

TEST

Brig Eagle 645



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Launched at the Southampton Boat Show in 2006, the 645 remains the flagship of Brig's three-boat Eagle range. Alex Smith heads to Drake Marine in Poole to investigate.



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Arrive at Sandbanks under a crisp blue sky to see a marina enjoying the peculiar boon of British summer warmth. Naturally, I'm convinced it won't last so we head down to the pontoon to get the boat out before things turn for the worse.

Down on the water, the resoundingly white Brig Eagle 645 glows in the sun like an advertisement for washing powder. Only the engine, the teak deck and the grey rubbing strake offer respite from the dazzling glow. But as my eyes adjust sufficiently to make out the details, it becomes plain that the Ukrainian-built Brig is a great looking boat.

It's squat and chunky like an old-style Tonka toy, with fat tubes all round, a thick A-frame and a bullish, squared-off nose. And its engaging girth is a great aesthetic match for the beautifully bulbous space-age style Verado 150 on the transom. For anyone who enjoys flared wheel arches or fat chrome grills, the uncompromising

chunkiness of the Brig is very attractive.

Inside, the 645's console is offset to starboard, leaving a very useable walkway to port, which links the aft cockpit and the forward V seating. The result on the 645 is enough room for about eight people to sit in relative comfort at moderate speeds.

There are some good practical touches here too. The provision of proper cleats on solid GRP bulges either side of the engine well means you're not expected to tie your lines off to the screen rim or the A-frame. The fact that they're sunken is another attractive feature and one all too rare on leisure RIBs.

The fake teak deck looks every bit as good as the real stuff, but adds low-maintenance practicality to the mix, and the curved, tinted screen is a much-needed feature on a boat so dominated by gleaming white. In short, from the square GRP nose moulding to the self-draining deck, handholds that actually fall to hand and a rubbing strake the width of your

list, things are very serviceable on the Brig for a regular boater who wants his boat to make sense.

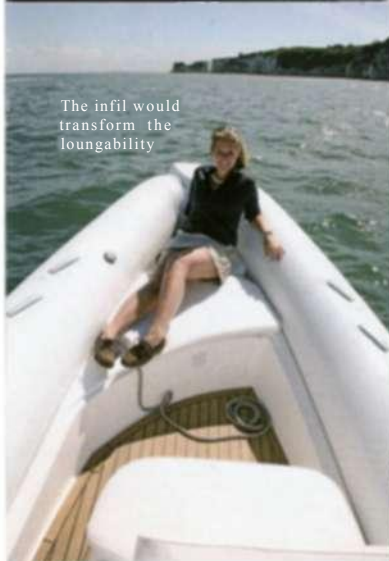
One place where the thinking doesn't quite win through, however, is in the tube cones, where steps are built into the backs of the collar. It's a neat idea, as it allows the space that might be taken up with a plat form-aim-ladder to be used for sizeable storage spaces on either side of the engine. But in practice, you need to be pretty agile to pull yourself up onto these stepping ledges, because unlike the simpler, more common telescopic ladder, they won't come down into the water to help. You will need to add the optional boarding ladder for £225.

Even so, things are very comfortable for the passenger back aft. The deep-set bench seat has access to flip down tables in the back of the forward seating unit and the helm and navigator are equally well catered for with flip-up seat cushions for a bolster-style driving position. >

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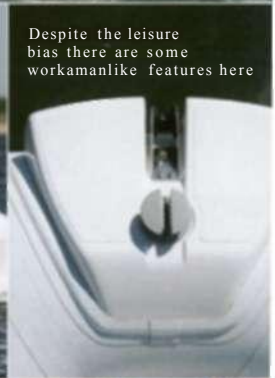
Nice...



The infill would transform the loungability



A haul of 46mph with urgency throughout the range is commendable



Despite the leisure bias there are some workamanlike features here

Inside the console is a big drained space for storage, and although the wiring inside the helm looks a little frenzied and unkempt, the general standard of finish is very sound.

PERFORMANCE

Despite a deadrise that errs more on the side of planing efficiency than ride comfort, the Brig's entry is rather fine, opening up waves for the rest of the boat to follow. It makes things quite smooth and quick in a straight line and with the Verado supercharger kicking in with delightful obedience wherever the throttle happens to be, the user-friendly poke is available from standstill right through to the top end.

Put the hammer down from a standstill and the results are extremely rapid. The tubes, which kiss the waterline at

rest, lift elegantly from the surface, the pace builds and the boat hits the plane, flat and level throughout, in just 2.5 seconds. Power on and the intensity of the acceleration is unabating, right through to a top end of around 46mph.

Into the head sea the quality of ride, the pace and the dryness of the experience is most impressive. Ease the boat round and across the water with the sea on the beam and the lateral stability at pace feels equally good. With her collar now lifted clear and the engine howling at 6,000rpm, there's no skittishness as the chop runs through - just quick, flat progress and an efficient, if slightly hard, ride.

Carry that pace and that drive into a hard turn, however, and the results can be a bit lively for a novice with a heavy throttle and a sluggish wit. As she heels in and you power round, the >



There are few more reassuring fenders around than this





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inside tube drops to steady her, but with the water shapes now bullying her attitude, the steadfast surefootedness is fundamentally impaired.

I am assured that this boat is "fitted with a propeller designed for maximum speed" and in all fairness, we are giving it the kind of throttle-happy race treatment the owner is unlikely to mete out, but either way, the handling when pushed through turns on a chop is not all it could be. It's not a case of cavitation or loss of grip from the prop - that side of it is fine. It's more a tendency to catch with the nose and flatten off the heeling moment mid turn that has you hauling back the throttle and straightening the wheel.

FOR THE FAMILY

It's a good move if you're testing a prospective boat to try every seat available while underway at pace. On a boat like this, with an offset console and

an open bow, that usually means that the back left seat is wet, the front of console is devoid of secure grabbing points and the passenger seat is exposed to the wind. But on the 645, despite varying degrees of ride firmness and 'interaction' with the elements, the two things that stand out are dryness and security.

That security on the aft bench comes partly on account of the thick GRP A-frame, which hems in your shoulders in the most reassuring fashion. It limits your view a touch but it's not overly intrusive. Better still, there's a long metal handhold both in the top of the helm seat in front and in the top of the bench seat behind, so whether you're sitting or standing, there's always something to grab.

The relatively meagre hull warranty of just two years doesn't inspire confidence in a world where the likes of Zeppelin offers a full decade of cover. But taking the Brig at pace through confused chop suggests that the build is everything it needs to be on a mid-range leisure boat. And with five-year tube cover, things don't look so bad.

The fuel capacity is also excellent >



The helm seat is not reversible but the fold-down table's a nice touch



It's difficult to feel unsafe when you're hemmed in by slabs of GRP

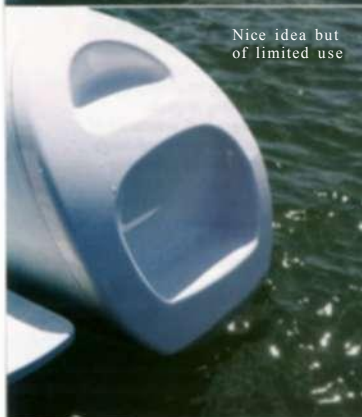


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At rest, the tubes play on the water, creating good stability for mooring



Nice idea but of limited use

on a boat of this size. A 200-litre tank means that at a gentle 30mph cruising pace, leaving a safe ten per cent spare for difficulties, you could travel for over 12 hours solid, covering a distance of around 380 miles. It's a serious range for summer touring and, given a good weather window, puts vast new areas of coastline within your reach.

THE UPSHOT

The Brig Eagle 645 is by no means perfect. The handling requires a sensitive driver, the helm seats are not reversible and the standing position on the test boat is too far from the console for a man of my shape to anchor his frame in comfort. Despite the provision of some good standard features, the options list also needs a visit for vital items like a compass and a boarding ladder.

But with an efficient hull, good pace, a dry ride and a secure and reassuring cockpit, this RIB represents a good option for family users on sensible summer days. Throw in good build, decent economy, a big cruising range and a set of practical features to make your life simpler and the Brig outdoes a great many of its rivals in terms of all round ease of use. Most definitely worth a look ... •

Details

FOR

Stable on the straight
Quick pick up
Dry ride

AGAINST

Unruly in the turn
Pointless tube steps

SPECS

LOA: 6.48m
Beam: 2.5m
Weight: 855kg
Fuel: 200 litres
Deadrise at transom: 18 degrees
Max Power: 175 hp
Engine: Mercury Verado 150
Tube warranty: five years
Hull warranty: two years
Price: from £25,175
Price as tested: £28,780
Trailer: £2,499

PERFORMANCE

RPM	Speed (mph)	Fuel flow (litres per hour)	Economy (miles per litre)
2000	8.8	6.3	1.41
3000	17	11.5	1.48
4000	29	21.5	1.35
5000	40	46.5	0.86
5900	46.5	72.4	0.64

CONTACT

Drake Marine
01202 893646
www.drakemarine.co.uk
UK Distributor Boating Sports
www.brig-uk.com

And so farewell to summer.
Here's hoping the 2008 season
lasts more than a day...



WHAT ELSE?

Drake Marine makes it a policy to offer a free half-day handover with its own staff instructor to every customer who picks up a new BRIG from Poole. In addition, if you choose a Honda outboard, you get a free RYA Level 2 Powerboat course for up to three people, courtesy of Honda UK.