

RODMAN 55 PATROL

In this year's Christmas boat test special, we head to Spain to test one of Rodman's most successful models, the 67-knot 55 Patrol

Words **Jack Haines** Pictures **Paul Wyeth**

Oscar Rodriguez, vice president CEO of Rodman, is standing in front of me holding an invisible AK-47. His legs are bent at the knee and braced for recoil, as if the imaginary trigger beneath his right index finger is capable of pumping out actual rounds. "You see that hatch over there?" he gestures towards the companionway. "I could fire an AK-47 at it from point-blank range and it would not pierce the surface."

That's some serious protection, which is what you would expect from material that costs €3,000 per square metre. Mix into the equation a Kevlar-infused hull and bulletproof windows and you begin to appreciate what a serious bit of kit the Rodman 55 is.

It has become somewhat of a tradition for us to test something a bit special in our Christmas issue, including a Type 23 Royal Navy frigate and Safehaven Marine's Barracuda. This year it's the turn of the 55 Patrol, a boat that Rodman has built over 180 of across a period of 20 years, and in that time they have been dispatched to customs patrols, harbourmasters, pilots and police forces. The particular one we're on is destined to head for Mozambique to help local forces protect fishing fleets from

the threat of pirates. With twin Hamilton waterjets and a pair of 1,375hp MTUs, its storming performance and shallow draught make it the ideal craft for the job, but more of that later.

Arrive at Rodman's HQ in Vigo, southern Spain, and you soon understand what a large operation its commercial vessel arm is. There are rows and rows of outboard-powered 33 Patrols lined up on the hard, ready to be shipped off; the 55 we're testing is rafted to one of five hulking 110 Patrols that are heading off to the Middle East. It's not just military craft either; the yard also builds offshore catamarans for wind farm and oil-platform supply and a range of commercial fishing vessels; it's no wonder that new leisure craft have been few and far between, given Rodman's commercial commitments and their lucrative contracts.

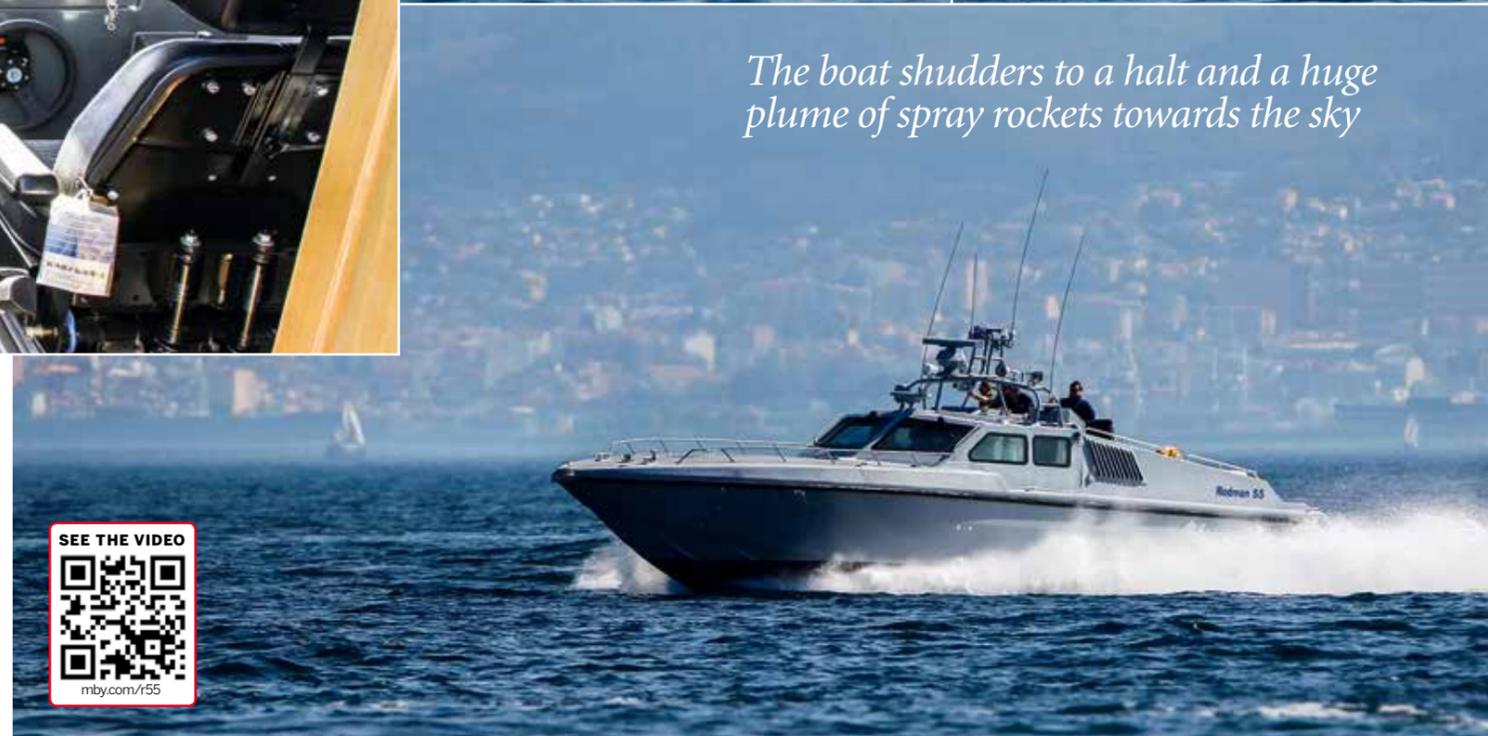
Despite its fit-for-purpose nature, the 55's lines are surprisingly handsome. Its long nose leads back to a rakish cabin roof while gently sloping buttresses lead the eye down to its pert transom. From the bow, its knife-like deep-vee hull, rippling with chines and boasting a prominent sprayrail, snarls an evil grin back at you. I certainly wouldn't want to see it charging down my wake trail, blue light flashing.

Oscar fires up the engines and they burst into life with a bark that suggests noise suppression isn't so much of a concern when





The boat shudders to a halt and a huge plume of spray rockets towards the sky



you're outrunning pirates. The motors idle impatiently below the open aft deck, sending great snorts of water out of the transom via dustbin-like through-hull exhausts. Even at tickover, the boat feels raw, the deck below my feet vibrating in time with the throb of the MTUs. We release the lines and Oscar engages the joystick, sliding the boat sideways with considerable grace.

The aft deck on this particular 55 is sparse to the say least, with just a liferaft and yellow lifebuoy in place to break up the gunmetal canvas. Optional extras exclude the likes of a wet bar or sunpads, and Rodman will add some seats if require, though if it's weapons you're after, they have to be installed by a NATO-approved supplier, which seems sensible.

AGILE STEERING

There is very little protection for anyone but the helmsman, who gets the basics of a small and somewhat ineffective wind deflector atop the dash and a swivelling leaning post that slots in place to

starboard of the helm and hems them in tight. For anyone else on deck, it's a case of grabbing the nearest handhold and preparing for your face to be battered by the oncoming breeze for the foreseeable.

You peer through the low-slung radar arch; close and low enough to act as a bracing point for crew and topped with an open array radar scanner, three powerful searchlights, a loud hailer, VHF antennae and the solitary blue light. The dash is almost brutal in its bareness with dials and switches, lacking aesthetic consideration laid out before you and a pair of upright black throttles sprouting out of it.

This is the only jet-driven boat that I have helmed that doesn't have the word 'Williams' emblazoned on the side. In my head, I expected it to feel just like a 19-tonne, 2,750hp jetRIB, and in some ways it does. The grip is phenomenal and the ease with which the tiny dodgem-style wheel flings the 55 from side to side is reminiscent of a jet tender, but good grief is this thing a handful when you up the power. The wheel is incredibly sensitive and

it only takes millimetric adjustments to get the boat to change direction with the speed and tenacity of a housefly. The twin jet nozzles work against each other at speed, meaning the boat naturally begins to snake, and it takes a steady hand and a dose of concentration to stop it from developing into a tank slapper. Work too hard against the boat's natural motion and the slaloming gets worse. It's a boat that needs to be driven and not left to its own devices.

In harder turns, the boat is more

confidence inspiring as it becomes clear just how well glued to the water it is. The sensation of quick lock-to-lock manoeuvres is unlike anything I've ever driven as it leans hard into the turns, not like a sportsboat, but more like an acrobatic aeroplane. The way it digs in and heaves its topsides towards the sky as you dial in the lock conjures up images of a Moto GP rider flinging their weight through a chicane as the bike pivots beneath them. It's a calm day, but the manner in which the 55 bisects the wash of the chase boat hints at a hull that will carve through big seas and comfortably maintain high speeds. The boat is so fit for purpose and stripped of unnecessary luxuries that there is nothing on it to rattle or squeak; it's bulletproof and it feels it.

CRASH STOP

In benign conditions we topped out at 48 knots, but this particular boat, weighing in at 19 tonnes, was four tonnes heavier than a 55 would normally be and it had some weed on the hull; eliminate these factors and it should be good for 55 knots. One particular client's request for a high-performance version resulted in a staggering top speed of 67 knots.

Oscar takes the wheel so that I can head below, but not before he has demonstrated

one of the 55's party tricks: the crash stop. Essentially, this entails driving flat out and then putting the jetdrives in reverse, flipping the buckets and grinding the 55 to a halt within a boat's length. I have tried this on a Williams, but the idea of doing it on something this size with such huge forces in play is a nerve-wracking prospect. The crew find a spot to brace against and Oscar eases the throttles on to the stops before taking a good look around and counting down slowly: "Three... two... one!" He draws the throttles towards him and the bow dives towards the water, we brace hard as the boat shudders to a halt and a huge plume of white spray rockets towards the sky and crashes down as if a blue whale has submerged behind us. I unclench my eyes and look to the helm to see Oscar grinning from ear to ear.

Below decks, the comfort levels for crew are much higher as there are five shock-absorbing KAB seats to help take the strain. Whereas the open deck is ideal in clear weather, for general patrol, the wheelhouse feels more focused. It's hunkered down, claustrophobic and noisy, with huge screens bursting out of the dash displaying the radar and night vision camera. The helm station is a mishmash of black switches, control screens and dials and there isn't a touchscreen in sight, just big

A Spartan cabin strips things back to the bare essentials



Just enough space to brew a cuppa at the galley



Creature comforts do extend as far as a basic loo



A CLOSER LOOK
RODMAN 55 PATROL

SUSPENSION SEATS

The five KAB suspension seats in the wheelhouse increase comfort when the going gets really hairy and the crew need to maintain the pace.



UPPER HELM

The sparse, utilitarian deck helm offers very little that could distract the skipper from the job of driving. The joystick delivers excellent slow-speed manoeuvrability.



COMMS AREA

A spot in the aft wheelhouse is dedicated to communications, leaving the skipper and navigator free to concentrate on their respective jobs during the course of a patrol.



ENGINEROOM

Like the rest of the boat, the 55 Patrol's engine room has little consideration for comfort and practicality. It's hot, cramped and dark with just about enough space to wriggle around and check the necessary service items, but it's not a space that you would want to spend a huge amount of time in when rolling around at sea.





One optional extra you won't find on most price lists is a gun mount on the bow

You need your wits about you on deck as there is very little stopping you from toppling into the drink

The jetdrives allow for ludicrous handling and extraordinary amounts of grip. The boat's agile handling and shallow draught make it a potent chase weapon

The military, police forces and harbour patrols want a boat that can be relied upon

clear buttons that can be used by a gloved finger when you're haring along at 50 knots. The seat in the aft corner is surrounded by VHF sets and communication equipment, leaving the helmsman free to deal with the business of driving.

The cabin is there to provide a modicum of comfort for the crew and somewhere for miscreants to sit, so it isn't exactly the last word in luxury. There's a toilet and a small galley, but the only place I could stand upright was with my head poking through the deck hatch. And the décor? Let's call it prison-cell chic with a military flourish.

PROVEN PERFORMER

You see the 55 out on the water and its running attitude is perfect, its stance poised and aggressive. Even though this particular boat is overweight, it

still handles well and consumes long distances with boundless vigour.

These are the spoils of building one type of boat for over 20 years without having to cater for changing trends, living space or unnecessary options. It's a different world to building a successful leisure craft because in the commercial sector, if something works, they will buy it and continue to do so.

The military, police forces and harbour patrols want hard proof that a boat which is going to be relied on in emergencies and in potentially hazardous conditions is going to get the job done while ensuring those on board are safe — and not just from an imaginary AK-47. **MBY** **Contact** Rodman. Web: www.rodman.es. With thanks to UK Rodman agent RBS Marine. Web: www.rbsmarine.com

THE HELM VIEW

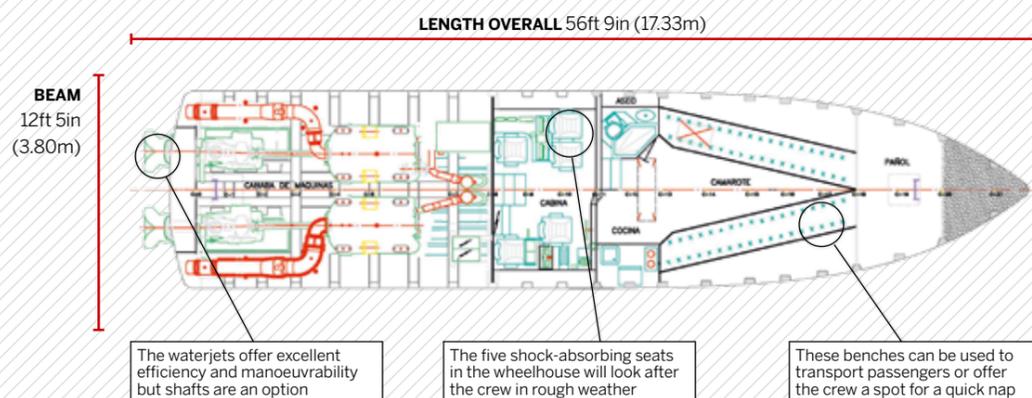


Huge radar and night-vision screens sprout out of the central dash so all in the wheelhouse can see them

The helm station won't be winning any prizes for aesthetics with its eclectic mix of screens and buttons

The hinged helm panel allows easy access to the electronics so issues can be sorted quickly

THE DATA



PRICE AS TESTED
€1.8m ex VAT
FUEL CAPACITY
660 imp gal (3,000 litres)
WATER CAPACITY
24.2 imp gal (110 litres)
DRAUGHT
3ft 1in (0.95m)
RCD CATEGORY
N/A
DESIGNERS
Rodman Polyships
DISPLACEMENT
19 tonnes (light)

PERFORMANCE

TEST ENGINES Twin MTU 1,375hp with Hamilton jetdrives

FIGURES	ECO					FAST		MAX
	1,000	1,200	1,400	1,600	1,800	2,000	2,200	
RPM	8.8	10.0	12.1	19.2	29.5	37.2	43.3	2,400
Speed	52	80	136	182	266	394	512	604
LPH	11.4	176	29.9	40.0	58.5	86.7	113	133
GPH	0.77	0.57	0.40	0.48	0.51	0.43	0.38	0.36
MPG	406	300	214	253	267	227	203	191

Speed in knots. GPH & MPG figures use imperial gallons. Range in nautical miles and factors in 20% reserve. Figures taken from on-board readings. Prices exclude VAT. Light winds and calm conditions for sea trial. 5 crew and a liferaft on board.

RIVALS

Safehaven XSV 17
Price from €1.2m ex VAT
A surface-driven wave piercer capable of 60 knots thanks to twin 1,000hp Caterpillar C12s.



Bladerunner 51
Price from £1.2 ex VAT
Sixty five-knot leisure boat that could be converted for military use. Set the 2005 Round Britain Record.

