

# Some like it fast

*A boat for those looking for that special something.*

*By Mike Brown*



**K**irby Marine won the outright award for WA Boat of the Year in 2009 and they did it again this year, and both times they won by a clear margin. They also took out Aluminium Boat of the Year, for boats that many people think of as inflatables – rubber duckies. And thinking that way, there are people who wonder what their attraction is.

They are actually rigid inflatables: aluminium boats with an inflatable collar. And the Kirby aluminium structure is so heavily engineered that they will probably outlast every other aluminium boat. Customers seem to think so: every Kirby sold second hand has fetched more than its new price.

Most Kirby Naiads face working lives as sea rescue craft, or as patrol boats for Police and government agencies. But a few are built for private owners who want special qualities in their leisure boats. Kirby principal Rob Kirby says the typical buyer is a time-poor man.

“When you are short of time you want to be certain that the plan for boating on a given day can be carried out almost regardless of the weather. For similar reasons these people like to go fast.”

The wishes came true for whoever bought the 2010 Boat of the Year, a 10m Naiad. This is the fastest boat I have driven: 58 knots. That’s what a pair of V8 350hp Yamahas can

do for you, but only on the right hull. This hull has a 27deg deadrise, a pair of steps in the bottom and, when the collar is clear of the water at speed, a narrow hull.

Close relatives to rigid inflatables (RIBs for short) are rigid buoyancy boats that use foam plastic or other materials in place of the inflatable collar. They get buoyancy all right but miss out on one of the RIB’s great features – the shock absorption the collar gives. On one of our testing days (not the 58-knot day) we were at close to full throttle directly into the seas produced by a 35-knot wind. Naturally the bow went up and down in large amounts, but what counted was how gently we came down. The sharp bottom





and forefoot eased the Naiad back into the water, and the collar did the final job: it had far too much buoyancy to let the bow bury, but its ability to deform took all the bite out of the landing.

That super-sharp bottom and the collar have a couple of secret weapons added to them to cope with really nasty weather: special seats and special floor. The seats, four of them, are Ullman jockey-style suspension seats that have a reputation as the world's best – and at \$5,000 each that is understandable. Between the carpet and the aluminium deck is the other weapon, a fatigue membrane. I can testify that it makes a big difference to comfort.

In leisure boating terms this Naiad could be called a bowrider as there is a small forward cockpit ahead of the cabin. You reach it either through a door from the cabin, or along aluminium side decks built over the collar. There are plenty of handholds to make this safe, including grab rails over the soft top – a close to unique feature. Things to hang onto are important on a rough water boat and the Naiad abounds with them.

The cabin is large and lined, and the two bunks – or storage areas for day trips – are bigger than normal single beds. Aft of them are a large portable fridge to starboard with a toilet opposite. This is a beauty, featuring an electric vacuum flush (with its own small fresh water container), and a portable sullage tank mounted alongside it. This means you have none of the worries about built-in tanks or potential smells, and the vacuum system with its minimal water usage means great

capacity is not needed. The owner had this Naiad geared up for long weekends of fishing or island visiting, mainly with two to four people aboard, hence the four main seats, the pot winch and the uncluttered cockpit. Alternative layouts could replace two of the seats with a galley unit (still leaving a folding lounge aft), or whatever else you could dream up. These boats are built to order, and they are fitted out to suit the owner.

The concept of linking fish hooks and pot pulling with an apparently vulnerable soft, inflated collar might seem bizarre to the casual observer, but this boat's commercial cousins have pulled thousands of pots. Kirby fit reinforcement to all the wear points, and no one has had any problems. What the collar does for fishermen is provide superb stability. Fill one side with anglers (the collar makes great seats too) and the boat will list until the collar is in good contact with the water and will list no more.

The owner likes his fishing but is not single minded about it, and Rottneest runs are on the cards. 10 passengers could get there in 15 minutes for lunch at the pub, or they have enough space on board to set up tables and chairs for a picnic lunch. They have an excellent platform for swimming, and the divers among them have an even better dive boat. It has storage for loads of scuba gear in the cabin, space for gearing up, excellent water entry over the sides, and a fresh water shower after peeling off.

Apart from being such a practical day boat the Naiad is also a highly desirable plaything. With the Yamaha V8s the throttle and gear

## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Model:</b>	Kirby Naiad 10m
<b>Length overall:</b>	10.0m
<b>Beam:</b>	3.2m
<b>Fresh water:</b>	120L
<b>Fuel capacity:</b>	670L
<b>Motors:</b>	2 x 350hp Yamaha outboards
<b>Price:</b>	\$270,000 to \$330,000
<b>Builder:</b>	Kirby Marine, 24 Sparks Rd, Henderson Tel: 08 9410 2270

change controls are electronic, so no chance of graunching into gear, and no sudden death throttle movements. You just get lots of power that comes on progressively – and gets you up to speed with Aston Martin-quality acceleration. A lot of the sensation you might expect is absent. The motors are quiet, the hull just about silent, and not much in the jolt line penetrates the seats or fatigue membrane.

The sensations come on once you turn the wheel. Put this boat into a turn with more Gs than a centrifuge and it just hangs on. The Ullman seats let us hang on too, and far more conveniently than using our hands. Set aside the serious fishing or day cruising – people will want to buy this just for fun.

What they will also get is a boat that will give joy of ownership. This is an industrial product they will be proud to say came from Western Australia. Overall and detail design is first class, the execution and finish superb, and the quality of fit-out is as good as it gets. ■