



PERFECT SOLUTION: Essex correspondent Colin Jarman puts the HonWave dinghy through its paces and finds it as fun as it is practical

More than just hot air...

AA Boat Doctor **Garth Cooper** was faced with either repairing his 10-year-old flubber or buying a new one. Now he's the proud owner of Honda's very latest model.

My cheap and cheerful 2.6 metre rubber dinghy was in need of some form of proofing as, after 10 years use, it would only stay fully pumped up for three or days. We had fitted new valves and had submersed it in a tank of water but could find no discernable leaks, so we came to the conclusion the material was becoming porous.

It owed me nothing having cost just £250 to buy, but was it worth sending it away to be treated and how long would the treatment last?

Also could I really put all my trust and that of young grandchildren in it?

It didn't take much persuasion to replace it with a new one, but this time something of better quality, and after a trawl through the gear test reports, adverts and chatting to mates I set myself a budget of £500.

I wanted a two-to-three-man boat, easily rowed, that could be powered by my Honda 2hp four-stroke, would be light enough to lift aboard and small enough to stow on the liferaft supports on my coachroof.

I looked at everything from the cheap and cheerful at £200 up to the positively exotic at

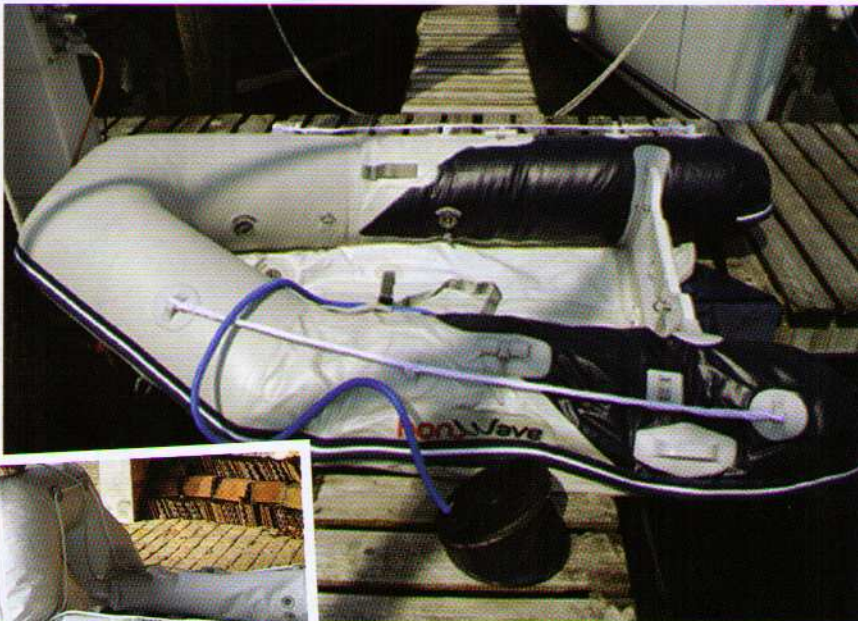
well over £1,000.

In the end I chose a 2.4m Honwave T24 tender at a dealer price of £580 (list price £700) from Seamark Nunn of Trimley near Felixstowe. It fitted the size profile, and is made of double-layer PVC, which is claimed to last longer and be less prone to damage when folding and stowing than the Hypolon of my previous boat. It also has a blow-up floor and keel.

It comes with pump (two-stage job too), solid GRP seat, pair of decent aluminium oars, a repair kit and pressure gauge, and a smart fold-over cover.



NEAT PACKAGE: The T24 laid out ready to inflate.



GOING UP: Partially inflated (above) for the seat to be attached. The large foot pump has a sensibly-long filler pipe, and each of the valve seats has a flash detailing the optimum pressure. It's certainly more attractive (and hi-tech) than my trusty – but now rather leaky – 10-year-old flubber (left).



I just wished I hadn't opened the user's manual. It is so poorly laid out and confusing as to be virtually useless.

There are three chambers, a feature I was particularly keen to have on the new boat, as I can inflate the forward chamber and stow it on the foredeck partially inflated as a safety aid (I don't have a full-time liferaft).

Each valve is marked with the optimum air pressure, hence the need to check with the pressure gauge. Both the transom and the seat are made of reinforced GRP.

One trick the book didn't suggest was attaching the seat lugs into the holding straps on each side with the chambers partially inflated then harden off. I did manage to twig that one for myself.

The central valve stubs were all a bit stiff to twist and close, and the end of the inflation pipe, which has a form of claw that locks into the valve, was bit tight to get in.

The pump, which has high-flow low pressure and low-flow high-pressure settings, worked a treat; it's quite large as these pumps go and good exercise for leg muscles atrophied by long hours at sea.

The valve covers are small, neat and lock down with a half turn. The two part aluminium oars are robust and are held in place in pin-style rowlocks and can be laid flat along the tube by pushing the shaft into retainer blocks.

When in the water I found the dinghy was remarkably stable to clamber in and out of, and although the seat is high up – virtually on top of the large-diameter side tubes – she's proved a nice little boat to row, even in the swells and wavelets of a busy river.

Rowing in my previous boat had always been torture, but this rows more like a hard dinghy. You actually propel it through the water with the long strokes rather than paddling it, and with little effort.

It also carries its way rather better. I put this down to the RIB-like underwater profile. The

inflatable keel gives definite bight and grip to the water.

With the outboard motor on this was even more noticeable; she didn't skid round corners, and was easily driven with a good turn of speed achieved with much less throttle than the flat bottom flubber.

There are two small inflatable 'trim-tabs' aft and believe me, they work. At full throttle in a choppy bit of water she didn't rear up and nor did great quantities of spray and splash come over the front.

The inflated floor delivers its promise to absorb the wave shocks and makes for a smooth comfortable ride. There's grab rope down each side, well positioned lifting handles for hauling up a beach and the towing eye on the bow incorporates a lifting handle. There are two additional eyes for setting up a towing bridle.

There's not a lot to fault but the weight is a problem – it's heavier than I realised. At 33kg, it is at my physical limit to lift and carry.

Getting it aboard inflated was cured by simply attaching a cord diagonally across the boat to two of the four lifting eyes, attaching it to a spare halyard and hauling up on the mast winch – easy-peasy. Once aboard she is easily turned over and stores neatly on the foredeck.

There is a hefty rubbing band round the chambers, with a pronounced curled moulding on the outside – which is a devil for snagging things such as guard wires, pontoon edges, or any amount of lines.

Only breakage so far has been the plastic moulding which clamps the two sections of the foot pump together.

Without a doubt this little boat is going to get a lot more use than the old one. It's actually fun just to take it out for a spin on its own. It was just over my budget, but what the heck – the enjoyment my grandchildren (to say nothing of granddad) will get from it is worth much more.



SPECIFICATION

LOA:	2.40 metres
Beam:	1.54 metres
Inner length:	1.48 metres
Tube dia:	42.5 cm
Dimensions:	112x60x32cm packed
Weight:	33 kg
Max hp:	6
Capacity:	3 adults
Warranty:	2 yrs
Price:	£700 (note that some dealers offer discounts)

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