's primary gathering point, however, and the cockpit arrangement is as welcome as it is unusual. The commonplace aft bench has been ousted in favour of a much more enclosed and intimate C-shaped seating section for five. This feature is currently confined to the largest two models in the Golden Line – and to help make the most of it, there is an optional table fitting arranged in the centre of this space, plus a fridge and a couple of sinks built into the back end of the helm's two-man seating unit. You could easily fit an optional stove beneath the ram-assisted lid to further augment the 850's family credentials – and it's also good to see the use of undercut mouldings in the base of the wet-bar unit. Not only does it generate extra room for your knees when you sit at the back end, but it also enables people to move forward and aft through the angled gap without the slightest obstacle.

The storage space beneath the ram-assisted bench, which lifts without any need to remove the cushions, is impressively large; and in

addition to being great to look at, the 'weaved' quality of the Hypalon collar is very practical for traction underfoot when you make your way on and off the boat. However, it is notable that some of the fibreglass stepping surfaces at the back end, between the bench and the swim platforms, lack any tread. That makes them very slippery when wet, and while that's an authentic issue, it's not a difficult one to remedy. Either Grand Marine can machine a pattern into these surfaces at the factory or (failing that) you can get an affordable retrofit, self-adhesive liner like those from Treadmaster.

The heads space is actually quite accommodating



Grand's flagship is priced at around £85,000



The aft seating is impressively intimate for a RIB



Protection behind that screen is much better than you think



The wetbar sits in the ideal spot for the five aft diners

Performance where it counts

In truth, the 850's 42.5-knot top end is not especially rapid for a boat of this scale and weight with a 300hp outboard on the transom, but, in tune with the natural strengths of modern, direct-injection 2-stroke technology, the Grand's most striking party tricks are to be found lower down the rev range. From a standstill, we find ourselves hitting the plane within a second and passing 37 knots within just 6 seconds. That's extremely rapid by any standard – and the vigour of that throttle response is retained right through to the 42-knot top end.

However, you need more than pickup alone if you want to really relish a complex and lumpy sea state, and happily the boat's attitude can also be adjusted with laudable accuracy. Running through a following sea at pace with around 70% trim is very pleasing indeed. You find yourself squirting from crest to crest with plenty of air, but with great control over both your attitude and your direction. There's no steering by the bow at all, and the same is true

in a lively head sea. Such is the planted feel that you can give her some decent trim into the waves and the wind without getting any excessive lift from the wing-like shape of that broad, squared-off bow. In fact, with its combination of stability, agility, poke and composure, it's exactly the kind of boat that flatters, rather than challenges, your skills at the helm.

It feels pretty efficient too, but it's plain that our fuel flow read-outs are more about wishful thinking than accuracy. According to the display, we're using just 20 litres per hour from the 300hp G2 outboard at 42 knots and achieving a range at cruising speeds of around 1000 nautical miles. On the basis of what we've seen from the G2 300 to this point, we should be running closer to 90 litres per hour at the top end, 60 litres per hour at 5000rpm and 40 litres at 4000rpm. On that basis, I'm willing to speculate that our range from the integrated 300-litre tank (with a 10% margin in hand) would be around 190 nautical miles

PERFORMANCE

RPM	Speed (kn)
500 (idle)	1.3
1000	3.2
1500	5.4
2000	7.8
2500	12.6
3000	19.8
3500	24.4
4000	27.7
4500	31.0
5000	33.3
5500	38.0
5950 (WOT)	42.5

FOR

- Fine looks
- Rapid pickup
- Easy on-board movement
- Enjoyable driving dynamics
- Big storage

AGAINST

- Needs extra tread plates
- Helm seats need lateral cushioning
- Anchor locker needs finishing

STEP ON BOARD AND THE LAYOUT OF THE 850 FEELS VERY CLEAR AND SIMPLE.



8 It's a very easy boat to enjoy

at 28 knots, 150 nautical miles at 33 knots and 125 nautical miles at wide-open throttle – all of which is perfectly adequate for a cruising RIB with such prodigious pickup as this.

At the helm, meanwhile, all is well. The leaning posts with bolsters do a very good job, the screen keeps the elements at bay, and the large, angled dash comes with plenty of room for bespoke electronics. The passengers also enjoy very secure seating, alongside grab handles that are as well positioned as they are plentiful. In terms of changes and upgrades, I suppose you could look into spec'ing this thing with a twin rig of 200s, but for me, perched contentedly in the skipper's seat, just three issues spring to mind ...

Firstly, the metal sidebars built into the seat base to help keep you in position could do with cushioned linings to make them more comfortable; secondly, the foot brace (like the aft mouldings) needs a grippy tread to help prevent your feet slipping in the wet; and thirdly, the throttle could do with a more substantial base to help support the heel of your hand and make your throttle adjustments that bit more sensitive.

These things aside, though, I have to say that the driving experience aboard the Grand 850 is very well judged and thoroughly rewarding.

Verdict

Grand's new flagship is the point at which the company's most lavish internal facilities meet its most potent driving experience. With its broad beam, its extensive array of deck furniture and its 300hp DI 2-stroke outboard, it was never likely to be a 50-knot ocean-muncher, but in the most relevant recreational bracket, between zero and 40 knots, where we cruise, play, wakeboard and ski, its ability to go, turn, lift and trim is extremely satisfying. In fact, notwithstanding a couple of minor finishing touches here and there, the 850 represents a very complete RIB package. There's a clarity to its internal design, a user-friendliness to its communal layout and a sophistication to its styling that make its price feel distinctly moderate. The fact that it also happens to be such a capable and entertaining driver's boat marks it out as a very credible flagship indeed. **PBR**

