Words and photography by DAVE LEWIS

EXCEPTIONAL!

If you want a boat for long-haul fishing sorties, this is the perfect choice

ROBALO HAS BEEN BUILDING HIGH-quality sports fishing boats in the USA since 1968, and today it is renowned for providing a heavy-duty construction along with a superb ride in the roughest of seas.

Late last year, on a cold, crisp and windy day off Pwllheli on the Lleyn Peninsula in North Wales, I spent a few hours aboard a Robalo R200. Certainly not a day when the standard-fitted Bimini sun top was required, but I did encounter decent conditions to assess the sea-keeping qualities of a fast fishing boat that offers serious offshore potential.

The Robalo R200 is 6.27 metres (20ft 7in) long, with a 2.59m (8ft 6in) beam, and displaces 3,000lb and has a 0.37m draft. She could be accurately described as being a purpose-built offshore sport fishing boat, a vessel that clearly has been created by a team of designers and boat builders that fully understands the needs and requirements of today's offshore anglers.

BUILD QUALITY

Each Robalo hull is engineered to weather the harshest marine environments using premium gelcoat, Vinylester resin, fibreglass with Kevlar reinforcement for maximum strength, along with innovative composite corings to create a rot-free construction.

Only the highest quality stainless steel hardware is employed, along with Nano Block Technology upholstery vinyl, while yacht-quality standards are used in all of its wiring and electrical systems.

As an angler, I know exactly what fixtures and fittings I require aboard the boats I fish from, and, perhaps most importantly, exactly where I want those fixtures and features to be fitted. In this respect, the Robalo R200 ticks all boxes.

For example, the bow incorporates a spacious anchor locker that is fitted with a pair of brackets designed to hold the protruding lugs at either side of the blades of a standard Danforth style anchor.

This simple feature holds the anchor securely, thus stopping it crashing and banging about within the anchor locker while the boat is underway, which is a real pet hate of mine. When the time comes to use the anchor, it is easy to grasp and pull free, without having to first untangle yards of rope. ▶

The Robalo R200 has a space ingeniously incorporated within, and is accessed via the forward edge of the centre console that is intended to hold a chemical toilet. There is plenty of room to sit in comfort, and this feature will appeal to many anglers.

Of course, this particular space is very useful for storing the multitude of bulky items that anglers habitually take afloat.

Another standard feature is an aerated livebait well. It is large enough to hold a full day's supply of bait, and features rounded corners that prevent bait from getting bunched up, thus keeping them swimming and in a healthy condition. The inside is painted blue, which tests have shown helps to maintain the bait in a livelier condition.

The hull cut cleanly through the water

KEY FEATURES

Other key features include a 72-quart Coleman cooler installed beneath the helmsman's seat, a padded seat across the transom with stowage beneath, rod-rests and additional stowage racks, a smart stainless pulpit rail, all necessary deck hardware including strategically located grab handles, and a transom boarding ladder.

You'll find lots of additional useful locker space, including two 23-gallon insulated and drained fish boxes at the bow.

Buoyancy is provided by foam flotation, installed to ensure that in the unlikely event the cockpit becomes swamped, the boat floats upright and level. Of course, the deck is self-draining, and has what the manufacturers describe as a 'diamond lustre non-skid finish'.

Inboard freeboard is excellent, with high gunnels that fall vertically to the main deck, which are padded inboard for maximum comfort when fishing.

The test boat was fitted with a stunning 200hp four-stroke Yamaha outboard, the maximum rated engine size for this vessel. Fuel is supplied from a 70 US gallon/265L fitted fuel tank.

The Robalo R200 comes with a 10-year hull warranty; the hull on our test boat was a beautiful Deepwater Blue, but several other colour options are available, along with various custom graphics.

ON THE WATER

My day afloat had been arranged by Neville Williams, managing director of Ideal Boats, based at Pwllheli Marina. The close-quarters, slow-speed handling qualities of the Robalo R200 were flawless. Once out into open water and clear of the harbour speed restrictions, I sat back on our camera boat and watched as Neville put the Robalo through its paces in an impressive display of boat handling.

Like most American-designed and built sport fishers, the R200 has a deep-vee hull, which is perfect for slicing through a hefty swell and choppy waves, conditions typically encountered offshore. Robalo's famous Hydro Lift hull design generates hydrodynamic lift across the entire running surface, with her sharp, deep-V keel and wide strakes creating maximum control.

A reversed chine planing surface with reduced deadrise delivers incredible stability at low end. The end result of all of this technology is a noticeably dry ride with phenomenal efficiency, whether operating at trolling speed or full throttle.

There's little point in owning a fast fishing boat designed to venture many miles offshore to fish distant marks if the only time you can benefit from that speed is when conditions are favourable. The Robalo R200 is a boat that will ensure that, provided you drive her with due regard to the prevailing weather, even if conditions do cut up rough while you are out fishing, you will be able to cruise back at a reasonable speed in both safety and comfort.

By the time my opportunity to climb aboard and drive the Robalo R200 came, I had already seen more than enough to convince me that she was an exceptional boat, but still I was itching to have a go. Immediately, I found that her response to the throttle was fast and crisp, which is exactly what you want when running in heavy seas, conditions that demand continual adjustments of the throttle and helm.

Driven sensibly, the hull cut cleanly through the heftiest waves and wakes from passing boats. If this boat ever does slam, then it will be entirely down to operator error, which is almost always the case.

Certainly, the Robalo R200 is one boat I would love to have at my disposal for long-haul fishing sorties because she's the perfect tool for offshore sport. ■

ROBALO R200 KEY FEATURES

Stainless steel rod holders

An aerated livebait well is standard

The chemical toilet is roomy

The 72-quart Coleman cooler

NEED TO KNOW

■ The cost for a Robalo R200 package starts at £46,399. For more information, visit www.idealboat.com
Email: sales@idealboat.com
Tel: 01758 703013 or 07813 581937.
For information on Yamaha outboard engines visit: www.yamahaoutboards.com

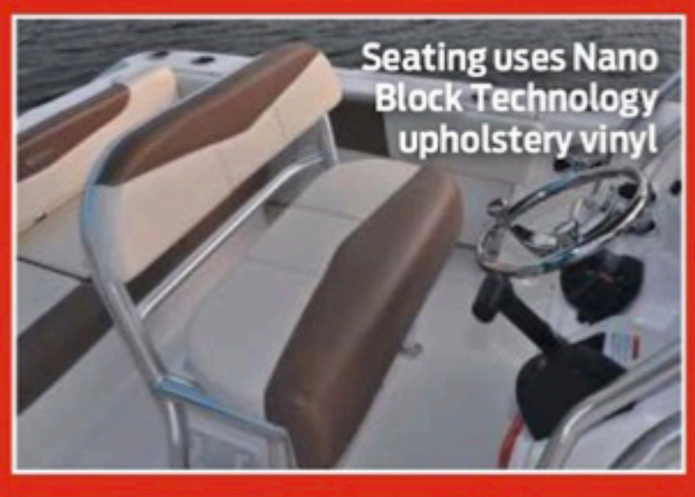
POWERFUL OUTBOARD
The test boat was fitted with a stunning 200hp four-stroke Yamaha, the maximum rated engine size.

High-quality fittings all round

The spacious anchor locker

Access to the forward space

The railings are stainless steel


Seating uses Nano Block Technology upholstery vinyl