

LOVE ME TENDER

Kim Klaka

Feb 2015

Summer is when the yacht's dinghy or tender is put to hard use. Indeed we are stuck without it. But do you have the right tender for the job, and do you get the most out of your tender?

CHOICE – THE FIVE "-ABILITIES"

There is a bewildering range of dinghies available on the market, so how do you choose the best one for you? You can divide dinghy types into 4 broad categories – inflatables (the most popular), rigid inflatables (RIBS), aluminium (tinnies) and glassfibre or wood. There are a few other promising variants, such as folding dinghies and rotomoulded polypropylene . Selection of type is based around the five abilities – durability, stowability, stability, rowability and affordability. My own assessment of how the various dinghy types rate is given in the table below.

(1= good, 4 = bad)

	inflatable	RIB	GRP	Aluminium
durability	5	3	2	1
stowability	1	2	4	4
stability	1	1	4	4
rowability	4	3	1	2
affordability	1	3	1	2
total score	12	12	12	13

If you simply add up all the scores for each dinghy, you will find that they all score about the same. However, this assumes all the -abilities are equally important. You will have your own priorities, so you should weigh each priority to suit your needs e.g. if stowage is not a problem, multiply that score by about half; if durability is critical, double that rating.

Following this process will help you decide what type of dinghy you need, but it is only a guide. For example, you might have rejected the inflatable option because of low durability. However, if you can find a good quality inflatable made from Hypalon fabric (very rare due to high cost) with good bottom protection, it can be quite durable.

Similarly, a solid dinghy can score highly on stowability if it is foldable, such as the Australian Quickboat.

We started out with a wooden dinghy for our 34ft cruiser/racer, attracted by the price and its good rowing performance. It also had a mast and sail, which sounded fun. However, it was heavy, difficult to stow and not very stable, so we traded it in for a hypalon inflatable with a rigid but foldable bottom (the discontinued "Tinker" brand). This gave us the advantages of an inflatable, plus good rowing performance and some extra durability when dragging it up and down the beach. It was expensive, like most things that work properly. Sadly, after over 15 years of flawless use it experienced a fatal accident in the hands of a service agent (they literally blew it up) and the replacement they provided was a PVC inflatable which was utter rubbish – I snapped the painter with my bare hands and the glued joints lasted just 10 hours. After much heart-searching and a lot of trialling we have ended up with another PVC inflatable (different make! a NZ Takacat), owing to severe constraints on weight and stowage. We hope it will last 5 years but are not holding our breath.

If you have a large yacht and you can't decide on tender type, how about getting two dinghies? This certainly provides freedom to go fishing *and* shopping if there are several of you on board.

OPERATION – DANCING THE TENDER TANGO

About 80% of owners end up with an inflatable tender, either out of choice or circumstance. So how do you get the most out of it?

Almost everyone uses an outboard motor. This is partly because we are lazy, but also because most inflatables are dreadful to row. So the question to ask is, what do you do when our outboard stops working? When, not if. For the case of a tender that rows well, and a person who knows how to row, you don't really have a problem. (This means that there must, absolutely must, always be someone in the dinghy who can row well). However, rowing your average inflatable has been likened to pushing jelly uphill. So you need either a second motor or a dinghy anchor and at least 20m of cable plus some means of attracting attention.

Motor size

How big should your outboard be? Big means fast but expensive and heavy. If you are only going to use your tender for trips of less than, say, half a mile then you don't

really need speed (it is illegal and anyway rather stupid to travel at more than 4kts in most anchorages). In which case you might want to consider the smaller outboards in the 2-3hp range. They can be lifted on and off the tender with less chance of back injury.

If you decide to go for a powerful outboard that enables your tender to plane, make sure you have a tiller extension so that you can sit well forward of the transom. And a kill switch lead that will stretch that far. A dinghy with all its weight in the back creates a huge wash and will use up lots of fuel.

Most inflatables are a poor hydrodynamic shape, so they usually need at least 5hp to plane.

We opted for a 2hp motor, which I can lift on and off the boat with one hand. It still has enough power to do about 6knots as long as there is only one person on board and you put your weight in the right place.

More and more people are using electric motors such as Torqeedo in order to reduce noise and remove the need to carry volatile fuel. Initial outlay is high but it pays for itself very quickly through low (no) maintenance and repair bills.

Recommendation for towing a dinghy in coastal and open waters.

Don't.

Not unless the dinghy is large and your boat is large and the sea is calm and you have a safe means of bringing the dinghy aboard in rough weather and you are not too concerned if you lose it.

Theft

You need to have a means of locking your tender up, both ashore and alongside at night. Unfortunately there have been several dinghy thefts from beaches and a few attempted thefts at night with the tender tied to the stern of the boat. A long loop (5m) of plastic coated stainless wire with eyes either end, and a padlock or combination lock, is generally considered the best solution. Another dilemma is whether to put the yacht name on the tender. It helps identify it if it gets lost, but it tells the beachcomber thief which of the boats at anchor are likely to be unoccupied. It is a DoT requirement that the tender has the parent vessel's registration number on it, so the astute thief will still be able to link tender to yacht. By the way, if you use your tender for anything other than going to and from shore, DoT require you to register the tender as a separate vessel. So if you ever use your tender for fishing, snorkelling, visiting other

boats or just pootling around the bay for pure pleasure, this draconian law requires it to be registered in its own right. Don't blame me, I didn't vote for them!

SAFETY – DARK WAS THE NIGHT, STARLESS AND BIBLE BLACK

- Anchor and cable for when the outboard fails
- Oars that work, or a spare outboard and fuel
- outboard emergency repair kit
- lifejackets (no use unless you wear them!)
- torch at night, or if you might be returning at night.
- lifejackets
- VHF radio and/or phone or EPIRB

All that gear takes up space, which is a nuisance. And you have to stop it getting nicked when you go ashore. But can you really risk doing without it? You are coming back from the beach after sunset, there is a fresh offshore breeze, the nearest land to leeward is 15 miles away and the outboard stops. Nobody can see you and nobody can hear your shouts for help. What are your chances of survival without this safety gear?

END