



Gemini Waverider 650

Alex Smith heads to Lymington for his first taste of Gemini's multi-purpose 6.5m RIB.

Most of us know Gemini either as the builder of Zapcat race boats or as the provider of patrol, police, customs, military and rescue vessels to serious commercial operators around the world. In either case, the fact that the credentials of this South African company have been honed over nearly 40 years to cope with treacherous seas and arduous maritime rigours stands it in very good stead to produce the kind of RIB the UK boater will appreciate.

Commerce v. leisure

Iain Wood, the man behind Gemini UK, is an ex-soldier and a seasoned RNLI crewmember, so he's seen a few authentic sea boats in his time. He is also based in the hometown of Scorpion, one of the world's most famously capable RIB builders, so it's safe to say that if he likes a

boat well enough to import it for UK distribution, then it's probably worth a look.

Coming in toward the middle of the Gemini fleet, the 650 straddles the gap between the company's larger, more serious commercial sea boats and the smaller, more leisure-friendly craft at the bottom end of the spectrum. However, having been rigged specifically as Iain's own powerboat instructor's vessel, the test boat itself falls broadly into the former camp and there are plenty of features that reinforce that. For a start, the vast, muscular A-frame that straddles the compact engine well positively reeks of commercial pragmatism. Similarly, the casual family luxury of a lazy aft bench has been sidelined in favour of extra deck space for the installation of a life raft. And while there are any number of potential cockpit seating configurations available to the modern designer, the use of a pair of traditional inline jockeys suggests that this is a boat conceived for action rather than decadence.

However, even for the leisure

Specifications

LOA: 6.5m
Int length: 3.9m
Beam overall: 2.4m
Internal beam: 1.4m
Weight: 1623kg
Max. power: 180hp
People capacity: 8
Fuel capacity:
140-280 litres
Engine: Suzuki
DF140

Package price

£45,000

Contact

Gemini Marine Ltd
T: 01590 75621
W: www.gemini-marine.co.uk
E: sales@gemini-marine.co.uk

user, these staunch commercial underpinnings have some distinct merits. For instance, the support and comfort from each of the four seats is superb, the deck space is uncommonly generous and the freedom of movement for those making their way fore and aft past the central helm console is far better than you might expect on a RIB of this scale. The flared grab rails that orbit the console screen are extremely effective, as are the tight, full-length grab lines that run the entire length of the collar. You also get an extremely robust, full-length keel guard, plus a pair of bow eyes and that most quintessential sea dog accessory, an oversized Samson post at the bow. Add to that a range of fabrics, materials and colourways that prioritise simple, wipe-down modesty over stylistic bravado and the 650 exhibits precisely the stripped-back toughness that those in pursuit of a commercial-spec vessel tend to enjoy.

Having said all that, there are also several areas where the test boat currently falls short. For instance, the helm console is devoid of useful storage, and the space beneath the foredeck, though ideal for a large storage compartment, is entirely unused. Iain is aware of this and is currently in the process of

ONBOARD THE GEMINI WAVERIDER 650 ...



This 37-knot boat is also impressively stable at rest



The commercial style helm position is good - but not perfect



A generous network of grabrails and lines keeps you very secure indeed



The winged jockeys are supremely comfortable



The powerful A-frame reeks of commercial muscularity



The space beneath the foredeck is not yet utilised for storage.

... what we have here is a thoroughly safe, secure and well-sorted commercial platform on which the finer elements of finish are slightly lacking.

devising watertight compartments for both areas. The helm console itself also seems to be a work in progress. Certainly, the shallow, almost horizontal angle of the dash provides a pleasingly commercial-style interface, with your left hand on the upward-facing wheel and your throttle hand reassuringly braced against the dash top. But from the seated position, you can't see the dials past the top edge of the non-adjustable wheel; and you can't see anything at all on the plotter screen as its flush-mounted angle reflects whichever part of the sky happens to be directly above you. A more steeply angled dash would rectify this at a stroke - and happily, that's one of the many things the new leisure variant of the 650 promises to provide.

In fact, during our test day I was treated to a sneak peek at the recreational 650 in build at

The turn is all about vigorous, dependable grip



This is a platform that looks set to combine the glaring dynamic advantages of the steadfast commercial 650 with the enhanced style and features demanded by the modern family boater.

Gemini UK's Lymington HQ, and I can confirm that this slicker, more family-friendly craft looks set to address pretty much every quibble I have about the test boat. For instance, its new console uses a swing-up frontal seating section to provide unencumbered access to the entire internal cavity for much improved storage space. The test boat's absence of tube-top tread plates is also remedied with the use of a much more fibrous matt Hypalon fabric that provides effective underfoot traction even when wet. And it also comes with a moulded foot brace built into the console base that the test boat currently lacks, plus a range of more leisure-friendly seating options (including an aft bench and a set of leaning posts) alongside an updated fabric and colour palette that will see the aesthetic appeal of the 650 radically transformed. However, despite all these tweaks, the key news for us is that it employs precisely the same hull as the commercial boat. So rather than teasing ourselves over the likely impact of all these improvements prior to the new boat's launch at the 2016 Southampton Boat Show, what we really need to assess here is just how effective the much-vaunted Gemini 650 is out at sea ...

Easy underway

The moment you ease your back between the cosseting lateral wings of the helm seat and lay your hands on the controls, the 650 feels like a boat that will take great care of you – and as you get underway,

that impression is progressively reinforced. The stability at rest is excellent, the directional tracking off the plane is very linear and controlled, and when you put the throttle down the 650 flies onto the plane in around 2 seconds with barely any bow lift at all. Of course, with the DF140 on the transom the well-built 650 was never likely to slap you in the face with outright pace or handling aggression, but what it does do supremely well is avoid those jarring ergonomic and dynamic failings that can so easily strip the pleasure from a day out. Everything from the positioning of the grab rails to the reassuring

thrust of the cushion in the small of your back and the unencumbered 360-degree view of the horizon combines to make the Gemini experience one you can embrace without doubt or trepidation – and the quality of the hull, as well as the ergonomic clarity of the fit-out, has to take a lot of the credit for that ...

In order to feed the prop the cleanest possible water, the Gemini's spray rails come to an end a few feet short of the transom, and in practice, the results of that are impressive. From a standstill, you can open up the throttle with the wheel hard over, and as the boat heels and turns, the inside tube drops with ever greater vigour until the angle of heel feels almost vertical. Keep the power hard down and the wheel hard over and whether you've put her to port or

Notable standard features

- 1100Dtex Hypalon collar
- Dual heavy-duty rubbing strakes
- Full-length tube-top grab line
- Internally taped seams
- Integrated 140-litre fuel tank
- Two stainless steel bow eyes
- Anchor line bow protection
- Anchor locker
- Aluminium keel band
- Self-draining non-slip deck
- Full boat cover
- Console and seat covers
- SBS single-axle trailer
- RYA Powerboat Level 2 course
- Four months Sea Start membership

The shortened spray rails are designed to deliver clean water to the prop



The driving experience is remarkably novice-friendly



starboard, the prop will continue to grip without the slightest hint either of aeration or cavitation. It's more than just a puerile, crowd-pleasing party trick too because when you get underway and combine this laudable trait with the boat's impressively balanced weight distribution, it yields some very attractive handling manners indeed. Even across the chop or with a little extra trim, you get secure, dependable grip that enables you to turn hard at pace and push on with confidence rather than fretfully anticipating a shock transition from grip to slip and back again.

Better still, with that buoyant bow and those deep-set, double rubbing strakes, the 650 also does a great job of flinging any stray water out of harm's way. I deliberately flirted with some messy, wind-stoked chop on the port bow, but other than the faintest suggestion of airborne vapour, no wetness at all made its

way inboard. And even if it did, those huge deck drains are very reassuring indeed, paying ample testament to this boat's origins among the oceanic swells of Cape Town. Sadly, our test day in Lymington was virtually nothing like Cape Town, with only light chop and moderate winds, so we were unable to explore her calibre as a serious sea boat first-hand – but given South Africa's natural fondness for proud, stuff-resistant bow shapes, not to mention the easy compliance of the hull's dynamic behaviour, the 650's notoriety as a capable sea boat looks very well founded.

Although the fuel flow display was out of action on the test day, the Gemini also feels like it has the potential to be quite an efficient long-range companion. The integrated 140-litre fuel tank can easily be upgraded to 280 litres without any reworking of the

It's such an easy boat to drive that I can't help hankering after another 30 or 40hp



Performance Figures

RPM	Speed (knots)
1000	3.5
1500	5.2
2000	6.8
2500	7.7
3000	12.3
3500	19.1
4000	22.9
4500	26.3
5000	28.1
5500	33.3
6000	37.0

I reckon it could well prove to be one of the most significant and memorable debut craft of 2016.

HIGHS

Tenacious grip at hull and prop
Low-speed directional stability
Flat and rapid transition to plane
Comfortable, supportive helm
Novice-friendly dynamics
Soft, dry ride

LOWS

Finish is lacking in parts
Storage needs a serious upgrade
Tube tops require tread panels
Console needs a rethink

moulds, and if you treat the 650 to some generous trim, the efficiency gains feel substantial. In fact, so responsive is this hull that with the revs set at 5000rpm, you can go from 26.5 to 31.5 knots on the trim switch alone. Plainly, this boat's suitability for commercial applications is already well proven, but with that level of controllability, allied to the 650's softness of ride, ease of use and unerring stability, it is also one of the most novice-friendly RIBs you could wish to see.

Verdict

RIB purists can lament the transition from commercial brawn to recreational chic all they like, but if you can have both on a single platform, why on earth would you object? As things stand, what we have here is a thoroughly safe, secure and well-sorted commercial platform on which the finer elements of finish are slightly lacking. I have no doubt that the finish, like the issues with the storage, will quickly be rectified as Iain tweaks the commercial boat's details. But of even greater interest is the leisure model that is currently in build. This is a platform that looks set to combine the glaring dynamic advantages of the steadfast commercial 650 with the enhanced style and features demanded by the modern family boater. Having seen it taking shape at Gemini HQ, I have to say it has all the hallmarks of a seriously desirable piece of equipment – and with a similar all-in package price of around £45,000, I reckon it could well prove to be one of the most significant and memorable debut craft of 2016. **PBR**