also reduces underwater drag, making the hull movement more efficient. BC Ferries says it expects its one and only cable ferry to go into service in the summer.
— Bruce Buls

Workskiff begins work on Navy support boats

Workskiff of Sedro Woolley, Wash., picked up its biggest Navy contract to date for up to 64 8-meter Surface Support Craft over five years. The new contract comes on the heels of six recently delivered Small Force Protection boats for the Navy.

“We’ve now established a good track record with the Navy,” said Bryce Clark at Workskiff, “starting with oil spill response boats and progressing to the Small Force Protection boats that we delivered last year. That is what pushed us forward in this bid process and allowed us to win this larger contract.”

The 26’ aluminum hulls are powered by twin Evinrude 250-hp outboards and protected by a foam-and-air hybrid collars from Wing Inflatables. Topsides can vary from T-top open consoles to cabin variations. Sprit speed is 35 knots at full load, cruise speed is 25 knots at full load.

The Navy’s intended uses include diver and swimmer support, vessel and equipment towing, and SEAL deliveries.

Shockwave is supplying the shock-mitigating seating.

While RIB-like in appearance with their Wing collars, Workskiff is calling these boats “collared fast boats,” or CFBS.

“Because people see RIB boats as being for military or law enforcement operations, by calling it a collared fast boat, it opens us up to not just military operations but to commercial applications and recreational applications as well for customers who are looking for those benefits from a collared boat,” said Clark, who shares management of the company with his father, Jeff.

Clark said they’re confident the Navy will buy all 64 boats over the five years.

“From our conversations with the Navy, we’re very confident they’re going to exercise the full capabilities of those options.”
— B. Buls

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RIBs with air-filled tubes continue to fulfill critical missions.

By Bruce Buls, Technical Editor

There must have been a time when the acronym for rigid inflatable boat, RIB, made sense, back when the boats were just U-shaped tubes held together by fabric floors and cross-tube seats. Without any air, you could roll the things up and stow them in bags.

That’s an inflatable boat.

On the other hand, a 30’ aluminum hull with twin diesel-powered waterjets wrapped with a hybrid foam-and-air collar is also a “RIB.”

Only it isn’t.

“To be a true RIB, you have to have a fully round tube on top of it,” said Richard Bryson, director of engineering at Willard Marine, one of the leading RIB manufacturers in the U.S. “With a RIB, you tend to have a deeper deadrise hull and so that tube is there for a reason, and part of it is cushioning extreme impacts. When you’re launching off the top of a wave, that tube will help to cushion your descent back into the water.”

True RIBs are also less beamy than hard-sided boats, “so your narrower hull is giving you the seakeeping, but the tubes are helping with stability at rest when they’re immersed,” said Bryson.

“When you’re running, they’re helping to cushion the big waves.”

“A traditional rigid inflatable boat has a flotation tube that is actually part of the flotation of the boat,” said Perry Knudson at Armstrong Marine, an aluminum boatbuilder in Port Angeles, Wash.

“I think there’s a lot of confusion in the market about what a RIB actually is anymore. Sometimes we have people ask for a RIB and essentially what they want is a boat with a fender on it, something

Willard Marine’s 7-meter RIB is a standard search-and-rescue boat for many Navy ships.
A traditional rigid inflatable boat has a flotation tube that is actually part of the flotation of the boat.

Perry Knudson
Armstrong Marine

The value of inflated tubes for buoyancy and shock absorption is most evident when running in heightened sea states.

for protection against another vessel or at dockside. But the fender isn’t part of the boat’s buoyancy itself.”

For that application, Knudson and others say that hybrid collars with both foam and air are becoming more popular. “It just seems that the move in the marketplace is toward boats with fenders as opposed to boats with buoyant collars.”

That said, Knudson announced that Armstrong Marine is close to finalizing a partnership agreement to produce a new line of RIBs. “It’s interesting because RIBs were a big part of what we did 10 years ago, and it kind of faded off a little bit. Then people started asking about inflatable collars, Wing Inflatables] in particular, so we were getting back into them when we were approached by this other company, so we’re excited about the timing.”

Armstrong Marine is also currently constructing a 35’x12’ monohull RIB for a client in the Caribbean. The new boat will be powered by a single 350hp Yanmar with outdrive and provide seating for 26 with a crew of two. “It will be used as a tour boat and for snorkeling and dive charters.” It will have inflatable Wing collars.

MILITARY RIBS
By far the largest customer for RIBs is the military, particularly the Navy and Coast Guard. Karen Jacquelin, director of marketing at Willard Marine, said that based on what they hear from the Navy, about 90% of their 7-meter and 11-meter RIBs are from Willard Marine.

In November, the Navy awarded Willard a new five-year contract to provide two types of 7-meter RIBs for search-and-rescue missions. Both types will have fiberglass hulls, Wing polyurethane tubes and 254-hp Steyr engines with Bravo Two X Mer-Cruiser sterndrives. The RIBs will also feature Bristedk man-overboard indicator antennas and displays, as well as forward machine gun mounts. The first order under the new contract calls for 24 boats, the first of which will be delivered in March.

“This five-year contract will supply

SOLAS FAST-RESCUE RIBS

Willard Marine has landed contracts to develop two new SOLAS fast rescue boats. The buyer is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Willard is the only U.S. manufacturer of SOLAS rescue boats and currently has two Coast Guard-approved models — the 490 SOLAS OB and the 670 SOLAS — both of which are RIBs. The 4.9-meter 490 is powered by a 40-hp outboard, and the 6.7-meter 670 is powered by a 230-hp diesel engine and single waterjet.

The new fast-rescue boat (FRB) models will also be RIBs. One will be an outboard-powered 5.4-meter hull and the other will be a diesel/waterjet-powered 5.9 meter. “So we just doubled our SOLAS product line,” said Karen Jacquelin, Willard’s marketing director.

All Willard SOLAS FRBs will have self-bailing, fiberglass hulls with international orange gel-coated hulls wrapped with orange-and-black tubes. The SOLAS FRBs are also self-righting, so Willard equips the boats with an arch over the transom with a self-righting bag secured to the top. If the boat capsizes, the operator manually activates an inflator that fills the bag with air, which rights the boat.

— B. Bults

SOLAS fast-rescue boats must meet a demanding set of specifications and are built to ABS standards.
75 percent of all their 7-meter RIBs for shipboard use,” said Jacquelin. “And that’s why they want fiberglass hulls, because they don’t want metal that can interfere with radar or other electronic technology on their ships.”

Willard’s deep-V hulls, which are designed by C. Raymond Hunt Associates, the original developer of deep-V hulls, are routinely built from both composites and aluminum, depending on the customer’s preference.

Jacquelin noted that the new Navy contract is an example of a military trend called IDIQ (indefinite delivery, indefinite quantities).

“With IDIQs, you don’t know how many they’re going to order in what time frame,” she said. “They will often put an ‘up to’ number in a contract, like up to 50 in a year, that kind of thing. But that doesn’t mean they’re going to order that many. You don’t know what they’re going to do. That changes everything for everybody. You may give them a proposal for the ‘up to’ amount, for maybe 50, for example, and you cost them at that number, and they end up ordering 10. So it’s really changed the nature of manufacturing and how we look at our business. We now have to manage a bunch of ‘what-ifs,’ including the purchase of equipment from vendors” for unknown quantities.

“Repairs are also now being done on IDIQs,” said Jacquelin. “And because you get locked out if you’re not the winner, winning is crucial. It’s creating some tension.”

So even though Jacquelin reported that government RIB business has picked up over the past five years, Willard diversified recently with the acquisitions of Crystaliner and SeaArk Marine designs.

Crystaliner was a Southern California builder of fiberglass surf and rescue boats that closed its doors in 2012. SeaArk Marine also stopped production of its aluminum workboats and patrol boats in 2012, but now Willard will build the popular Commander and Dauntless series designs, which greatly expands its product line.

Willard has also contracted with Mil- Pro Marine, Grand Rapids, Mich., to represent all Willard vessels, including the SeaArk designs, in the Great Lakes, Midwest and Northeast.

MilPro has been in business for eight years and sells exclusively to military, law enforcement and government agencies.

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