

RS Q'BA



PHOTOS: JEREMY EVANS

The Q'ba is the latest all-purpose dinghy from RS, filling the space between the Tera and Feva in their low-cost rotomoulded range. **Jeremy Evans** discovers how the Q'ba scores as a weekend 'family' boat...

The news might be full of soaring prices, but not everything is getting more expensive. A brand new Q'ba complete with launching trolley, top cover and wind indicator will leave you change from £2,700. If you added every available extra with the exception of a trailer (you don't need one) it would push the cost past three thousand quid, but for a

brand new boat which can carry two children the rotomoulded ranges certainly offer value.

The Q'ba fits between the Tera and Feva in the RS 'all purpose' range, all of which have rotomoulded hulls with inner and outer layers of polyethylene plastic sandwiching a foam core. This is the standard method for producing rotomoulded dinghies with an acceptable compromise between ▶

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Above People of all ages and abilities can enjoy sailing the new RS Q'ba.

stiffness and weight. The RS system is called 'Comptec PE3,' but all the major manufacturers have a similar approach to rotomoulded sandwich construction.

Paul Handley designed the 12ft Feva for RS in 2002. The concept was based on his own family's experience with classic Mirror dinghies, creating a modern alternative which has been a big success – not least as a junior international racing class. Paul's design for a dedicated kid's singlehander followed, in the form of the 9ft RS Tera which is being marketed as equally suitable for learning or racing. His third design in the series, the 11ft Q'ba, has a considerably wider focus as a family boat to be sailed single or doublehanded whilst promising 'proper RS handling'.

Below The Q'ba can be quickly and easily rigged by just one person.

Below right Due to the boat's size, it can be easily transported on the roof of a family car.

Rigging up

We organised a 'family' sailing expedition that involved a loose mixture of mum, dad, two daughters and possible boyfriend. Thanks to Oilly, Hannah, Carla and Amanda for helping to provide our prototype perfect family. We also chose a suitably stunning location – the kind of place where a young family would surely want to play

Swallows & Amazons on a fine summer's day – Swanage SC, hidden in the corner of Swanage Bay.

We drove in with the Q'ba on the roofrack. Carrying a dinghy on a roof rack is a hell of a lot easier and cheaper than towing a trailer, but the boat must be a snug fit and be easy enough to lift on or off. No problems here with the Q'ba. It actually felt fine lifting at both ends, and we liked the convenient handles on the bow and at the stern. Curiously, the galvanised trolley felt more cumbersome than the boat. It's very solid and appears to have been made to last a lifetime. We also liked the form-fitting cradle for the hull, as well as a high handle at the front which means you don't have to stoop and wreck your back when pulling the Q'ba.

Six years after the Feva was launched, RS seem to have learnt how to make a really attractive rotomoulded boat. The Q'ba drew appreciative comments from club members, as we trundled through the dinghy park and down to the beach. All the bits you need to go sailing will fit inside the cockpit, including the boom which holds up the cover when you leave the boat. This is a neat feature, ensuring that rain will fall off the sides. The mast is a two-part aluminium tube, but unlike rivals such as the Pico it's fitted with a luff groove for the mainsail. This means that the mast can stay up whenever you raise or lower the sail. You never have to lift the mast with the sail attached, which can be very difficult for children, which means the kids can be in complete control.

On this occasion, our 'mum' took control of rigging. Amanda found it a slight challenge to join the mast sections together – beware of sand – but had no problem lifting the mast and dropping the foot into the deck where a mast gate locks it in position.

Our test boat came not only with the optional



jib kit which is simply attached at tack and head, but also the Mylar Pro sail. With no battens, the standard Dacron mainsail (blue and white radial stripes) was a doddle to rig. Just pull it up the luff groove with the halyard and attach the clew to the adjustable outhaul on the end of the boom. Everything is easy to figure and well sorted – we particularly liked the neat way you can tuck halyard ends into a Velcro pocket, which is part of the mainsail.

On the water

On a family sailing expedition, you've got to travel somewhere magical. Old Harry Rocks provided the perfect destination – you can even land on the beach if you know where to go. We tried all permutations on the way out and on the way back home. Olly and Hannah sailed two-up with mainsail and jib. They had enough space to co-exist in the cockpit, and the jib gave Hannah a bit of added interest in the crew role.

We then took away the jib for Hannah and Carla who looked just right for the boat, followed by Olly who went raging around Swanage Bay. A regular Laser Pico sailor, he was clearly impressed saying, 'The Q'ba is a great fun boat – all the fun of the Pico, but with extras that make sailing a pleasure. With its calm blue colour, it is a really cool boat to be seen in!'

'Like the Pico, it can be dragged up the beach and is ready for rough and tumble, but feels lighter and performs better on the water. Everything is more streamlined. Space in the cockpit is excellent and comfortable. The sheets move smoothly; the sail area seems larger, but not overwhelming; the jib is easy to put on or take off. The boat is capable of great cruising speed and feels effortless to sail. For a novice it is quite forgiving and not tippy, but a capsize is easy to right. Reefing requires a simple twist of a handle and it's done. The rowing kit would be a nice extra, so you can still have fun on the water if the wind disappears.'

If truth were told, we had to drag Olly off the boat. With a wide grin on his face, he would have stayed out on the Q'ba until the sun went down.

The adults also tried the Q'ba with its standard sail – although not together. I can confirm Olly's view that the Q'ba is forgiving and easy to sail. There's just enough space for a 75kg bloke to feel comfortable, although the boat is essentially small. Despite its size, the Q'ba does not feel particularly weight sensitive with an adult. There is loads of buoyancy in the V-shaped bows, which helps ensure that you can sit forward and drive the Q'ba upwind. I could have done with more breeze – or the bigger sail – but the boat still felt pleasantly responsive on a beat or reach with the wind diddling around Force 3. Tacks and gybes felt super-stable in those conditions, helped by the centre of effort being well forward. It's also nice to find there's plenty of space to duck your head under the boom.

Olly had a go at reefing the mainsail while out on the water, and we discovered that the roller system is very neat. Undo the kicker, ease off the outhaul, and then pull the handle at the base of the mast through 360 rotations. Nothing could be simpler and it appears to work very well, giving Carla the opportunity to enjoy sailing the Q'ba



with a half-rolled mainsail that suited her junior family member size. As an alternative, you can slab reef the mainsail (pulling down a horizontal panel). This means the mainsail can be reefed without removing the jib.

Last but not least, we went for a sail with the Pro sail, which is not only bigger, but also built in Mylar with full length battens supporting a wide roach to pile on extra power. It certainly changes the appearance of the Q'ba and should provide a big boost in performance for an adult or capable teenage sailor. Sadly the wind was fading, but it's clear that sail would provide a powered-up and even frisky ride in a fresh breeze!

Capsize drill

Even though no one had come close to capsizing the Q'ba during our test day in Force 3-4 winds, it is designed for beginners so it will happen. Hannah was volunteered to flip the Q'ba on its side and had no trouble flipping it back up again in double quick time. The low freeboard made it easy for her to scramble over the side, while the boat stayed stable.

The Q'ba had shown no inclination to invert, but we wanted to see what happened. So we asked Hannah to stand on the rig and pull the boat upside-down – a possible scenario when novice sailors lose their marbles during a capsize. The hull has pronounced rubbing strakes, which not only protect and stiffen the hull, but also provide useful foot and handholds on an upturned boat. Hannah had minimal trouble scrambling up and pulling the boat back onto its side, but by that stage was understandably a bit tired and found it more difficult to get back up onto the daggerboard, which like all modern boats floats quite high. For that kind of situation, the Q'ba has ready-for-use righting lines under the gunwales, which should make it a lot easier to pull the boat upright. On this occasion, there may have been a problem with water leaking into the mast which should be fully sealed. Just a litre or two inside the mast will play havoc with the efficiency of your righting 'lever'.

Above Even after a full inversion, the Q'ba is easily righted. The boat has accessible righting lines under the gunwales, just in case they are required.

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The verdict

RS's Q'ba seems to clearly line up against Laser's Pico, the ubiquitous rotomoulded beginner boat for one adult or two children, as favoured by sailing schools and holiday operators far and wide. The Q'ba provides a similar package, enhanced by better sailing performance, slicker features and a wider range of use, particularly if you add the optional Pro sail. What's more, the Q'ba is a good-looking boat, which is fun to sail and should be hassle-free to own with minimal maintenance required. If that suits your lifestyle, the Q'ba could provide the solution to some totally modern sailing.

Above The larger, semi battened 'Pro' mainsail is perfect for the older sailors, as well as youngsters who crave more speed.

Thanks to Swanage SC, with its clubhouse set in a beautiful location on the Dorset coast, for providing facilities for this test.
www.swanagesailingclub.org.uk

RS Q'ba specifications

DESIGN:	Paul Handley n 2008	
LENGTH:	3.53m	
BEAM:	1.42m	
HULL WEIGHT:	58kg	
SAIL AREA:	MAIN (Dacron)	5.6sq m
	MAIN (Mylar Pro)	7sq m
	JIB	1.2sq m
PRICE:	SPORT	£2,350
	PRO	£2,450

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COMPARISONS... Where does the Q'ba fit in? Here are some alternatives...



■ LASER PICO

The first rotomoulded Laser, designed by Jo Richards and launched in 1995. A huge success, selling at an average rate of 1,000 new boats each year.

LOA:	3.5m
BEAM:	1.37m
HULL WEIGHT:	60kg
CONSTRUCTION:	Polyethylene
SAIL AREA:	
	Main & jib 5.1sq m
	Sport main 6.44sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£2,465*



■ MIRROR

Jack Holt classic for children or adults. More than 70,000 built since 1963. A junior racing class which now allows new cockpit and Bermudan rig.

LOA:	3.3m
BEAM:	1.39m
HULL WEIGHT:	45.5kg
CONSTRUCTION:	Various
SAIL AREA:	
	Main & jib 6.3sq m
	Spinnaker 4.4sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	(new) £4,800*



■ COMET XTRA

Dedicated singlehander which suits a range of crew weights, despite its small size. First designed in 1981. Recently updated with sailor-friendly Xtra rig.

LOA:	3.45m
BEAM:	1.37m
HULL WEIGHT:	50kg
CONSTRUCTION:	Glassfibre
SAIL AREA:	
	Xtra main 6sq m
GUIDE PRICE:	£2,950*

ANSWER BACK

from Martin Wadhams

Many thanks to Jeremy Evans and Yachts and Yachting for a great test on the RS Q'ba (pronounced 'Cuba' by the way!).

The positive findings in this test have been echoed by many institutions that have had the opportunity to test the Q'ba and subsequently ordered fleets of boats. They have many years of hard-earned experience in a tough environment on which to base their opinions.

Key secrets to the Q'ba's success are brilliant weight-carrying ability for a variety of sailor sizes and combinations; responsive handling (like all RS boats) that makes the sailing really enjoyable; and practical, user-friendly features to make rigging, reefing, storage and transport truly convenient.

Sailing is a sport that many people would love to be involved in, and boats like the Q'ba make it more accessible and more fun. For some newcomers and families the Q'ba will be a stepping stone that gives them a positive introduction to sailing before moving on to bigger or higher performance sailboats. For others, the Q'ba will provide years of excitement, making the most of every opportunity for a break by the water.

The inevitable success of such a good boat means we can all look forward to seeing Q'bas at clubs and coasts wherever we go in years to come. Fortunate then that the Q'ba is also good-looking!