



SEAWAKE STYLE

You would envy anyone who could spend their life messing about in a Ribeye 785 with 300hp on the transom while getting paid for it, wouldn't you? **Simon Everett reports**

Well, Lloyd Currie, the previous owner of this Ribeye, used to run historical and wildlife-watching trips on the Northumbrian coast with her, but he had an injury which prevented him getting his commercial skipper's ticket renewed on medical grounds. He tried to get someone to run the boat for him – he even offered to pay for a local lad to get his commercial licence – but he couldn't get anyone to take the offer up. Incredible but true. This was a stroke of luck for Duncan Gilroy, though, who had similar plans for the boat on the Menai Straits and so bought the Ribeye, fully coded,

for a very agreeable price and launched her at Port Dinorwic, a pretty little harbour midway along the Straits.

It is from Port Dinorwic that Seawake ply their trade, running wildlife and historical trips to see the Menai Straits from the seat of a fast RIB. This area is rich in history and is a popular tourist area, being more or less at the foot of Snowdon and close to the ancient towns of Beaumaris, Conwy and Caernarfon. The operation only began this season and yet has already

attracted sufficient business for Duncan to start thinking about putting another RIB on the water to cater for the demand. The difference between Seawake and other RIB rides is that passengers can get to drive the boat. This is possible because Richard, the skipper, is also an RYA powerboat instructor. This aspect is one that really appeals to many visitors, as it isn't often one gets the opportunity to drive a boat with 300 hp up her chuff.

Although the Seawake Ribeye 785 is capable of in

excess of 50 knots, as she is running a Yamaha HPDI 300 2-stroke, the whole ethos of their trips is about relaxed enjoyment, not seat-of-the-pants adrenaline rushes. This has struck a happy chord with many visitors who, not having been frightened or soaked, are happy to come back again, and more importantly recommend the trip to others who may have been dubious. Richard has a deep interest in the local history and he regales the passengers with tales about the various things there are to see along the straits.

Leaving Port Dinorwic with our complement of passengers, in this particular instance a family group enjoying a birthday gift,

The difference between Seawake and other RIB rides is that passengers can get to drive the boat.

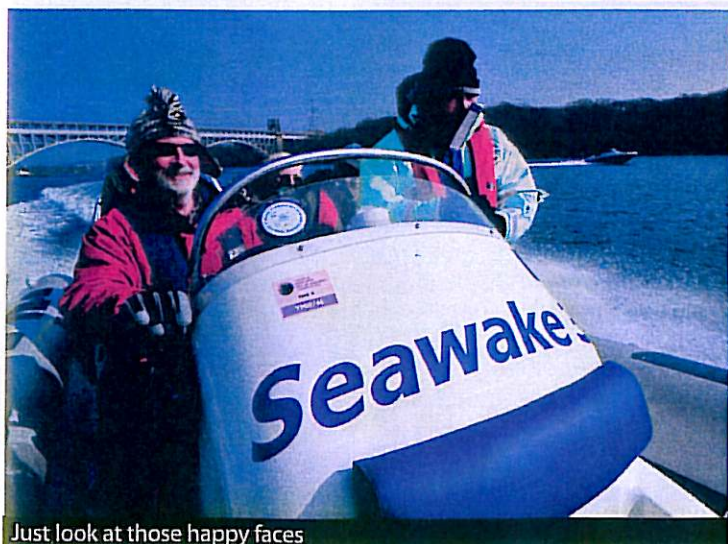
with the recipient having been delivered to the boat blindfold! – the decision as to which way to go depended very much, as ever, on the prevailing conditions and the state of tide. Today we went eastwards first, running along past Plas Newydd, the seat of the Marquis of Anglesey. Further on there is HMS Indefatigable, and a statue to Nelson stood on a rock just off the shore. Of course, the main focus of the Menai Straits is Telford's famous bridge, which successfully joined the two sides for the first time. Seeing it from the water one realises what a massive undertaking and what a fantastic feat of engineering it was. It is still impressive today – standing proud and majestic and aesthetically pleasing, it dominates the scenery with its three small stone arches and main span stretching across the channel to allow the masts of sailing ships to pass underneath.

Between the bridges the tide is fearsome at times – with the flood and ebb flowing both ways, it follows its own set of rules as it pours in to fill the gaps between the various rocks and islands. The most famous landmark here is the Swellie Rock beacon, which always seems to have at least 4 knots of tide running past whenever I see it. Close to Swellie Rock

there is an island, Ynys Gorad Goch, which means the 'Red Island Trap', with a white cottage built by the monks at Penmon Priory for the keeper of the fish trap. In Victorian times they used to row visitors out to the island for tea and whitebait, the main catch in the fish pool. The fish trap has been

completely restored but the tea shop is long gone. The island is now in private hands as a holiday cottage, but it is kept in good order and is a focal point for the reach between the bridges, and as the boat gets swept along past it there is plenty for Richard to talk about too. The eastern end of the

straits opens out into a shallow sandbank-strewn stretch of water once past the university town of Bangor and the castle of Beaumaris. There are channels between, but of course, in the summer the number of visitors that get it wrong provides entertainment for both



Just look at those happy faces



boaters and shore watchers alike. It is a long, lonely wait for the tide to return. On the other side of this sandbank maze lies Conwy, a little way up the estuary, guarded by one of Edward Longshanks' castles. Here there is a thriving mussel industry – Conwy mussels are sought after for their size and flavour. As well as big mussels, Conwy also boasts the smallest house in Britain, an old fisherman's cottage overlooking the water. There is plenty to keep the visitor interested and amused in the 10- or 12-mile run to Conwy.

Whizzing back through the whirlpools of the Swellies and under the bridges gives Geoff Heaney the chance to take the wheel of Seawake – birthday presents don't come much better than that. Although Geoff has a boat, it is a Hardy 20 with a much smaller outboard, so there is a stark contrast between the stately progress they are used to and the eye-stinging, cheek-curling, hat-wrestling speed of the Ribeye. For 6 or 7 glorious miles Geoff can escape and fast-track into the waters off Caernarfon, where Richard takes over again to negotiate the narrow channel along the wall in front of the castle and round to the landing steps, where everyone can go ashore for an ice cream. The history of Caernarfon is long and deep, too long to tell over an ice cream stop, but the main aspects are covered and then it is back in the boat and time to head home.

Other days they will head out through the western entrance to the strait, past Fort Belan and over the Caernarfon Bar to Llanddwyn Island and Pilot's Cove, where the pilot boats were kept so they could row out to the arriving ships to put local knowledge aboard to guide them into the straits through the shifting



... the whole ethos of their trips is about relaxed enjoyment, not seat-of-the-pants adrenaline rushes.

sands. Pilot's Cove is a wonderful, clear lagoon with a white-sand beach, so it is a popular spot in the summer. The entire trip is overlooked by the magnificent mountains of Snowdonia, and as there is a very special climate in this part of the world, where they rarely get frost and it is often clear, even

when it is raining on the mountains, it makes for a boating paradise. The Menai Straits, even during big blow, are never going to upset a powerful, modern boat, and so you can be pretty much assured of getting out. This has, no doubt, contributed to the immediate success of the Seawake venture.