

If money is no object,
Zodiac's exciting CZ7
may well be the
ultimate adventure boat

Although military technology commonly filters down to the civilian sector, this is not typically the case with military vehicles and boats. The Jeep is probably the best-known exception. The Hummer is another civilian vehicle that has taken its styling cues from the Humvee — the Jeep replacement currently in use among our armed forces. With few exceptions, there's not much civilian demand for tanks.

On the marine side, we've seen World War II PT boats converted into yachts, but few other military watercraft have penetrated the recreational boating market. Until now. Billed as

the "Ultimate Adventure Boat," Zodiac's new CZ7 rigid-hull inflatable boat (RIB) is a civilian version of the military Zodiac H-733.

The H-733 is used by U.S. Navy SEALs and by both the U.S. and Canadian coast guards. The CZ7 boasts identical construction in every respect except, of course, for the gun mounts. The targeted buyer for the Zodiac CZ7 is the same guy who buys a Hummer

— except for the fact that you can buy four Hummers for the price of a CZ7. This rugged, crossover Zodiac will dent your bank account to the tune of nearly \$200,000.

This is a boat for the guy who wants the toughest, meanest boat in the harbor, and has the wherewithal to afford the best money can buy. It will find duty on megayachts where the soft sides won't mar the mother-ship's finish, and cost is no object. It will appeal to macho boaters who want to challenge the elements at any time or any place. This rig is not likely to appeal to your wife or girlfriend.

TRY TO BREAK IT

The CZ7 measures nearly 24 feet in length and, with the tubes inflated, has a beam of 9 feet. The rigid hull features a steep, 24-degree deadrise (measured at the transom), and the only way to describe the construction is rugged and substantial. Nothing on board is cheap or cheesy and nothing you grab is likely to come off in your hands.

Zodiac claims the CZ7 has the ability to withstand six Gs of acceleration when fully loaded — and while we didn't have any way to test this, it seems likely that bodies will break before the boat does.

Our boat was rigged with twin direct-injected Evinrude 150s and was carried on a custom Float-On trailer with Posi-Latch, a system that allows the boat to be driven to the bow stop and locked in place without the need for a cable and winch.

The fiberglass hull is hand laid using fire retardant vinylester resin. The inflatable collar contains five chambers and is made of neoprene Hypalon. The design includes inflation valves and pressure-relief valves. There's also an automatic air pump that maintains proper tube inflation as air and water temperature changes affect inflation pressures.

Naturally, the air chambers are constructed in such a manner that if one chamber is damaged or loses air pressure, the remaining chambers are unaffected.

POUR ON THE COALS

The hull is rated for 300 hp, and our rig's twin Evinrude 150s managed a top speed of 52.3 mph. The bottom design is patterned after offshore racing hulls. It handles exceedingly well and offers exceptional riding qualities. Based on our experience, it would seem that the



■ Built to withstand radical missions, this 23 1/2-footer is up to any civilian challenge. The aluminum console is rugged and filled with high-tech, military-grade electronics.

Extreme Machine

By Jim Barron

Extreme Machine

■ Break out the stealth PFDs. The new Zodiac is short on interior space but big on performance.

CZ7 is capable of handling more power — as well as the resulting boost in speed.

At rest, the Zodiac sits with its tubes at water level, and as the tubes are extremely buoyant, the boat offers excellent lateral stability. You can move around or step on the gunwale and the CZ7 barely moves.

At planing speeds, the hull rides on a narrow portion of the V and is very sensitive to weight shifts from side to side. The movement of one person has a considerable effect on lateral movement of the hull — although this is the expected tradeoff for the riding qualities of a well-designed 24-degree V bottom. For those who don't want to tell their friends where to sit, a set of trim tabs would be a nice addition. Heck, at a price of nearly \$200 Gs, they ought to be standard.

PUT HER HARD OVER

The Zodiac's aggressive deadrise allows equally aggressive handling. It can be pushed hard and fast into turns and, when well heeled over, the inflatable tubes that act as a chine on the inside of the turn provide additional grip to prevent the boat from sliding. When conditions are rough, they can also generate substantial spray fairly far forward that ends up in the cockpit. More moderate turns



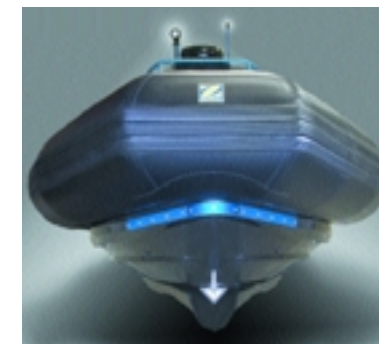
keep the tubes out of the water for a drier ride.

Given the right set of conditions, the sizable tubes can also temporarily lift the rigid, V portion of the hull out of the water, which can result in bouncing or sliding. Zodiac recommends appropriate caution in hard turns.

Nevertheless, this boat should be a real blast to drive once its abilities and idiosyncrasies are learned.

SHOCK FACTOR

With a 9-foot beam, you might expect the cockpit to be quite



■ Ullman hydraulically damped seats are more like saddles, allowing crewmen to distribute shock loads between the seats and legs. The hull's deep-V design and extremely sharp forward entry eases through seriously rough waves. Large air chambers provide exceptional buoyancy once they hit the water.

roomy. It's not. The tubes are 22 inches in diameter, and when you subtract 44 inches from 108 inches, the resulting interior

width is only slightly more than 5 feet.

With four suspension seats, a center console and forward stor-

Extreme Excursions

An interesting facet of the CZ7 buying experience is the chance to enroll in Zodiac's Extreme Excursions Adventure Academy. We had the pleasure of taking the one-day course, but one-half and two-day junkets are also available. This is a training course in boat handling and operations that can be tailored to an individual's specific desires. It is taught by former Navy Seals, Special Forces personnel and U.S. Coast Guard instructors as they put the CZ7 through its paces.

The first part of the training includes hands-on experience in the

proper handling of the CZ7. Hard turns, gentle turns and effective use of trim are covered in detail. Positioning the boat and docking maneuvers are also taught. From a practical standpoint, most *Trailer Boats* readers will find this section to be very basic.

The second part of the course is where the fun begins, and Zodiac has set up some interesting scenarios. For the pseudo-military paintball set, a make-believe Navy Seals Special Ops unit faces a mock "terror force" as they use the CZ7 to accomplish their mission. We were involved in the "rescue" of an am-

bassador from a pretend island in the Middle East. Our Extreme Excursion scenario also involved the transfer of personnel from one boat to another while running at planing speed in moderately choppy water. The buddy system was employed and we all wore Mustang survival suits and carried whistles for safety.

Other courses available are the "Lost Treasures Expedition" where an Indiana Jones-style adventure leads clients against seemingly insurmountable obstacles while racing the clock, and a "High Speed Tour" where clients can select a simple or complex

course around Baltimore Harbor.

Want to learn to run inlets or charge the surf? Extreme Excursions can arrange that, too.

This is an idea whose time has come. It is not only fun, it's also an opportunity to pick up practical boat-handling techniques from experts. The cost of a program such as this makes it generally prohibitive — except, of course, for those who can afford a boat such as the \$195,000 CZ7. There are numerous successful sports car driving schools, we say it's high time for a marine version. *Jim Barron*

Extreme Machine

JOCK BRADLEY/RIPPIN PRODUCTIONS PHOTOS



■ Designed to withstand 6 Gs, Zodiac's CZ7 is prepared to challenge the surf and seas anywhere in the world.



age box, there is not much space left for crew movement. And, of course, the RIB design precludes under-gunwale stowage. Still, the CZ7 offers numerous interesting innovations.

This military-derived Zodiac features a special Shock Mitigating System (trademarked SMS). This includes the inflatable collar and shock-absorbing Skydex decking. This is the same material that's used to absorb shock in Nike athletic shoes.

Finally, the four Ullman shock-absorbing seats are more like saddles than seats. Their height is adjustable and they allow you to distribute impact loads between your legs and backside. The calm-water joy-

rider won't find them very comfortable — but for long trips in rough conditions, they work quite well.

DRESSED TO THE 9s

The console is all aluminum and contains a full complement of Faria multifunction gauges. In addition, a high-end Raymarine electronics package is standard. This consists of a VHF radio and 10.4-inch color display head that can be split between a digital sounder, chartplotter and 2 kW radar.

Another noteworthy standard is Volvo's SeaKey, which is the marine equivalent of On-Star. SeaKey can tell you where your boat is even if you are not on board, and can warn of leaks or other impending

problems. A special button sends out a call for help should an emergency occur.

Other military-styled goodies include: Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) capability, a Night Nav 1018 Night Surveillance System by Night Vision Technologies and a cockpit communication system by Tiger Performance.

There's no doubt that the CZ7 is a unique boat that, except for its prohibitively expensive price, would appeal to macho types everywhere. Recognizing this, Zodiac has plans for future versions that are more affordable, and will also be introducing a complete line of "Ultimate Adventure Boats" intended for extreme conditions.

SPECIFICATIONS

ZODIAC CZ7	
Base Price	
(w/ twin Evinrude 150s and trailer)	\$195,000
Price as Tested	\$195,000
Length	23' 9"
Beam	9' 0"
Weight	3700 lbs.
Fuel Capacity	133 gals.
Maximum Horsepower	300
Engines as Tested	Twin Evinrude 150 2.6L DFI V-6 two-strokes
Horsepower (combined)	300
Propellers	14 1/4 x 21" aluminum 3-blades

Zodiac of North America, Dept. TBM, 540 Thompson Creek Road, Stevensville, MD 21666; 410/643-4141; zodiac.com

TEST RESULTS

Engine (rpm)	Speed (mph)	Fuel (gph)	Range ¹ (mpg) (miles)
1000	7.6	3.8	2.7 323
1500	10.9	5.4	2.0 239
2000	15.0	7.2	2.1 251
2500	23.5	9.8	2.4 287
3000²	31.1	11.0	2.8 335
3500	37.7	13.8	2.7 323
4000	41.3	16.0	2.6 311
4500	45.5	22.2	2.0 239
5000	49.6	29.0	1.7 203
5300 (WOT)	52.3	37.4	1.4 167

¹ Based on 90% fuel capacity

² Optimum cruising speed

High-end gizmos aside, the pure adrenaline rush of putting a rig such as the CZ7 through the wringer is enough to hook you on this commando wannabe. Sign us up. 🐾