

PRACTICAL FUN

Jet tenders have been around for many years, and there are one or two European based brands that dominate the market. However, Kiwi manufacturer, Explorer Boats are doing their best to change that. Barry Thompson checked out the company's Viking 420 JetRIB to see how it compares to the overseas competition.

Power is transmitted through a 155mm jet pump which gives the Viking 420 JetRIB a top speed with two up of around 30 knots.

When I first experienced a jet tender from Explorer Boats a few years ago, I was impressed with the concept and could see that the company was on the right track. With the growing number of bigger production motor yachts, especially those with boat garages, the jet tender just made sense. The size was, and still is an issue when you are looking for a tender to stow inside a 16-20m cruiser, so it is a delicate balance of packaging the power plant, seating and console into a restricted space. Once you have that mastered, then it's a question of finish and presentation. In most cases, these small RIBs are part of the compliment of multi-million dollar boats, and the owners demand the highest standards, even from the tender.

For Explorer, their first move into that market was somewhat tenuous with quality and power issues deterring some potential buyers. However, when Andy Lamont purchased the company a couple of years ago, he wanted to change that. The first move was to take away the diesel option, which was fraught with issues. He also choose to go with a brand of petrol 4 stroke engine that was common throughout the world, so servicing and parts were not a problem. For this, he went with the Yamaha TR1, the same engine as in 100s of thousand's of PWCs.

He says that although it's still very much in the development stages, an electric version of the 280 and 300 Jet tenders is on the drawing board.

"I think that if we can sort out the right engine/battery package, an electric jet RIB will have worldwide appeal, especially in the superyacht sector. But for now, we are 100% committed to developing and improving our existing Jet RIB petrol range", says Andy.

There are two Explorer Jet Rib Series comprising four models. The 320 and 340 Panther Jet Tender with a low profile to fit into tender garages and the 3.8m and 4.2m Viking JetRIB Series are pitched at the recreational market. Two previous Panther models, the 285 and 300 are undergoing redevelopment and are currently unavailable. All current models run the same Yamaha TR1 / 125hp (estimated) powerplant.



The ideal tender or sport boat for family fun.



LOOKING SHARP

The first impression of the Viking 420 et RIB is that the overall finish and presentation has vastly improved with a lot more attention to detail. Andy says he is very conscious, especially with the jet tender range in putting a product out there that will be taken seriously and be equal or better of any competitive brands.

“That is one of the main reasons we are redeveloping our two smaller jet tender models as we need to be on the top of our game if we are serious about breaking into the international jet tender market”, says Andy.

A recent sale of a Viking 420 JetRIB to a client upgrading from an older 380 was a good start, and the comments from overseas have been more than favourable. Andy points out that for now, the New Zealand and Australian market are his prime focus, and from all accounts, the orders are coming in. The Viking 420 JetRIB is the second Explorer jet I have reviewed under the new ownership, and it is pleasing to see the improvements and updates in the brand in such a short time. They were always a great boat, but they have just got a lot better.

The 420 JetRIB is the largest of the Explorer jet boats at 4.20m and features a full fibreglass composite hull and Orca Hypalon tubes. Standard, the Viking 420 JetRIB comes with Orca 828, with our boat upgraded with Hypalon Carbon, that gives a carbon textured look. The tubes are glued to the grp hull, and it all comes with a 5-year warranty. The GRP hull is fitted with a full fibreglass underfloor section and inner liner.



The seat in front of the console is optional.

PLENTY OF SEATING

The only difference with the smaller 380 JetRIB and the 420 JetRIB is there is less forward area, but from the console back it is the same layout. In the forepeak is an anchor locker- no space for a drum winch – with a cushioned top. There is extra seating available with an optional bin seat, which also provides some further storage. Alongside the console is a small side seat, which I found was an ideal place to sit if you have only one passenger and want to keep the boat balanced. Currently, there is only a single console option which allows the top to be hinged for easy access to the wiring behind the dash. With no shortage of storage space within the console and side seat, you have loads of places to keep your gear dry. A new console is in design which will provide more dash space for electronics.

With limited available space, Explorer has done an excellent job of incorporating the engine box and driver's seat. There's even a shallow locker under the seat for items such as your car keys, cellphone and sunnies. The engine box is hinged to allow easy access to the engine.

LITTLE ROCKETSHIP

Power is transmitted through a 155mm jet pump which gives the Viking 420 JetRIB a top speed with two up of around 30 knots. Punch the throttle, and it leaps onto the plane, so be careful to tell your passengers and always wear the kill switch.

It will effortlessly pull a single skier from a standing start and is a great machine to tow water toys. I did find a little 'loose' spot about ½ throttle, but the boat quickly settles as it accelerates to maximum rpm. Andy says they will be making a few alterations to the forward strakes which should eliminate this small issue.

The 4-stroke, 3 cylinder, 12 valve engine, displaces 1049cc and revs to 8000 rpm. It is dry sumped and runs a fuel management EFI system. The engine responds with a crisp, powerful feel off the bottom end and continues to accelerate strongly throughout the power band.

Of course, I had to throw the boat into the obligatory 'jet spin' at full speed. Awesome feeling and 100% dry on board.

While the first Viking 420 JetRIB was seen at the 2019 Hutchwilco NZ Boat Show, it wasn't until the end of the year that a finished boat was ready for the water. Explorer has certainly come out with a winner both in finish and performance. Certainly a fun, safe family boat whether you use it as a tender or sport boat.



Boat Design Name Viking 420 Jet RIB **Year Launched** : 2020 /
New Zealand **Builder** Explorer Boats **Price as Tested** \$NZ47,000
LOA 4.20m **Beam** 1.98m **Deadrise** 5 deg **Construction**
Fibreglass hull / Hypalon Orca Tubes **Weight: (boat only)** 365
kg **Trailerable Wgt** 550 kg **Power Type:**amaha TR1 / Jet **Max**
Horsepower 125 hp **Max Speed** 30 knots **Fuel Capacity** 50 litre
Flooring U-Deck **Trailer** Hoskings **Boat Supplied by** Explorer
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