

Oceanid RDC

Manufacturer: Oceanid Water Rescue Craft
Origin: USA
Cost: \$3300
Weight: 50lbs/23kg
Inflated Length: 15' 4"
Pack Size: 32"x22"x12"

Since my next piece for this publication in the series "Back to Basics—Swiftwater Rescue," will center on boat operations, it seemed appropriate to review one of the most ideal multi-purpose swiftwater rescue rafts to come along in 30 years.

Even before we started the Swiftwater Rescue Technician program, there was a crying need for river rescue craft. Since commercial rafting only dates back to the late 1960s, there were virtually no purpose-made rafts of any sort, and we used primarily commercial shore dinghies and military assault rafts. Finally, the industry, led by Avon, started to make rafts designed for rafting, and since they were there, they started being used for river rescue. By 1980, the techniques taught for using 4 m. IRBs, "inshore rescue boats," in the surf started being adapted for use in river rescues—commencing with the pioneering work of the San Diego Lifeguard River Rescue Team and members of the Northwest Region of the United States Lifesaving Association.

35 years on and there is a bewildering array of boats now being marketed as the "best" or "ideal" swiftwater rescue boats. The technology of whitewater rafts continues to escalate. The boats are routinely self-bailing, once a unique feature, and they are being made of lighter and stronger materials.

Powered boats are made as inboard or outboards; jet, prop, turbine fan; self-bailing; with open bows or sterns; as sleds or shallow v hulls; inflatable, rigid, or rigid-hulled inflatables. Even personal watercraft, or "PWCs," once considered "the dirt bikes of the water," are now called RWCs, with the addition of a rescue sled pulled behind.

The race to build "all

purpose" boats continues, even though one well-known raft manufacturer has named his company for the initials "State Of The Art Raft."

But boats specifically made for swiftwater rescue remain few and far between.



One recent entry, however, gets very close to the ideal, the RDC, (for Rescue Deployment Craft,) manufactured by Oceanid, an Idaho-based manufacturer.)

The RDC doesn't meet just some of the requirements for an all-around swiftwater/fast river rescue boat, but virtually all of them.

It is

lightweight, just 23 kg so one person

can carry it down a steep trail to inaccessible rescue locations. It doesn't require a trailer, obviously. It comes with an optional transom so it

can be run with up to a 5 horsepower outboard motor. It transports easily in a helicopter or the side-bay of a fire truck. It inflates either from a conventional SCUBA or SCBA cylinder, or with a foot pump. The material is strong and easily repairable in the field. Front and stern are identical. It can be paddled, powered, or towed. It is almost impossible to flip over on purpose unless overloaded.

When used on rope systems it can be deployed and managed by fewer rescuers in faster water than any other conventional whitewater raft.

It is "self-bailing" in the sense that if the nose is buried, water merely runs down the inflatable floor and out the other end. The deck is high enough off the side tubes so that rescuers dragging it on river rocks, over brush, posts, even barnacle beds in long-shore floods, will be able to avoid the pinhole leaks common to other boats in such circumstances.

Using optional accessory hardware, the RDC will pull at maximum speeds with fantastic stability behind PWCs, in the river or in the surf. At slow speeds behind a PWC or other boat it can carry up to 8 victims out of localized flood conditions.

Other hardware is designed so that the RDC can be used as a sled behind snowmobiles. The SAR team to which I belong has recently found this use particularly helpful. The RDC moves across the snow and ice easily, and the tied down are ideal for securing a rescue basket, AND attendant.

The RDC takes the place of virtually all inflatable "ice rescue decks" currently on the market, since it performs the same function, along with all of these others. We have also started using it as an assist and work platform for the new Debris Flow and Mud Rescue courses being taught throughout the United States, and now in Asia.

Because of its weight, the manufacturer has been queried to develop an auto-inflation package so the boat can be airdropped offshore, the proposed use being primarily for domestic US airports, many of which have sited runways over oceans, rivers and lakes. The additional weight will still make such a package half the weight of the nearest competitive product.

RDCs are made of a PVC/polyester material and seams are both taped and welded. The polyurethane coating diminishes UV deterioration substantially. The I-beam construction keeps it hard at low pressures.

The boat is 15 feet long, 4 feet wide, and the tubes are 1 foot in diameter. The boat has over 2000 pounds of positive buoyancy. It comes with a five year warranty.

The basic package—boat, breakdown paddles, repair kit, and multi-chamber pump costs \$3300.

The special bow cover, hardware for towing, and transom are extra.

More information on the RDC is available at : www.oceanid.com

- Jim Segerstrom 

