

Inflatable Boat: The Remote Water Companion

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Here's a thought on having a "travel pack" type of small boat that fits almost anyplace for remote water travel, is safer than the old floppy blowup Bi Mart fish hunters, and can mount faster or quieter motors, to fit whatever you choose to do.

The inflatables I looked at included both the Mercury, and Bombards, I have owned three so far over 25 years so I'm picky about what size I really need, what I want for boat livability features, and how they are built. My first was an Avon "floppy floor" 12 ft. that was too clumsy to haul around, no motor mounts that really worked. My second was an Ampac with hard transom and mahogany floor boards, at 10 ft much better to haul, but the floorboards were something to look for and remove each time I traveled, however I did make a Sabot sail rig and leeboards work to sail it. My third was a Fish Hunter 360 from G.I. Joes, that I even made a wood floor for, a real seat across the whole boat to sit higher, just for river rafting without power. That was a bust. Way too floppy overall, no directional stability, but light, portable and cheap!! We also have a G.I. Joes yellow banana kayak, good value, easy to carry, again cheap, stable and decent directional stability. However wind kills this one for any kind of directional control -- big time -- and if you weigh over 150 lbs max your butt sags the shape so badly that one can't do anything with it. Plus (minus...) you sit so low that it is hard to get out of after a couple hours. Back to a real stiff fabric inflatable, never stow it fully deflated -- get a bigger bag. Preferably store 3/4 inflated (no fold lines), use Armorall or similar with UV protection on all the fabric, and make lighter oars, and better yet, include a long kayak paddle so you can face forward while traveling down rivers.



The Inflatable beached on the shore of Lake Pauline OR. Note the fact there is no launch site. Both the Kayak and inflatable were brought down to the water from the near-water campsite.

What I purchased is from -- Affordable Inflatables -- from their e-Bay Store on the web. The one I got is 8 1/2 ft. long, raised bow to shed waves, 'V' bottom for directional ability, solid transom rated to 10 hp., and an inflatable high pressure floor for solid footing without weight. Merc wants a lot of bucks for that floor, it is the state of the art as it still folds with no parts to fuss with like the hard

wood floorboard type. These guys sell them on the e- Bay auction side, so mine cost \$715.00 delivered, and I could look at the feedback from previous buyers. This air floor design saves about 30% weight over a wood floor, which reduces weight almost 30 lbs overall for this length which is a major reason to own one anyhow. The 9 1/2 footer is more \$\$ and weight. I wanted to get what I could easily carry and shove around the shores of smaller rivers and lakes, without taking more stuff than is needed.

Very first thing I did out of the box was to apply a couple coats of Armorall on the whole boat, as a UV protection, and it makes it a lot more slippery in the water. This boat has a very smooth bottom material, textured everywhere else, so it should be faster than an all textured bottom fabric -- never seen this before!! The oars lock on a stainless pin with nylon cap screws, absolutely can not lose an oar by popping off the hull clips. Also has a very healthy extra rub rail on the whole keel section, and an extra fabric layer where the main pontoons rest on the ground, covering all bottom seams at least partially. Really first class construction, love that part !!! It does need an extra filling connector and hose, for an electric air pump -- the one they supply is glued on, to fill the much higher pressure floor, but it is a lot slower than an electric would be.



I plan on making a wider seat to fit completely across the tube tops to sit higher, put the battery in a box to balance the weight -- either in a plywood box platform forward or under the seat. Forget a sail rig as too complicated to fuss with, and live happily with the electric Minn Kota 40 (40 Lb. Thrust) as it pushes my other boat, a 14ft Bayliner, at #2 speed setting for over 6 hours before recharge.

My solo seat while motoring aboard the boat will be a lower beach sand chair, instead of the thwartships board furnished, so I get a back rest, lower seating, and more movable balance position. Put pipe insulation over the chair frame for puncture proofing, cover the air floor with

outdoor carpet to keep it nice and clean – kind of a mini yacht for the local small bay or river ?? Next comes a Bimini top, no I'm not foolin', I have some bows and will be taking measurements as I work on the details. I have all ready moved a set of attached home made beaching "kick up" wheels from another small boat to the inflatable, and they work even better! Just pick up the front handle on the bow and roll it over the gravel. A boat with training wheels, how cool can that be?



As the Minn Kota 40 will be the main power, I installed bigger sized welding cable as a power cord from the battery to the motor. This lowers resistance to get all the juice to the motor with little loss. It should be good for up to 8 hours without a recharge at the cruise setting – no gas mixing, noise or smell.





To recharge the battery while in the bush, I made a fused 10 amp cord that goes into the lighter on one end, and six feet later it has two shielded alligator clips to go on the battery, so it should charge as I drive, (my mechanic says it will work). If this doesn't work, I will put in another socket, 15 amp fused, and connected direct to the car battery as I have done in the past. The Trojan Group 24 deep cycle battery is in a closed box to help prevent acid spillage. It has bolt terminals for lighting clips on one case end -- the main welding wires and connector are 2 ft. long so they stay connected and safe full time. I do not have to open the case except to check water levels: am looking for a battery meter to fit into the case also. All this stuff makes battery power an easy matter, and the box is an easier carry with the large comfortable handle. No worse, maybe easier to carry than a sloppy, smelly, big 'ol six gallon gas can -- which is not good for a fabric boat, and yucky to clean off after every use.

All in all, one solution to getting onto remote waters without the hassle of a trailer or a boat launch!