



TOM BROWN/STAFF

The Coast Guard's response boat-medium, introduced to the fleet in April, brings more speed, better accommodations for its crew and greater maneuverability than the service's aging utility boats, which have been in the water since the early 1970s.

A faster response

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RBM offers more speed, comfort than predecessor

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POTOMAC RIVER, Washington, D.C. — Taking a ride on the Coast Guard's new response boat-medium and then hopping aboard the older 41-foot legacy utility boat is like traveling through time.

Instead of the hodgepodge of electronic devices that have been upgraded over the utility boat's four decades of service, the RBM has state-of-the-art equipment, including an archive of digital pictures of various ports, fore and aft cameras, and an updated communications system.

Coasties can sail in comfort aboard the RBM, with four shock-absorbent seats inside the climate-controlled cabin to ease fatigue during long patrols. In the older boats, sailors either had to stand for 10-hour shifts or take turns driving the boat to ride out the waves in its lone seat; temperature was simply left to Mother Nature.

They can even cook Hot Pockets in the boat's microwave or keep bottles of water cool in the ice



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The first response boat-medium joined the fleet in April. The service plans for 180 RBMs to enter service over the next seven years, at a cost of \$610 million.

chest below deck.

Although the utility boat's maximum speed of 26 knots was fast in its day (the first boat entered the fleet in the early 1970s), the RBM can cruise at upwards of 40 knots, a necessity for the service to successfully accomplish its post-Sept. 11 responsibilities, Coast Guard officials say.

The RBM also is capable of

“walking sideways,” allowing the boat to fit into much tighter spaces than the utility boat, even though it is nearly 4 feet longer than its predecessor.

“It's doing very well. Every mission the 41 does, [the RBM] either meets or exceeds it, and in most cases it exceeds,” said Master Chief Boatswain's Mate Gordon Muise of Station Little Creek, Va. The RBM

is Little Creek's primary vessel and has conducted numerous missions even though it remains in the testing phase, Muise said.

The station received the first boat in April. Stations Cape Disappointment, Wash., and Key West, Fla., also have one boat each as part of the operational test and evaluation period, with Station Milwaukee expected to receive one in October. Plans include another 176 boats over the next seven years, with a total price tag of \$610 million.

Rear Adm. Gary Blore, assistant commandant for acquisition, said cooperative efforts during the four-year design phase of the boat addressed most problems before construction even began.

“There haven't been a lot of suggestions for improvement, and I do believe that's because of the four years that took place when we were deciding the capabilities,” Blore said. “I really do think [this acquisition] has represented all the great lessons learned and shows a very integrated Coast Guard. We need to keep doing that in the future.” □