

GRAND DRIVE 600 LUX

With a non-existent extras list, it seems that no stone goes unturned in this high-spec boat, as Greg Copp reports ...

PHOTOS BY: GREG COPP





Considering this boat falls into the most hotly contested section of the RIB market, UK importers Wills Marine have taken a bold approach with their new Grand Drive 600 Lux. This company has ratcheted things up by offering a highly specified boat in standard

form - virtually without an extras list. It has a newly designed deep-vee hull, as Grand have not gone down that line of simply reworking an old design, as many boatbuilders do. So for a 6m RIB, it is about as complete as you can get. Technically speaking, there are three extras for the 600 Lux: firstly,

you can opt for a Yamaha F115, but given that this engine is based on the same engine block as the F130, all you would save is a bit of cash; secondly, there is the choice of fitting the bigger and heavier Yamaha F150, but this would only give you an extra 2 knots or so, at the cost of potentially spoiling

what is a well-balanced boat in terms of handling; thirdly, there is a £1,200 T-top. It comes with an impressive wealth of features. The tubes are Orca Hypalon, the upholstery is premium Silvertex, and it comes with soft SeaDek synthetic teak decking. Silvertex and SeaDek are

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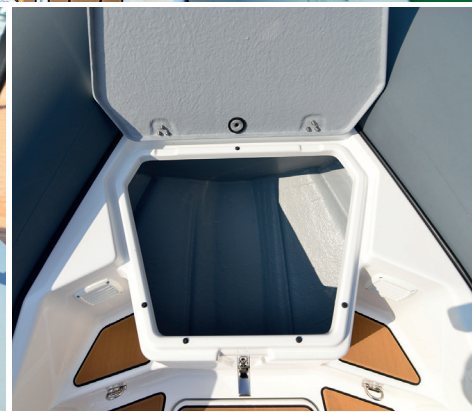
certainly what you would expect to see on an extras list, especially SeaDek - crucial for wet feet, dogs or barefooting on a hot day. Wills recognise that nobody now goes to sea without a chartplotter, and nobody should go to sea without a VHF. Consequently, the boat comes with a 9in Garmin UHD 95sv EchoMap plotter/sonar, and a Garmin VHF set - both flush-fitted. The inbuilt fuel tank is a generous 160L, giving this boat a range that will inevitably exceed most people's daily needs, which is important when you keep the boat in a location where dockside fuel is not available. With a strong focus

on water sports, it comes fitted with a very contemporary ski pole, which, being powder-coated black, matches the rest of the rails and hardware. Sensibly there is keel protection, which for a family boat that will often be running up West Country beaches is certainly a good idea. On top of this, the Drive 600 comes supplied with an all-over storage cover, console cover, seat covers and an Admiral trailer.

It is a complete boat that just needs crew, life jackets and flares for a long day on the water - which not many new boats offer.

This is a modular boat, so there is the option of a different layout if you want the more commercially orientated '600 Active' version, which comes with jockey seats. Our boat, however, was the Lux, which came with two very stylish black pod-like helm seats. They are meant to work in a similar way to a jockey seat, inasmuch as you can stand over them leaning into the seat back. However, this simply does not work, as the seat base is too wide for you to stand with your legs either side. If they were lower as jockey seats are, that would be fine. The seat bases need to be made thinner at the front, otherwise you either sit in a relaxed cruising stance or, if you want to 'drive in a spirited manner', you stand, pushing your backside into the front edge of the seat, which is not that secure.

The windscreen is spot on as you are totally shut off from any wind blast. The helm ergonomics are good, with the wheel and throttles a short stretch away whether you sit or stand. You get a perfect view of the plotter and the engine display, as they sit at the top of the console, along with a wireless phone-charging cradle. If this is not a sufficient information overload, then a large binnacle compass, which looks like it has been robbed from a yacht, sits on top of all of this - in the hope that you might do some chart work before casting off. As can sometimes be the case, the VHF is somewhat forgotten, being



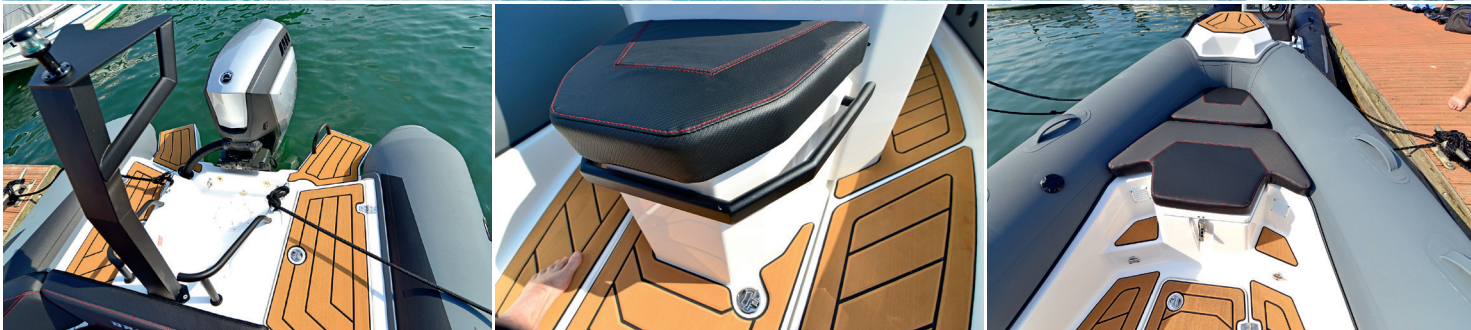
1. The whole foredeck can convert to a sun pad. 2. The helm set-up works really well. 3. The internal finish of all lockers is very good. 4. The Silvertex upholstery is one of the best materials of its kind on the market.



Nothing gets past the tall windscreen.



These well-made seats need slimming at the front.



1. Access to the stern is perfect with these deck sections. 2. This whole seat and floor section hinges up for below-decks storage. 3. Neat touches everywhere.

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 6.12m
Beam: 2.50m
Displacement: 884kg (with Yamaha F130)
Power options: 115-150 hp Yamaha
Transom deadrise angle: 12 degrees
Fuel capacity: 160L
RCD category: C for 12
Test engine: 130hp Evinrude E-TEC

PERFORMANCE

39.5 knots
Range: 120 miles at 25 knots with 20% reserve with an E-TEC 130 – expect slightly more with a Yamaha F130

PRICE

As tested: £49,995 (inc. VAT) with Yamaha F130

CONTACT

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Running through the wake of some of the larger craft out on the day provoked no complaints from what is a sturdy, sharp-entry hull.

lower down on the starboard side. Behind the helm the wrap-around bench seat is no less 'gucci' than its helm counterparts. I understand that the modular design of the 600 does allow for a double revolving helm seat, which can be rotated to face the aft bench seat, and an insert then turns this whole area into a large sun pad. Likewise, an insert can also transform the foredeck into a sun pad from the console to the bow. In terms of storage, this boat is unrivalled. As well as an anchor locker, there is under-seat storage in the bow section, the aft bench seat and the forward console seat, and under-deck storage beneath this. If this

is not enough, then large lockers sit inside each stern quarter. The internal finish and fittings of all these compartments are of the highest standard.

Driving the 600 Lux

Our test boat was powered by a 130hp E-TEC. Sadly, the 2-stroke E-TEC is no longer produced, as this is an ideal engine for this size and weight of boat, and being

a 2-stroke it has a great spread of power. However, the sprightly 174kg Yamaha F130 is a good replacement, which this boat will be fitted with going forward. Though not fitted for our test, I know from experience that this engine has a good power delivery and an outstanding reliability track record.

Pushing the throttle forward quickly punched the boat onto the



No space goes unused – there are lockers everywhere.

FUEL FIGURES (EVINRUDE FLOW METER)		
RPM	Speed (knots)	Fuel consumption (nmpg)
1500	4.5	5.6
2000	6.6	3.9
2500	9.5	3.8
3000	16.1	5.0
3500	20.5	5.1
4000	25.1	4.8
4500	29.2	4.5
5000	33.1	4.4
5500	36.0	4.0
5900 (WOT)	39.5	3.5
Range: 140 miles with 20% reserve at 25 knots		

Even the stern quarters have lockers.

plane, and within moments I was running across Starehole Bay at over 30 knots, pushing quickly up to its top speed just shy of 40 knots. Thanks to its SeaStar hydraulic steering, it turns quickly, and in a reassuringly steady manner. You can hold it easily with one hand while cornering hard, and then quickly centre it back on track, without a hint of delay or oversteer. It holds its line well, to a point that you will have no difficulty in digging the tubes in while cutting

ever tighter circles. If you really try, you can get a touch of hull slide, but it's nothing you can't easily get a grip on.

Out in the open water, the Grand's deep-vee hull had an easy job of dealing with the moderate sea state of the day. This boat runs very level, requiring little trim out at speeds over 30 knots, and she is capable of planing at just 13 knots should you need to. Running through the wake of some of the larger craft out on the

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day provoked no complaints from what is a sturdy, sharp-entry hull. It is a driver's boat, which given some more testing sea conditions I suspect will prove itself a capable sea boat for its size.

Verdict

What strikes one from the outset is the quality of build and finish, which is matched by the driving experience. It is a complete boat that just needs crew, life jackets and flares for a long day on the water – which not many new boats offer. There will be cheaper 6m RIBs competing with it, but you need to look at what the alternatives really offer in terms of cost and kit. Any new Drive 600s will be Yamaha-

powered boats, of which the F130 is the most sensible engine option and likely to return slightly better fuel figures than the E-TEC-powered boat we tested. ■



WHAT WE THOUGHT

FOR

- ▲ Balanced responsive steering
- ▲ Quick acceleration
- ▲ Solid construction
- ▲ Attention to detail
- ▲ Finish
- ▲ Storage

AGAINST

- ▼ Needs slightly thinner helm seats if you want to stand when helming

