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Robalo R180 & 207

BOAT TESTS

WORDS SIMON EVERETT | **PHOTOGRAPHY** SIMON EVERETT

Simon Everett heads to a blustery Pwllheli to have a first look at the new Robalo R180 built by Chaparral and offered in this country by Idealboat.com

What is often thought of as the starter boat market can often be overlooked, yet this is an important sector of the boat-buying – and -using – section of society. The demand for smaller, yet capable boats is growing as fuel prices increase and boaters look to mitigate their impact on the family finances. There is also a growing band of boaters who recognise that you can have an awful lot of fun without needing a gas-guzzling monster, not to mention the ever-increasing interest in sport fishing from the family boat. Style and capability in a smaller, manageable package with plenty of room for her size is what this boat is all about.

The Robalo R180 is an open boat of the centre console type with a high freeboard and wide, flared bow sitting on top of a deep-vee hull with noticeably wide chines that have a slight reverse to them. This tried-and-tested hull form has plenty going for it: there is loads of lift from the combined surfaces of the strakes and the reverse chines, and the heavily flared bow deals with big waves with disdain, lifting the boat over and preventing too much drop in the trough. Those wide chines also make the motion more comfortable when off the plane and provide a high degree of support to resist list. The design is aimed squarely at the hobby sport fisher with the family in mind. Even if you aren't interested in fishing you can make use of the benefits for family picnic outings.

The boat looks good from the outset, which is always a plus. The lines blend well and flow from stem to stern in an unbroken sweep. The console is almost amidships, with seating for two on an aluminium-framed bench seat that matches the bimini tower. The stern seating is provided by upholstered quarter seats with folding, upholstered backs that fold flat to create casting platforms on the stern or a diving step for swimming. Between them a dedicated live-bait tank is built in to the transom with its own raw water pump and aeration system. Flush-mounted rod holders are set into the gunwale capping and rod racks are provided under the gunwales, in addition to the rocket launcher rod holders on the bimini frame. The fishing emphasis is prevalent throughout, but there is also the provision of a heads compartment in the console, with the front end swinging to allow access to the forward end. I was surprised at how much space there was in there around the actual toilet.

The structure of the boat is above the norm too, with Maxguard gelcoat and an epoxy resin used for depth of colour and to help stave off chalking or blistering over time. With the pedigree of Chaparral behind them the build quality is high with a touch of class added, such as the blue LED cockpit lighting and the chrome-plated or stainless steel fittings. The decks are given an efficient diamond pattern non-slip surface which provided my Helly Wellies with excellent traction. The deck is above the waterline too, so it is free-draining overboard, not into a sump. The 2" scuppers are protected from blockage by grilles in the cockpit where they can be easily cleared.

Although the boat is heavily fishing based it is stylish and practical on a personal level too, with comfortable seating and the convenience of the heads compartment. The forward seating converts to create a large, flat area with supplementary cushions to create a sunbed, or it can be used as a casting platform. The low side rail and lack of pulpit are not what we are used to, and the lack of a stemhead roller or fairlead is an oversight, but the Americans don't have to deal with the conditions we get here most of the time. The anchor is given a dedicated rack within the chain locker, which holds it firmly, and there is room for plenty of warp and chain. I would suggest the boat needs fairleads at least.

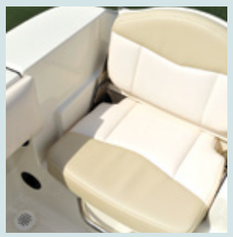
There is plenty of space down the sides and the support from the chines makes her stable on the water, so she doesn't move around too much when people do. I deliberately put her on a beam drift in some sharp, rearing seas. She rode them easily and without the associated slap and sudden lurch of so many deep-vee or hard-chine hulls. I was pleasantly surprised at the easy motion as she lifted over each wave face, some of which were cresting. What impressed me even more was the way she rode those same waves under power. Hard-charging at them, as if running a river mouth bar, or with a following or quartering sea, she was extremely well behaved and I couldn't find fault with her handling. We were out in some building swells, high enough to be looking up at the next wave top when standing on the free-draining deck. With the buoyancy in the flared bow and the generous freeboard she lifted from the troughs dry, with plenty in reserve before she was in danger of putting her bow under. Running hard with the following sea she was easy to keep on course, and again the flare of the bow held her head up as we crested the swells and drove up the next one. I was confident that we could have taken on even more adverse conditions safely.

ONBOARD Robalo 180

CONSOLE: Good sturdy hand hold, practical drink cup holders, really good stainless steel work, for additional security.

BOW: Ample bow stowage with sprung loaded hatch cover.

STEEL: Quality stainless steel work.



SEATING: Good high gunwales, seat with grab point below & high quality upholstery

I was confident that we could have taken on even more adverse conditions safely

Like any deep-vee hull, if you turn hard enough you can cause the propeller to lose grip, but with her reduced angle of heel she goes about easily. I tried her between waves – under normal usage there is no loss of grip or drive and I was impressed by her handling ability. Bringing her in on the trailer, with a strong side wind, the high freeboard has to be taken into account as the wind will deflect her, of course, but we managed to centre her on the trailer at the first time of asking. A lucky guess? Maybe!

The helm layout is on the centre line of the boat, although I am led to believe that on subsequent boats the wheel will be more offset to make more room for a passenger behind the console and screen. The substantial tubing used for the tower frames the console, providing an enclosed feeling as well as good handholds for the passenger, along with a suitable mounting point for the VHF aerial and navigation lighting, with the wiring run internally. The proximity of the tower frame lends itself perfectly to enclosing the helm with a camping cover. The helm itself will accommodate a 12□ multifunction screen on the centre line, together with VHF and other associated additions on the remaining facia. On top of the console there are two shelves fitted with non-slip rubber pads and a binnacle compass as standard. The Mercury gauges are set one above the other with the switch panels either side of the facia. Everything is well contained in a working area around the wheel.

The Robalo R180 is a fresh take on an established sector in the market and one which has stiff competition. Robalo boats are built by Chaparral who are well respected in the sports boat world. The heavy lay-up and quality fittings show they are keen to trade on that reputation and keep to it. The Robalo is heavy for her size, due to the strength of lay-up and the extra material needed for the high freeboard and wide beam. This is all to the good, as the seakeeping of the Robalo is very good indeed and her free-draining deck – as opposed to a sump and pump – is a great advantage, as is the heads compartment. For a family runabout she is a very attractive package; as a sports fishing boat she is one of the best for her size.

PBR

SPECIFICATIONS
Robalo 180

LOA: 18□ 4□ (5.59m)
BEAM: 8□ 0□ (2.44m)
DRAUGHT: 2□ 3□(0.69m)
DEADRISE AT TRANSOM: 18 degrees
DRY WEIGHT: 2600lb (1179kg)
FUEL TANK: 50 US gal (188 litres)
POWER RANGE: 115–150 hp

PERFORMANCE

RPM	Speed (knots)
800 idle	2.4
1000	3.8
2000	4.9
3000	7.4
4000	18.2
5000	24.6
5800	30.4
6000	31.8

PRICES

With Mercury 115hp 4-stroke and trailer: £26,995 (inc. VAT)
With Yamaha F115 4-stroke and trailer: £27,495 (inc. VAT)

CONTACT

Neville at Idealboat on
01758 703013 or 07813 581937
www.idealboat.com

Simon Everett travels to the Llyn Peninsula to report back on this new hybrid 207 from the makers of Chaparral.

The North Wales Riviera, otherwise known as the Llyn Peninsula, is a boater's paradise with plenty of exploration possibilities for cruising, protected water for water sports activities and some pretty good fishing as well. The Robalo 207 could have been designed specifically for this area with her multi-role capability. It was as fitting a place as anywhere to take her for a spin, and the mountains of Snowdonia as a background made for a welcome change.

Wide audience appeal

In an effort to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, the Robalo 207, it would seem, has incorporated every leisure activity known to man. Not content with being a traditional bowrider, the 207 has been given features not normally associated with this kind of layout and gives a nod to fishing and cruising as well as her main role as a water sports platform. Within the confines of her 20 feet she manages to include practical stowage solutions that would not be out of place on a cargo barge. In addition to the lined under-seat stowage, there is a long ski locker under the deck is unusually spacious with a great degree of room for equipment, and that goes the same for the cubbyhole within the helm console. In the opposite console there is a proper sea toilet fitted, which will make adventurous cruising more appealing to many. With the heads left out, the storage capacity would be incredible – and the boat would be lighter and faster too.

Regardless of how you enjoy your time on the water, the Robalo has it covered.

Seating around the boat provides a range of options. The main bucket seats are adjustable for reach and height and will swivel right round. The forward seating is more for lounging around on, soaking up the sun, while across the stern the seats will take four adults. With the ability to carry eight passengers, this will be a great family fun boat for ferrying your friends to a beach party. With all that storage there is bags of space for the BBQ and cool boxes for food and drink too.

Fancy a spot of fishing?

Where the 207 differs from any normal bowrider is in how she metamorphoses into a well-featured angling boat. Fishing is a very popular pastime, especially in America where she is built and virtually everyone goes fishing. To pander to the requirements of anglers, the stern seats fold flat to create non-slip casting platforms at the stern. Without the cushions in, the bow becomes an all-round casting area, again with non-slip surfaces, and the main locker in the bow will take ice and drains overboard, so providing somewhere to put your catch.

To emphasise the angling ability of the boat there are rod holders dotted about on the tower and set in the gunwale capping, where they are combined with drinks holders. There are rod racks under the gunwale, with the vulnerable tips stowed inside the gunwale. Stainless toe rails provide security when leaning against the padded cockpit sides playing a big fish, or leaning over to deal with one alongside.

Not everyone likes to cover their boat in fish scales and slime; instead they feed their adrenaline craving by skipping about in the wake of the boat on a ski or board or in a ringo. The 207 can more than meet this need too, with a tow ball on the tower and proper board racks to the sides like a specialist wakeboard boat. Regardless of how you enjoy your time on the water, the Robalo has it covered.

Boating freedom

Even if you just want to get the wind in your hair and rejoice at the freedom boating provides, the 207 is a pretty capable boat in this regard. With the Yamaha F150 mounted she reached a maximum speed of 36.4 knots at 5700rpm, which led me to think the prop was slightly too long, but as she had not benefited from any prop testing at this point, Neville at Ideal Boat knows to try the next size down to free up more revs and gain a little speed – if, indeed, that is what a customer wants. If you must go as fast as the boat possibly can, then the 207 can be rigged with the F200 for more torque and pulling power.

Any boat like this, first and foremost, regardless of her suitability for extracurricular activities, should provide a fun driving experience. The Robalo benefits from a superb build quality that includes the incorporation of Kevlar into the keel lay-up to provide extra impact resistance. The hull shape has been devised to provide an easy-to-drive, safe boat without hidden vices. The deadrise is sufficient to soak up rough water, but mild enough to be economic in its consumption of power and conservative with the angle of heel. A steep deadrise will cut waves better, but angles of heel can become extreme with it and greater power is required to support the boat.

The aspect the boat rides at is nice and flat, and while she does gain speed with trimming the leg up, the angle of attack doesn't change noticeably from the helm. The helm is nicely protected with that wrap-around windshield and the draught stopper in the walk-through screen does a great job of keeping your feet and legs warm. To extend the season there is a protective bimini that attaches to the top of the screen and goes over the tower, and an all-over cover is a possibility. To be fair, these won't be high priority, but they further illustrate the versatile nature of this boat.

We had some rolling swells and some chop to try the boat in. The patter below the hull told me that she was lifting, supported by the reversed chines that run from the bow, increasing in width as they run aft, and the flatter stern section of the hull. The forefoot is sufficiently sharp to cleave the water and soften the landing. The reversed chines deflect the spray wide and provide lift, but at the same time they help to limit the angle of heel in turns, making life in the passenger seats more relaxed and comfortable, which has to be a good thing. The wide beam provides considerable stability, which is noticeable at rest and will be recognised when you are sat at anchor with your glass of wine while the youngsters jump off the side – it won't rock the boat.

After thrashing the bay to foam there wasn't a single drop of saltwater on the upholstery – any of it – thanks to the attributes of the flared bow and extended chine rail. Spanking around she showed little tendency to tuck in on turns; trimming down helped to maintain drive through the prop, and she maintains a reassuringly low angle of heel. Even driving hard the ride was relaxed and predictable, giving time to take in the view of the mountains and coastline. I never felt, at any time, that the boat was liable to do something unexpected or unwanted. Some might call this bland, while those with children will find it reassuring. PBR

Within the confines of her 20ft she manages to include practical stowage solutions that would not be out of place on a cargo barge.

SOUND INVESTMENT: Robalo fit their own-brand waterproof speakers throughout the boat for on-board entertainment.

SPACIOUS: Spacious bow for sun-worshipping.

PERFORMANCE

Engine RPM	Speed (in knots)	Fuel consumption (L/hr)
600	2.9	
1000	4.6	
2000	7.2	
3000	14.6	
3500	20.7	21.2 L/hr
4000	24.1	
5000	30.6	
5700	36.4	57.3 L/hr

SNAPSHOT Onboard the Robalo 207...

STORAGE SOLUTION: The passenger console houses a very useful heads facility, or can simply house a massive amount of gear.

MORE STORAGE : Excellent, practical stowage under the bow seating.

LAYOUT: Traditional seating layout leaves plenty of room on deck.

ONBOARD: Stern stowage under lift-out squabs. The main seat is on top of the built-in livewell tank with its own pump – it could always be used as a beer cooler.

SWIMMING: Folding quarter seats provide excellent access for swimming and form a flat casting platform for anglers.

The Robalo 207 looks like many other bowriders, but has hidden charms.

SPECIFICATIONS

LENGTH OVERALL: 6.27m (20'7")
BEAM: 2.54m (8'4")
AIR DRAUGHT WITH WAKEBOARD TOWER: 2.54m (8'4")
DEADRISE: 18 degrees
FUEL CAPACITY: 227 litres (60 gallons)
DRAUGHT: 76cm (2'6")
MAX HP: 200hp
DRY WEIGHT W/ENGINE: 3400lb (1542kg)
PASSENGER CAPACITY: 8 persons/1200lb

PRICING (INC VAT):

On-trailer packages from **£37,115** (inc. VAT)
As tested, with Yamaha F150, sea toilet, tower and Garmin electronics package:
£46,195 (inc. VAT)

CONTACT:

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Website: www.idealboat.com

WHAT WE THOUGHT

THUMBS UPS

- Plenty of open deck space
- Amount of protected stowage
- Versatility to adapt to boater's needs

THUMBS DOWNS

- Lack of anchor fairlead
- Ignition switch placement
- No closure for console stowage when door is acting as draught stopper

POWER: The Yamaha F150 pushes her along at a sprightly 36.4 knots.

Even driving hard the ride was relaxed and predictable, giving time to take in the view of the mountains and coastline

With the ability to carry eight passengers, this will be a great family fun boat for ferrying your friends to a beach party.

Compact but complete. Ignition could be placed elsewhere to free the panel for a VHF.

THE ROBALO RANGE...

CENTRE CONSOLE

WALK AROUND

DUAL CONSOLE

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