

# Basic Detail Report

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## IRB 1

**Vessel number**

HV000362

**Date**

1970

**Primary Maker**

Dunlop Aust.

## Description

IRB 1 was designed and built to specifications compiled by Warren Mitchell. Mitchell and fellow life saver John Fuller trialed a UK-designed Beaufort inshore rescue craft in 1969 before developing their final ideas, incorporated in IRB 1. Although other inflatable boats had been trialed in Victoria, the concept was not adopted until IRB 1 was built and used successfully for rescue work at Avalon Surf Club in New South Wales. Dunlop Australia produced and marketed a range of rubber products and built the craft at their Bayswater, Victoria, factory for use at the Avalon Beach Surf Life Saving Club. It is 3.6 metres long, and the main inflatable 'u' shaped hull is made from nitrile rubber. The heavier non-inflating rubber bottom between the two cylindrical pontoon sides has an aluminium keelson (originally steel) and a plywood floorboard on the inside. The transom board for mounting the outboard motor is plywood. The 15 kw (20 hp) outboard featured a protective wire grill and sheet metal cylinder guard around the propeller for safety in the surf amongst swimmers. The craft had polypropylene life lines along each pontoon for people to hold onto, and footstraps in the floor to help secure the crew in the boat as it bounced through and over waves. A flexible fuel tank was added early on, replacing the original metal one. The Avalon club used the craft from 1970 until 1976 when developer Mitchell purchased the craft and it was put to use at Brunswick Heads in northern NSW until 1980. When Mitchell moved to Molong in NSW he kept the craft and used it at surf carnivals in Sydney, He painted it red and black and even rigged up a means of heating his wetsuit by running a line from the engine cooling water system around his suit. IRB 1 became the first inflatable rescue boat owned and operated by a Surf Life Saving Club in Australia. The rubber was originally yellow and had the name TOTAL AVALON SURF RESCUE- W MITCHELL printed on each pontoon. The name was derived from the local Avalon Total service station which supplied the fuel for the outboard motor. Mitchell donated IRB 1 to the Australian National Maritime Museum in 1987. It is now part of the National Maritime Collection and was displayed in the 'Between the Flags' exhibition in 2007 which celebrated the centenary of Surf Life Saving in Australia. Instead of being inflated with air the pontoons were opened on the seam at intervals then resealed after the interior was filled with tightly packed cushions made of dacron material. The inflatable craft replaced the traditional surf rescue craft including the wooden or fibreglass surf boat, manned by four rowers and a sweep, and the surf ski. IRB 1 showed that small manoeuvrable craft

manned by two people (a coxswain and bowman) could move more swiftly in response to an emergency than traditional craft, and could be used by both men and women successfully. It also replaced the belt, line and reel. By the late 1980s almost 400 IRBs were in use at surf clubs around Australia.

### **Dimensions**

Vessel Dimensions: 3.6 m, 0.13 tonnes (11.81 ft, 0.13 tons)