

# BARRACUDA SV 11

It has taken us a while to top our last Christmas boat test of a Type 23 Frigate but this storm-chasing stealth craft was our scariest mission yet

Text: **Hugo Andreae** Photos: **Lester McCarthy**





Staring up at the vast green wall of water looming over us, I can't help wondering how deep Jack is enjoying the Florida sunshine. This was meant to be his gig but we've been waiting so long for a big enough storm to blow in that by the time we get the call-up, Jack's busy sunning himself at the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show. Luckily, or should that be unluckily, I had no such excuse, which is why I now find myself strapped into the navigator's seat of Safehaven Marine's remarkable new Barracuda SV11 staring up the face of the biggest wave I have ever had the misfortune to meet.

For boat enthusiasts and YouTube fanatics alike, Safehaven Marine is something of a legend. Based outside Cork in the south-west corner of Ireland, it has a reputation for building some of the toughest boats in the world. However, it's the company's unique approach to marketing that has turned them into an internet sensation. Rather than hiring a couple of pretty girls to pose on the foredeck while the boat skims over a sun-kissed sea, the Safehaven team prefer to wait for a Force 11 storm to blow in from the Atlantic before motoring out to meet it with nothing but a battery of GoPros bolted to the decks. The resulting videos make spectacular viewing when enjoyed from the comfort and safety of your own living room. From where I'm sitting, however, it's a little too spectacular for comfort.

We've spent the morning playing in the surf at the entrance to Cork Harbour. This is where the outgoing tide collides with the incoming Atlantic swell, creating a vicious patch of large, steep

unpredictable rollers. The Barracuda shrugged off the challenge with aplomb, powering through the waves and landing in the troughs without so much as a squeak or shudder to speak of. Since then the wind has picked up even more, whipping the spray off the tops of the waves with gusts of up to 50 knots as we head further offshore in search of their other favourite playground.

The aptly named Daunt Rock is an underwater pinnacle, which juts up from the surrounding sea bed to a few metres below the surface. As the rollers charge in across the Atlantic's vast unbroken fetch, they are forced up over the rock into mountainous waves that come crashing down on to anything in their path. We are that 'anything' and right now the Barracuda feels like a fragment of jetsam bobbing helplessly on a storm-tossed ocean.

## THE EYE OF THE STORM

I shoot a nervous glance across at my skipper Ian. Up until now we've managed to time our approach so that the crest of the wave has already broken before it reaches us, dissipating the force and allowing us to punch through the boiling white surf relatively unscathed. But this one is different. The wave is still building, its crest towering over us like a sheet of cold steel twice our height and who knows how many times our weight. As we power up the face of it, nose pointed at the sky, everything seems to freeze. Suspended between sea and sky we are completely at its mercy.

I just have time to see the bow disappear into a wall of green water before the wave collapses on top of us. The windscreen is obliterated, the wheelhouse is plunged into darkness and all I can hear is the roar of water. For a moment I think my

time is up. Then suddenly we're out the other side, dropping like a stone into the chasm that has opened up behind the wave. Now it's my stomach's turn to defy gravity, disappearing into my chest while the rest of my body plunges into free fall.

The landing, when it comes, isn't as hard as I'd feared, cushioned by the 22° deep-vee hull and the seat's long suspension travel. As the water cascades off the steeply raked screen I can see one of the wipers flapping around at an disconcerting angle but the glass itself is intact and I can still hear the reassuring beat of the twin Caterpillar C9's chuntering away behind us. We're safe and so is the SV11. The only damage is a missing wiper blade and a smashed radar scanner, which was ripped off the mast by the sheer force of the water washing over us. I'm happy just to be alive but Ian is already working out how to re-engineer the radar mounting so that it can withstand this kind of punishment. That's the point of these extreme weather sea trials, to put the boats through hell before their customers have to.

## DISCERNING CUSTOMERS

So who are these customers and why do they have such extreme requirements? Thus far the majority of them have been port authorities and commercial operators who need to go out at all times of the year regardless of sea conditions; the only other boat out with us today is the Cork Pilot in, you've guessed it, a Safehaven Marine Interceptor 42 pilot boat. A handful of private customers have bought craft for their own use too, usually for offshore fishing expeditions. The Barracuda, however, is aimed at the military. Not surprisingly it's the yard's most extreme creation

SEE THE VIDEO



mb.com/bar



*The resulting structure is so stiff it makes other production craft look like oversized Airfix kits*

yet, a bulletproof stealth craft with serious fire power both in the engineroom and under the foredeck. Fast, indestructible, all but invisible to radar and with built-in lifting points for slinging it under a helicopter, it's just the job for intercepting bad guys or dropping behind enemy lines.

However, if you ask very nicely and are happy to replace the gyro-stabilised gun platform with a couple of berths and some rod holders, it could just make the ultimate all-weather cruising boat. With that in mind, and a healthy pinch of salt, we decided to put it through our usual MBY testing process to see how well it would work as a leisure cruiser.

## WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Designed by Safehaven Marine's founder Frank Kowalski, it features a full planing deep-vee hull with a constant deadrise angle of 22° and a slim wavepiercing bow. Two flat chines provide additional lift and stability while helping to deflect spray. This is what gives the Barracuda its unique blend of pace and seakeeping in both head and following seas, where semi-planing hull forms often struggle. Its strength comes partly from the heavy-duty hand-laid FRP composite (6,800g on hull bottom, 8,500g along the keel) and partly from the copious reinforced stringers and ribs. The resulting structure is so rigid that it makes standard production craft feel like oversized Airfix kits.

The superstructure uses lighter cored composites with carbon fibre mouldings and optional ballistic Kevlar panels capable of stopping a 7.62mm round from an AK47 in its tracks. The standard inch-thick glass can also be upgraded to 38mm ballistic windows if you're worried about aerial bombing raids from the local seagull population. Watertight seals on the aft door and weighted baffles on the air intakes for the wheelhouse and engineroom mean it can survive a complete inversion, so it should cope okay with a little wind against tide through Hurst narrows.

## LETHAL WEAPON

The reason it looks so cool is because all those flat angled surfaces are designed to disperse radar waves rather than reflect them back to source, ideal for evading your local Harbourmaster's speed traps but you may want to add a switchable AIS transponder when crossing the Channel in fog.

If you do find yourself in a stand-off with a petulant official, the Barracuda does have a couple of other persuasive features. Our

prototype test boat was equipped with a flame-spitting gas gun mounted on a gyro-stabilised platform that rises up from a watertight compartment under the foredeck but the real deal can be fitted with anything from a remote operated machine gun/grenade launcher to a non-lethal sonic canon. Any one of these should guarantee you the prime spot at your anchorage of choice.

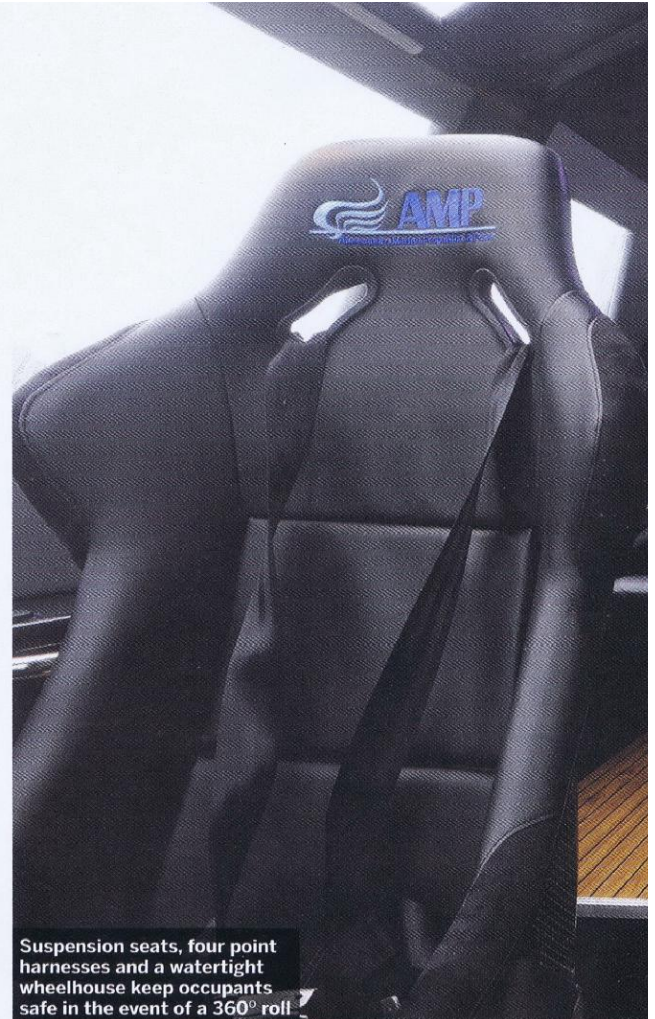
## FLOATS LIKE A BUTTERFLY, STINGS LIKE A BEE

On-board luxuries are not the Barracuda's strong point but the décor does have a certain minimalist chic. All five seats are fitted with four point harnesses and long travel suspension so the skipper never has to ease off the throttles for the sake of their passengers, and two of the rear ones have natty little carbon fibre chart tables with night lights for mission planning – although they seemed to work okay for cheese and pickle sandwiches too. Shame about the lack of cup-holders, though – have they not heard of gin and tonic?

The helm position is perfection itself, enabling you to see and reach all the key controls even when strapped in so tight that you can barely breathe. The steering is remarkably light and direct for such a heavy duty machine and, thanks to the oversized rudders needed to control it when surfing down the face of a following wave, it handles more like a sterndrive sportsboat than a shaftdrive plodder.

Performance is pretty useful too. Even with the drag of all that sterngear we clocked a maximum speed of 33 knots through seas that would have left most boats in bits long before they'd reached their theoretical top speed. If you need to go faster, or shallower, you can always opt for waterjet drives, pushing the top speed up to a claimed 50 knots.

Surprisingly, it's not that noisy inside. The wheelhouse structure is so well sealed from both engine and wind noise that you can happily hold a conversation while travelling at 30 knots through a hail of rain. Or bullets. But perhaps the most surprising thing of all is that once you realise just how solid and safe the Barracuda feels when hammering through 5m seas, it suddenly seems the most natural thing in the world. Despite my initial fears, this quickly became the most exhilarating, adrenaline-fuelled boat test I've ever had the pleasure of conducting. Even when I caught a wave at the wrong angle the SV11 simply barrelled on unfazed by my cack-handed rough weather driving skills.



Suspension seats, four point harnesses and a watertight wheelhouse keep occupants safe in the event of a 360° roll

Foredeck well for the hydraulic weapons platform eats into accommodation but optional extras include this rather fetching gun rack



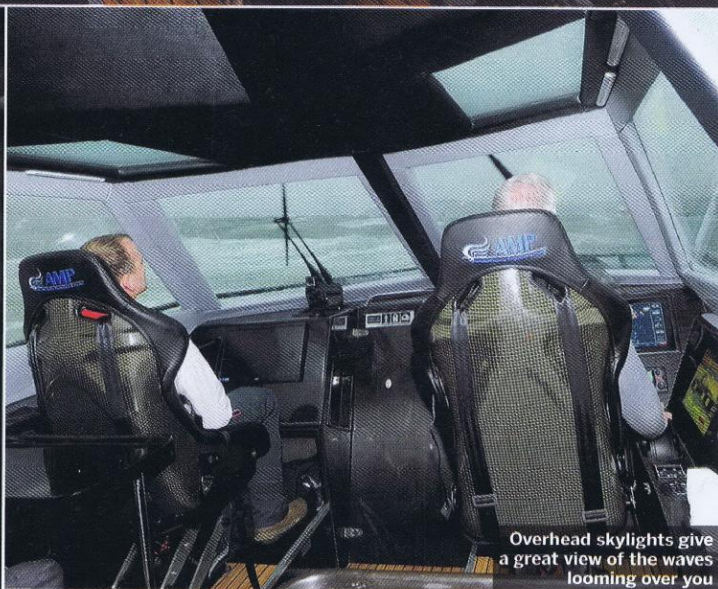
Hugo enjoys having all this weaponry at his disposal







In a perfect world all boat exhausts would like this!



Overhead skylights give a great view of the waves looming over you



Bulletproof glass and superstructure are optional extras



## A CLOSER LOOK WITH HUGO ANDREA

### CARBON FIBRE ACCESSORIES

Birdseye maple is all very well on a luxury motor yacht but on a military stealth craft nothing says cutting-edge design as much as a glossy carbon fibre chart table. The red reading light ensures your special forces operatives can check the mission plans without ruining their night vision.



### FUEL SHUT-OFF VALVES

Just because your craft is built to survive everything from a Force 11 storm to a direct hit from an AK47 doesn't mean it can't be aesthetically pleasing too – these stainless steel fuel shut-off valves are as solid and practical as they come but look like beautiful boat jewellery too.



### SUSPENSION SEATS

X-Craft supply these C-Force suspension seats to absorb any pounding which the deep-vee hull hasn't already dealt with. Based around a carbon fibre Kevlar Recaro bucket seat mounted on a suspension bracket with adjustable springs and dampers, they can be fine-tuned to suit the occupant's exact weight.



### ENGINE ROOM

The standard 575hp Caterpillar D9s run on V-drives for maximum reliability and control but optional jet-drives give a lower draught and greater speed. The engine room is the epitome of solid belt and braces engineering. Weighted air intake baffles stop water entering when completely inverted.





Automated machine gun and grenade launcher rise hydraulically from a watertight foredeck well

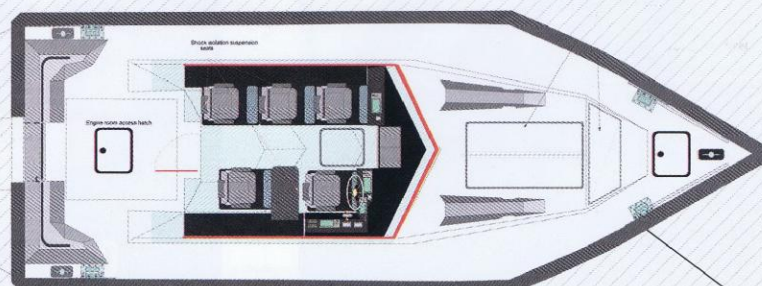


Angled surfaces are designed to deflect enemy radar waves away from source and reduce its radar profile until within range of the Barracuda's weaponry

## THE DATA

LENGTH OVERALL 36ft 1in (11.0m)

BEAM  
13ft 1in  
(4.0m)



Hull can be extended to 13m for rear mounted weapons too

Kongsberg gyro-stabilised 12.7mm mini gun and 60mm grenade launcher

Very fine wave-cutting bow reduces vertical acceleration

**FUEL CAPACITY**  
238 imp gal (1,000 litres)

**WATER CAPACITY**  
41 imp gal (50 litres)

**DRAUGHT (waterjets)**  
2ft 7in (0.85 metres)

**CATEGORY RATING**  
Lloyds approved, MCA Cat II offshore workboat for 12

**DESIGNER**  
Frank Kowalski

**DISPLACEMENT**  
9.8 tonnes




*It's hard to think of anything more devastatingly fit for purpose*


Frank could probably do with employing a designer to soften up the interior of any future leisure version. There are a couple of benches down below if you regularly carry a crew of burly commandos but you might be better off swapping the fixed seats for a scissor action vee-berth. The built-in gun rack is a nice touch, though – so much more convenient than wrestling with a gun safe. Your other half might also insist on replacing the intrusive weapons compartment with an ensuite heads if she objects to the current bucket and chuck it facilities. And a small galley may come in handy, although that might require upgrading to the SV13 to create the extra space.

**Contact** Safehaven Marine. Tel: +353 86 8054582 Web: [www.safehavenmarine.com](http://www.safehavenmarine.com)

## THE HELM VIEW

 Touchscreen controls for all major systems including foredeck weapons

 Civilian spec nav gear and engine monitors keep things simple and reliable

 Throttle and wheel are perfectly positioned for maximum control when strapped into the helm seat

## PERFORMANCE

**TEST ENGINES** Caterpillar C9s.

Twin 575hp @ 2,500rpm. 6-cylinder, 8.8-litre diesel V-drives

TEST FIGURES		ECO		FAST		MAX	
RPM	1,000	1,500	1,750	2,000	2,250	2,500	
Speed	8.4	14.5	20.0	25.5	29.5	33	
LPH	20	72	96	124	180	218	
GPH	4.4	15.8	21.1	27.2	39.5	47	
MPG	1.9	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.7	
Range	362	171	190	171	133	133	

## THE COSTS & OPTIONS

Price from

**As tested**

## Ballistic glass and superstructure

## Radar absorbing panels

### Insulation to reduce thermal signature

**Windlass, s/steel anchor and chain**

## Kongsberg Sea Protector mini

## ZMT 40mm grenade launch

### Hyperspike HS18 sonic gun

**M134 rapid fire 7.62mm machine gun**

Speed in knots. GPH & MPG figures use imperial gallons. Range in nautical miles and allows for 20% reserve. Calculated figures based on manufacturer's figures, your figures may vary considerably. All prices exclude UK VAT. 60% fuel, 20% water, 4 crew + minimal stores. 16°C air temperature, big seas, F8 for speed trials.

## RIVALS

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### RNLI Shannon class lifeboat

**Price from £2.1 million**

World-class rough weather capability but lacks the firepower and stealth technology.

### Icemarine Bladerunner 45

**Price from POA**

Another military contender but this one trades extreme rough weather ability for 70-knot pace.