

STINGER

800 GT SPORT CUSTOM

Alex Smith heads for Drivers Wharf in Southampton to test the new 'Sport Custom' version of MRL's Stinger 800 GT ...



i AS TESTED: The Stinger 800GT £76,400 Verado 300 with SmartCraft gauges
CONTACT DETAILS MRL - Drivers Wharf, 146 Millbank Street, Southampton SO14 5BB Tel: 02380 335333 www.mrl-uk.com

MRL are the sole importers of Stinger RIBs, and the company is justly renowned as something of a pioneer. Not only have they been forging ahead in their bid to transform Redbay's ultra-durable Stormforce into a desirable leisure boat, but they also seem to be taking the lead in making basic necessities (like anchors and compasses) standard fare. As for their boats, the current MRL fleet comprises everything from glamorous, Mediterranean-style Stinger and Predator craft to

bulletproof Redbay RIBs and stoic Sea Champion fishers. And yet, having tested the original Stinger 800 GT back in April 2012, it is the new 'Sport Custom' version of this family RIB that I am particularly keen to test...

Attention to detail

On first acquaintance my enthusiasm appears justified, because stylistically the new 800 is a triumph. From the moulded nose and the clean, teak-lined foredeck, the tapered, carbon-style collar leads back to a

beautifully swept console and a raked radar arch on attractively muscular haunches. It lends the boat an impression of potency, which is aided in no small way by the crimson colourways, the clean, aggressive hull mouldings and the dynamic dip of the second rubbing strake, which runs aft from amidships on the ever-widening tubes. Add in the sun-trap glitter of stainless steel fittings, plus a tinted screen and some carbon-fibre trim, and this boat is an object lesson in how attractive a modern RIB can be.

Happily, the sophistication of the styling is matched by the

maturity of the features list and the quality of the finish. The Flexiteek decking is beautifully laid and generously appointed, and the gorgeous collar fabric terminates at the edges of the deck with a faultless line of transition. In fact, look more closely and you will discover that even the screw heads in the storage spaces are arranged so that their exposed grooves are aligned fore and aft in perfect parallel. You might, of course, suggest that it doesn't matter, but for me this is a very satisfying indication that the builders care just that bit more about getting

BOAT
TEST



It was two below freezing on our test, but the boys remained cheerful and up-beat all day.

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belongs, and the solar panel, which perches on top of the radar arch, helps alleviate the burden placed on the twin battery bank by keeping things topped up. The electrical burden is further eased by the wholesale use of LED lights, both for the deck and for the storage spaces – and the excellent cool box (which is strapped inside the console) is an equally modern device. You can either plug it into the console's 12V socket or carry it home, connect it to 240V power

and then return it to the boat full of chilled food and drink.

The good news doesn't stop there. In addition to a dash-top compass as standard, you get a selection of flush-fitting cushions to turn the entire bow into a vast sunbathing area. And when the cushions are not in use, they too can be popped in their own zip-up carry bags and either stowed beneath the bow deck or taken home to help prevent unnecessary mould, wear or damage.

things right – and the evidence for that keeps coming ...

Down in the storage spaces, for instance, the drainage is provided not by a hole the same shape as a lazy rigger's drill bit, but by a large-capacity aperture, properly positioned and attractively terminated with a flush-fitting brass ring. The stainless hardware is also excellent, from the stylish hinges to the robust catches and the grab handles, which are not just C-shaped wedges of metal, but curved, tapered and elegant, making them a pleasure to see as well as to use.

Elsewhere, the fuel filler is positioned outboard of the transom, precisely where it





SPECIFICATIONS

Stinger 800GT

LOA: 8.0m
BEAM: 3.0m
INTERNAL LENGTH: 7.4m
INTERNAL BEAM: 1.75m
WEIGHT: 1230kg
TUBE DIAMETER: 65–45 cm
CHAMBERS: 6
MAX. POWER: 431hp
ENGINE: Mercury Verado 300
FUEL CAPACITY: 400 litres
PEOPLE CAPACITY: 12
CE CATEGORY: B

PRICES (INC VAT)

PRICE: £76,400

NOTABLE STANDARD FEATURES

- Verado 300 with SmartCraft gauges
- Simrad GPS, depth sounder and DSC VHF
- 80-litre freshwater tank with electric shower
- LED deck, locker and nav lights
- Carbon-fibre collar and dash
- Swim platform with bathing ladder
- Detachable ski pole
- Twin battery installation
- Arch-mounted solar panel
- Sundek cushions
- Flexiteek decking
- Full-length mooring cover
- Fusion radio with Alpine speakers
- Electric cool box
- Dash-top compass

NOTABLE OPTIONS

- Electric windlass
- Shore power
- Chemical toilet
- Ultrasonic antifoul
- Bimini cover

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However, the real highlight on board this boat is not the styling or the attention to detail but the helm station. The raked and intelligently undercut console comes with an angled foot brace, plus a pair of electrically operated drop-down bolsters set against vertical leaning posts. Of course, KPM Marine's impact-mitigation seats are still available as an option, but this standard set-up enables you to arrange a perfectly supported stance very quickly. The job of impact mitigation can then be taken on by your contoured backrest, your legs and your ability to negotiate a seascape without stupidity. For me, it's as close to the perfect driver's set-up as you could reasonably want.

Expertise retained

Despite all the changes, the new 800 GT Sport Custom exhibits precisely the same dynamic traits as its predecessor. The wheel and throttle are beautifully rigged and offer the keen driver all the accuracy, controllability and lightness of touch he could want. And while some find the almost weightless throttles of modern outboards quite awkward to use, in this instance you can rest the heel of your hand on the bulbous base and tweak the revs with great delicacy, even when large swells threaten to make things difficult.

When you push on, the surge is rapid, unrelenting and impressively linear at every



point in the rev range. Arguably, a top end of 46 knots is a touch modest on an 8m hull with a 300hp outboard, but it is folly to judge this boat on figures alone, because her sea manners are excellent. The ride is soft, dry, composed and thoroughly well sorted – and although the 800 is more a fast cruiser than an all-out sportster, her manners under aggressive helming are also very sound ...

In a fast turn, the large-diameter Hypalon tubes, the thick spray rail and the clinically slick hull chines enable you to



WHAT WE THOUGHT

The Stinger 800GT

WHY YOU WOULD

- Idiot-proof handling
- First-rate helm position
- Excellent console
- Big storage for a RIB
- Impressive finish
- Beautiful styling

WHY YOU WOULDN'T

- Sharp screw tips in forward storage space

QUIBBLES CORRECTED



I tested the original Stinger 800 GT in April 2012 – and my quibbles with its fit and finish have all been attended to on the new Custom model. The lid on every storage box is now supported on robust double rams, and the space beneath the aft bench can also now be opened one-handed without removing the cushions. Elsewhere, the cheap white plastic grab handle that once besmirched the front of the excellent console has been cast aside and replaced with a steel version much more in keeping with the boat's stylistic theme – and similarly, the fold-down cupholders on either side of the aft bench have been replaced with steel upgrades. Even the quality of finish inside the console has been improved – and while it still requires the addition of a chemical toilet to be seen at its best, the speed and efficiency with which MRL have responded to our feedback is to be roundly applauded.

load the power on, safe in the knowledge that the acute heel will remain solid and predictable. And the same is true on the straight, where a little extra trim helps lift the hull free of the surface, easing the point of entry further aft and drawing big dividends in terms of pace and efficiency. If you then become

uncertain of her behaviour or the seascape ahead, you can leave the throttle wide open and wash off up to 5 knots simply by easing the trim back down and generating a bit more grip. Here, as elsewhere, the ease and accuracy of the boat's response to your input leave you entirely in control, making the 800 not just fun to drive, but also very secure and confidence-inspiring for the novice.

Verdict

Too often we see a boat with a winning design principle let down by budgetary compromises and lazy half measures. But from stem to stern, the execution of the new 800 Sport Custom is rigorous, consistent and unstinting. Given the looks, the generous features list, the clear thinking design and the quality of finish, it would be easy to forgive mediocre performance or even a slightly juicy price – but it is very difficult to find any way in which the 800 disappoints. The old 800 was a fine boat, but this is better appointed, better-looking and (according to my figures) slightly quicker. You also get a more complete, more capable and more consistent provision of fittings plus a wider palette of customising options. At just £4,400 more than the old model, that makes the 800 GT Custom one of the most perfectly judged modern leisure RIB packages you can buy.

Alex Smith

The new console is first rate



SNAPSHOT Onboard the Stinger 800GT



DETAIL: The console undercut with built-in foot brace makes all kinds of sense.



STORAGE: The helm locker is deep. **SEATS:** Adjustable leaning seat posts are superb.



QUALITY: The finish is outstanding.



DETAIL: Nice stainless steel finishing. **ESSENTIALS:** Compass also included.