

New Response Boat Flexes CG Sea Muscles

Story and photo by PA3 Barry Bena

For more than 35 years, the 41-foot utility boat has been referred to as the workhorse of the Coast Guard. Search and rescue and law enforcement missions, just to name a couple, have relied heavily on the 41-foot utility boat. But that's about to change. The Coast Guard has just ratcheted things up a notch with the addition of the 45-foot Response Boat-Medium.

The RB-M will be the eventual successor to the aging fleet of 41-footers and its capabilities far exceed that of the boats they are replacing.

"We're thrilled at the capabilities these assets bring to our efforts," said Capt. Scott Buschman, Sector Key West commander. Station Key West recently received its RB-M during a ceremony held at Sector Key West, Oct. 6, 2008, and the crew has already put the RB-M through some tests.

Until the arrival of the RB-M, Station Key West relied on the MLB for many missions, including passenger transfers.

Chief Warrant Officer Dudley Morgan, commanding officer of the station, explained that because of the design of the MLB to withstand heavy surf, it was not the ideal platform for passenger transfers. The

boat would roll substantially even in moderate seas, whereas, the RB-M does not.

"We do a lot of passenger transfers," said Morgan. With the (RB-M) we could pretty much come in at a 90-degree angle, conduct the transfer, and be out of there easily. It's a little tougher with the 47 since it likes to roll a little more."

With a top speed of more than 45-miles per hour, the RB-M almost doubles the UT-B's max speed of approximately 25-miles per hour.

Another characteristic unique to the RB-M and the larger 47-foot motor lifeboat, is its self-righting ability.

Under adverse weather conditions, the RB-M has the capability to self-right in the event it capsizes. Although extreme seas are not a regular occurrence in South Florida, this can be an invaluable feature for Coast Guard smallboat stations that deal with extreme conditions more often.

The jet-drive system, which totally eliminates the traditional propeller, is another characteristic found on the RB-M. The RB-M utilizes a twin-water jet-drive system, which is controllable via two stalks that are similar to gaming joysticks, on the coxswain's and navigator's chair.

"It has similar characteristics to the (Special Purpose Craft-Law Enforcement) such as speed and maneuverability so it is ideal for us here in Key West," said Morgan.

The SPC was the newest smallboat in the Coast Guard's arsenal, offering increased speed, better crew accommodations and more maneuverability than the 25-foot Response Boat-Small and the UTB.

Not surprisingly, Station Key West continues to be on the cutting edge and the front line in almost all Coast Guard missions. Because of this, they will continue to be provided the tools necessary to complete these jobs safely and effectively.

"We get the newest boats the Coast Guard has to offer," said Morgan. "The RB-M though, it's definitely our favorite."



The Coast Guard's newest asset, the 45-foot Response Boat-Medium, cuts through the water off Key West, Fla. The RB-M is capable of speeds greater than 40-nautical-miles per hour, and is able to traverse 12-foot seas and 50-knot winds.