



# Island Life

*Interview*

**HMS** places his Dictaphone under the nose of, Alex Cottle, the man at the helm of Island RIBs, to learn a little more about how and why this new company are succeeding in the ever competitive UK RIB market...

**H**ow did the launch of Island RIBs come about and what are the backgrounds of its core team?

Island RIBs was formed in 2014 by Alex Cottle and Brian Hallett. In the late 90s and early noughties, while Alex was an

engineer working in product development at JCB, Brian had made a name for himself as a RIB designer and manufacturer. Brian's hull designs in particular became well known for their excellent seakeeping properties.

Both Alex and Brian have spent considerable time at sea: Brian was raised on a boat, and Alex is an experienced sailor - from dinghies as a child to many miles at high-latitude during his twenties.



In 2013, Alex and Brian met while working on the build of a luxury yacht – Alex as an engineer, Brian as a shipwright. Realising they had complementary skills and shared a fundamental approach, the pair set out to utilise their considerable experience, both on the water and as craftsmen, to design and develop a new generation of RIBs.

**What was your original concept as a brand and is your plan progressing as you originally envisaged?**

To build high-quality RIBs in terms of performance, reliability, durability and ease of maintenance, and to ensure that we are able to support the boats we build for our customers for years to come. Our customers will find the same quality below the deck and inside



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Above: Work underway at the spacious boat yard on the Isle of Wight.

the console as they see on first inspection. We achieve this for a competitive price because we are efficient in other areas of our business. We concentrate first and foremost on our product – spending money on research and development and high-quality materials rather than marketing.

Three years on, I would say yes, our plan is progressing as we envisaged. We built our product before attempting to build our brand, and now we are in a position to start telling people we are here.

**In such a competitive marketplace, what makes the Island RIBs concept different from what other builders are offering?**

We design and build an adaptable product that we are able to ensure is compliant and functional.

Our approach is that of engineers and boatbuilders – craftsmen rather than salespeople. Every Island RIB is built to commission, and throughout the process our customers deal directly with the people who design and build their RIB. There are no middlemen. We work with each customer to ensure that the build options are specified correctly according to the customer's intended application.

We carry out all design, boatbuilding and assembly in-house on a single site. This enables

us to control production and ensure that our manufacturing procedures are adhered to, ultimately ensuring the quality of our product.

We are an innovative company with a flexible approach. We have an understanding of the materials that we use gained from years of experience and are willing to do things differently if we think this will improve our product, even if this means questioning what the practice in the industry is.

**How challenging has it been to launch a new product into the offshore RIB market?**

We started from the drawing board – a new manufacturer releasing a truly new product, which we developed from our own designs. Perfecting the designs, manufacturing tooling, building prototypes – the essential steps in new product development cannot be rushed. The greatest challenge we have faced is patience!

**As a new boatbuilder, what would you prioritise as being the top three essentials for success in the market?**

A great product. This may go without saying, however it is crucial that the product is sufficiently developed before it is launched.

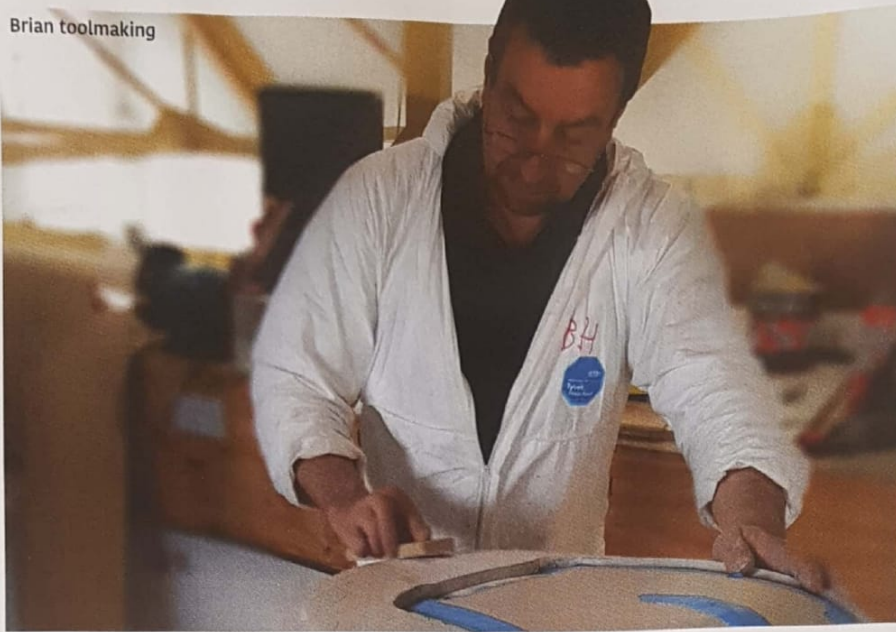
Boatbuilding is a business and success depends as much upon

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Brian toolmaking



Carefully developed and rigorously tested rather than hurried out of the workshop. Come and visit us and we might let you know a bit more!

**How do you see the RIB market changing over the course of the next five years, and how do you anticipate rising to the challenges involved?**

There are certainly challenges in the manufacturing sector as a whole at the moment, no matter what you are producing, but there are also opportunities. We manufacture a high-quality, British-built product with a broad appeal designed and built to exceed current standards. We are finding that there is a demand for our product despite current economic uncertainties. We have recently signed a distribution agreement with a company based in France and have just completed our first order.

We design, manufacture and assemble our RIBs here at our workshops in East Cowes. Our core team are fully employed - we believe in developing our own staff in-house and have established our apprenticeship scheme for this purpose, so we do not face the same potential challenges as those manufacturers who have outsourced production to Europe, or further afield.

**For what specific reasons should a potential customer put you on their shortlist?**

First, we offer a high-quality, British-built RIB with proven great performance for a fair price. Second, we spend our customers' money where it matters - on designing, building and improving our product. And finally, the quality of our build and finish extends to the parts of the boat that you can't see. **PBR**

your skills running a business as it does on your skills in building boats. Our RIBs are designed to last for many years and our customers need to be confident that we will be around to support the product they have bought in the future. We run all aspects of our business ourselves, from our accounts to our website, enabling us to closely monitor every part of our operation and ensure we are using our resources efficiently.

Carefully developing your brand is the other thing. In the early days of a new business it is easy to take up every offer that comes your way or make any modification that a customer requests, even if it goes against your professional judgment. Keep in mind the brand you are trying to create and consider any partnerships or modifications in that context.

**What is your most successful model in the range at present?**

The Island 7.5m. We designed the 7.5m to be a versatile platform offering a balance between performance and practicality. We

were clear from the outset that we wanted a RIB that not only looked good but would be easy to maintain and able to cope with extensive use in difficult conditions for many years.

The 7.5m has certainly proved to be versatile: owners include families using a RIB for water sports and days out, superyacht owners, yacht racing teams and commercial customers.

**Can you reveal what developments you envisage making as a company over the next 18 months?**

Although we have many years of experience within our team, we are still a new company. This is a competitive marketplace and we seem to have got it right with the 7.0 to 7.5 m range, so we are sticking to our guns. Any new product we launch will have been

