BOAT TEST
Robalo R200

i **PACKAGE PRICE:** £47,873 (with 200hp engine option) **LOA:** 6.27m **POWER:** Mercury Verado 200 4-stroke **CONTACT:** www.idealboat.com

American Beauty: The Robalo R200

***Alex Whittaker** drives Robalo's sports fisherman and discovers a softer side …*

PBR TEST REPORT

AMERICAN CENTRE-CONSOLE boats have a glossy minimalism all of their own. The overall formula for such craft is now well established: open boat, centre console, generous forward freeboard, sturdy stainless fittings, uncluttered decks and a bombproof leaning post at the helm. Add to this all the details beloved of American fisherfolk, such as a casting platform, aerated baitwell, rod storage, seawater washdown and lots of ordered space for tackle, and the gods of fishing are satisfied. So far so good.

Family mission

As well as fishing features, Robalo recognise that such a significant purchase should also have to deliver a family fun role too. Therefore family-friendly features are not forgotten in the R200. For instance, the bow lockers are insulated

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SNAPSHOT *Onboard the Robalo R200...*

CONSOLE: The resolutely functional helm is a pleasant and comfortable place to be.

Enough room at the helm for a Garmin Echomap 70s GPS + fish finder.

Coleman cooler lives under helm seat

Helm door hinges for access, and is fitted with a seat. Note grip bars.

The two rear jump seats can fold utterly flat to deliver a rear casting platform. Live aerated baitwell between.

Practical storage at the helm. One cubby is lockable. Note wide bottom footrest.

Porta Potti and wiring.

When punching through big waves she was quite magnificent for a 20-footer.

and have drains, so they can double up as food and drink ice chests. Thoughtfully, these lockers have comfy cushions fitted as standard. Handily, these bow cushions just snap on. A further plus point is that you don't have to remove these cushions to root inside the lockers. For snacking al fresco, options include a nifty teak or fibreglass table. Supplied as standard are a towing post for boards and toys and a decent waterproof stereo. Usefully, the supplied large carry-aboard cooler box (chocked under the helm seat) can be opened in situ. There is even space inside the helm moulding for a Porta Potti-cum-changing space. On the test boat there was an adjustable phone/handheld GPS holder with handy USB power socket. Such details ensure that the R200's fishing mission is ably complemented by a well-thought-out 'family dayboat' ambience. In fact, picnicking on a lake is just as well supported as punching back over the bar.

The hull

The maximum beam of the hull is carried well forward, and there is a stylish and rather impressive drop as the sheerline slinks aft. The hull has two lifting strakes leading up to a 4" reversed chine. Such aesthetic and technical features combine to deliver a noticeably dry ride. Unlike many similar boats, the hull continues well beyond the nominal outboard transom. This projects buoyancy further aft and also assists a faster 'hole shot'. Significantly for fisherfolk, it extends the surface for casting further aft than usual.

Fishing features

In fishing mode, the family-friendly locker cushions can be instantly unsnapped and stowed away. These reveal a non-slip casting deck on each side. The foredeck, complete with anchor locker, has a handy step up for easy access. The rear casting decks feature two well-upholstered jump seats. In a nifty design feature, these seats fold down absolutely flat. This makes them very secure to stand upon. This flush treatment extends to the neat boarding ladder cover, so overall clear casting space is maximised. Naturally, there is the obligatory deep livewell for bait fish, and a 12V aeration pump. There are two pull-out deep trays under the jump seats. These are ideal for storing tackle in fishing mode, and general items in family mode. There are rod holders on the side of the helm moulding and built into the

At speed, waves and wash can be shrugged off.

The simplicity and execution of the design really appeals.

gunwales, plus additional rod storage built flush into the cap rails. A convenient seawater washdown system is also fitted.

Helm

The helm feels eminently practical and functional. Placed centrally, you really do have a commanding view. Most importantly, it has that welcome touch of ergonomic comfort. I loved the chrome destroyer-style wheel (with deep finger grips). It felt cool to the touch in the hot summer sun. Mind you, it might need a sheepskin wheel glove in the depths of a British winter. The rather stylish forward helm seat is comfortable and has grip bars below and on each side. Importantly, the substantial stainless steel frame running around the windshield gives enough finger space for a comfortable grip. The handy helm top trays have rubber mats and are self-draining – ditto the deep beverage holders. It is a small but significant point, but when seated, the skipper's feet can loll behind the seat, or linger on the helm's integral footrest. You are not restricted, and you can always get a firm purchase when you need it in the rough stuff. The stylish helm moulding has a lockable glovebox, and additional handy storage places moulded above the footrest. The engine kill cord switch is situated conveniently near the throttle control. There is room at the helm for the flat screen GPS of your choice, right in front of the driver. The test boat had a Garmin Echomap 70s, combining a colour fish finder with the normal plotter function. Although I liked the supplied round multifunction gauges, at speed in strong sunlight my old mince pies had trouble checking the lower digital read-outs. Better to use your flat screen display for important things like knots. I thought the no-nonsense, retro-styled, flick-switch banks looked exceedingly cool. The very substantial helm seat frame is made from welded-up aluminium tube, and incorporates a grip bar to the rear. This is handily adjacent if you are using the rear jump seats. It is true that on some designs a fixed helm seat can introduce undesirable compromises, especially with drivers of differing sizes. However, I felt that the whole relationship of the seat to the helm had been

The Mercury 200 Verado proved an ideal partner for this hull. Note military-spec quality of the towing frame.

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Got power if you want it – the R200 is no slouch with a Verado 200.

SPECIFICATIONS

Robalo R200
Length: 20'2" (6.27m)
Beam: 8"3" (2.53m)
Draught: 1.2ft (0.37m)
Dry weight: 3000lb
Fuel capacity: 70 US gallons (265 litres)
Deadrise: 18 degrees
Steering: SeaStar hydraulic steering
Power: Mercury Verado 200 4-stroke outboard
Prop: 12"x25" stainless steel
Category C: certification for 7 people
Options: Optional hardtop available
Price: As tested: £47,873 (VAT included) with the 200hp engine option. Includes launch trailer. Lower engine options are available.

CONTACT DETAILS

www.idealboat.com

well thought out on the R200.

Helm compartment

This is a very useful enclosed space. It has a handy step to facilitate entry and egress, and there is a convenient light inside. Usefully this is provided with its own integral switch, so there is no scrabbling. The door is substantial, and I noted that the hinges looked up to the job. There is even a stainless steel grip bar on the inside of the door. Though there is not enough room for a napping area, there is room for a Porta Potti or fridge, and a surprising amount of casual stowage for a day trip. You can also hang a few life jackets in this space with the provided overhead rail.

The wiring for the helm is easily accessible in here, though I would have liked to have seen some sort of simple vinyl cover over the instruments' backs.

At sea

This boat was fitted with the new Mercury 200 outboard option. On test, with this power and three up, she was very nimble indeed. She was noticeably quick and unfussed onto the plane, and cut into fast 30-knot turns with no drama whatsoever. The high freeboard meant that you did not feel your ears were getting too close to the water on deep turns. I had instant control of the ride angle on the nifty outboard trim. Once over 3000 revs she became very responsive, and the throttle had to be manipulated precisely.

Landings were surprisingly soft. Realistically, I imagine that most fishermen will cruise out to their marks at about 25 knots, and save the substantial 40 knots-plus top end for those fast runs home when the weather turns nasty. Driving at over 30 knots in a chop would be a bit vivid for my own family on a sea trip. However, on a languid river, such fast runs would be a very pleasant family cruise. What can be said is that this hull and power option would get you out and back safely in all sane boating weather. When punching through big waves she was quite magnificent for a 20-footer. That big forward buoyancy just shrugs the green stuff out of the way. The exquisite throttle control on the Merc 200 made precise surfing, tacking across crests or judging the next wave leap really easy. On test we punched through aggressive overfalls at the harbour entrance and she handled them all with impunity. Despite the exposed driving position of all such boats, this one stayed remarkably dry.

The verdict

An affordable, well-thought-out, cleverly designed, dual-purpose family dayboat-cum-fast fisherman. The simplicity and execution of the design really appeals. Sparkling performance with the Merc 200. PBR

WHAT WE THOUGHT

PROS

- Fulfils its dual function admirably
- Impressive fit and finish
- Wide walkways on cap rail
- Useful pop-up breast cleats
- Good helm ergonomics
- Leaning post much better than two seats
- Good handholds going fore and aft
- Power on tested option was very good
- Low bridge draught
- Dry ride
- Great in big waves
- Tankage delivers a good range

CONS

- Would have liked to have seen a vinyl cover over the instrument backs inside the heads.
- The strop holding the bow locker open was a trifle too short on the test boat, so it could close unexpectedly.
- Given the ease with which the decks can be worked, the omission of an anchor roller was surprising.

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