

GET WET!

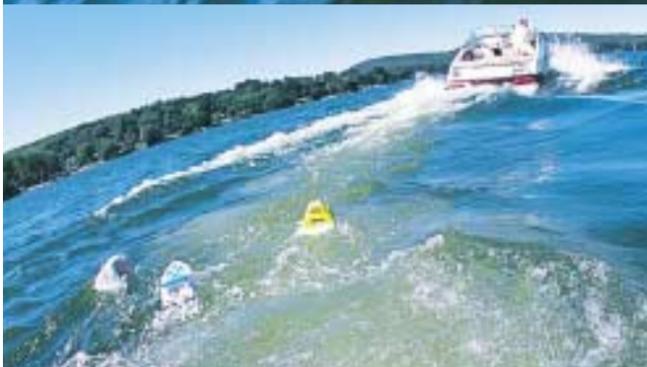
MICRO BOAT GUIDE

BY MATT BOYD | PHOTOS WALTER SIDAS

PROGRESS IS A GOOD THING. When it comes to RC, progress in microelectronics is a *very* good thing. It has spawned a new breed of cars, boats and airplanes that are smaller, faster, more reliable and more affordable, and when you're talking about boats, you can add a healthy dose of convenience as well. More than with any other type of RC, boats rely on an appropriate location; they aren't much fun if you don't have enough water! But these mini boats are small and nimble enough to be enjoyed in a medium-size swimming pool, so any local duck pond or swimming hole will have more than enough room. Don't let their size fool you, though; these little guys can be fast, and they handle rough water amazingly well. Driving them is easier than you might think; even beginners will have a blast! Who would have guessed that so much fun could come in such small packages? As I said, progress is a good thing!



4 SPLASH-AND-DASH POOL POUNDERS



>> MEGATECH H₂O

>> HOBBYZONE ZIG ZAG

>> ACE SPORT CRUISER

>> DANVO MINI STAR

GET WET MICRO BOAT GUIDE



data center

MANUFACTURER: HobbyZone
DISTRIBUTOR: Horizon Hobby Inc.
MODEL: Zig Zag Racer
BEST BUYER: anyone; beginners to experienced boaters
LENGTH: 15 in. (381mm)
WIDTH: 5.75 in. (146mm)
WEIGHT: 16 oz. (454g)
POWER: 380 electric motor with a 6-cell NiMH rechargeable battery pack
RUN TIME: 10 to 15 min.
PRICE: \$79.99

HORIZON HOBBY INC.
 (800) 338-4639; horizonhobby.com.

data center

MANUFACTURER: Megatech
MODEL: H₂O
BEST BUYER: Those who are looking for the ultimate in small-space maneuverability
LENGTH: 9 in. (229mm)
WIDTH: 4.75 in. (121mm)
WEIGHT: 9 oz. (255g)
POWER: 280 electric motor with a 5-cell NiMH rechargeable battery pack
RUN TIME: 15 or more min.
PRICE: \$99.99

MEGATECH (201) 662-2800; megatech.com.



HOBBYZONE ZIG ZAG RACER

Easy fun is the name of the game with HobbyZone's Zig Zag. If you can master inserting AA batteries into the included radio and plugging the included power-pack charger into the wall, you've handled the technical aspects. Now, all you have to do is drive! Don't worry if you're new to RC boating because the Zig Zag is darn near impossible to sink. If you flip it, the self-righting-hull almost always rolls upright in a second or two. The electronics are well sealed against water, so there's no need to worry that a short will shorten your day. The hull is made of rugged plastic, so the occasional collision between enthusiastic racers won't pose a problem. The 380 motor has plenty of power for a boat this size, and we were surprised just how quick these little suckers are.

The Zig Zag comes with three floating buoy balls so you can set up a racecourse, and there's even a bumper attachment for buoy retrieval. If you detach a buoy's anchor weight, you and a few other Zig Zags can use it to play water soccer. The boat comes with a wall charger and one battery pack; extras are available from the manufacturer.

WATER LOG

These little boats are definitely big fun! They are fast, nimble and very durable. On smooth water, the boat is foolproof; it rides super-flat, and you couldn't flip it if you tried. On rough water, it is even more fun as it bounces and skips along. You don't have to worry about wiping out; if the boat takes a tumble, just wait a second for it to roll over, nail the throttle and you're off again.

It steers so easily that someone who hasn't ever driven an RC boat can pick up the technique in only a minute or two. The throttle is fully proportional, so you can go as fast or as slowly as you like; remember, though, that at slow speeds the rudder doesn't have as much water flowing over it, so the response will be softer. Overall, the Zig Zag offers a lot of fun in a small, affordable package.



MEGATECH H₂O

Now we're talking micro! This little race vee-hull is only 9 inches long, although when you add in the length of the rudder, it ends up being slightly more than 10 inches. The H₂O's deck styling is more advanced than you'll find on some of the other micro boats, and underneath that deck is a truly innovative way to seal it from leaks. The deck pops off to reveal a fully enclosed main hull; access to the internals is through a hatch that clips on much as the lid on a plastic butter tub does. This is a very simple, effective and reliable way to keep water away from the electronics. If water does find its way into the hull, the radio and the speed control (both included and installed) are also individually encased in waterproof jackets.

The H₂O relies on a 280 motor and a 5-cell battery for power. This is smaller than the power systems in the other micros, but since the H₂O weighs less, it really doesn't suffer in the performance category. In terms of handling, the H₂O has a leg up; its rudder is substantially larger than those used in the others, and it is the only micro boat that features adjustable trim tabs.

WATER LOG

Looking at the size of the H₂O, I was afraid it would be at a serious disadvantage in performance. Boy, was I wrong; this little bad boy hauls! It lags behind the others slightly at the top end, but its compact size and crisp handling allow it to make up ground in the corners. It bounds over waves; watching it climb and then plummet off 18-inch wakes is hilarious, and not once did it seem in danger of capsizing. It looks cool, too, and the little battery will run all day. If you have a small pool, or if you just like the idea of a runt that can run with the big dogs, this is the pick of the litter!



ACE SPORT CRUISER

As you can tell from the photos, the Sport Cruiser is definitely the beauty queen of the bunch. Its vacuum-formed deck allowed Ace to work a lot of realistic detail into the design. Equally impressive is the equipment layout; all of the running gear is securely anchored in a molded interior and sealed against water. A nice touch for first-time boaters is the battery setup; the Sport Cruiser comes with a 6-cell rechargeable battery, but a battery adapter tray is also included so that owners without a charger can run their boats on 6, conventional AA alkaline batteries. The top deck is held by two screws and features a rubber on/off switch that protrudes through the deck. This allows the Sport Cruiser to be turned off without removing the deck; it's a feature that none of the other minis offer, but all manufacturers should take heed.

The Sport Cruiser's control system is less sophisticated than those on the other mini boats, and that somewhat limits its performance. Neither the throttle nor the rudder is proportional; the throttle is either full on or off, and the rudder is either full right, full left or straight. This makes precision driving quite challenging. The Sport Cruiser does have reverse though, and it's the only mini boat that does. This greatly improves its maneuverability in tight spaces such as swimming pools.

WATER LOG

The Sport Cruiser's emphasis is definitely on cruising. It trundles along at a walking pace; it doesn't compete with the others in top speed. Turns are plenty sharp; since the rudder angle is all or nothing, you have to pulse the steering input if you want a wider arc. The Sport Cruiser sits down in the water like a real boat and bobs and rolls with the current. This is fun to watch, and at the speeds the Sport Cruiser travels, it doesn't present a danger of flipping over. This would be a good choice for younger boaters and for those who value style and building-quality over all-out speed.



data center

MANUFACTURER: Ace Hobby Distributors Inc.
MODEL: Sport Cruiser
BEST BUYER: beginners who are looking for a stylish cruiser for pond or pool
LENGTH: 14.75 in. (375mm)
WIDTH: 5.75 in. (146mm)
WEIGHT: 16 oz. (454g)
POWER: electric motor with a 6-cell rechargeable battery pack
RUN TIME: 10 to 15 min.
PRICE: \$79.99

ACE HOBBY DISTRIBUTORS INC.
 (949) 838-0088; acehobby.com.



DANVO Mini Star

Danvo's were among the first mini boats on the market, and they remain some of the smallest. The distinctive barrel-back shape and low center of gravity allow this boat to right itself almost instantly from even the most spectacular tumbles. Performance-wise, the Mini Star is a real winner, thanks to the included 380 motor and driveline. It requires a bit more experience to assemble, and you'll have to supply your own speed control, servo linkage and radio gear. The Mini Star doesn't have a separate, sealed electronics compartment, so you'll need to seal it well with waterproof tape each time you run it. For these reasons, buyers should already have a boat or two under their belts. We spent most of our time on the Mini Star, but even smaller boats—the Micro Star and the Jet Ski—are available, and they share the same characteristics.

WATER LOG

The Mini Star accelerates briskly, and the brass rudder tracks well at any speed. The two smaller boats tend to porpoise more than the Mini Star—probably because of the battery position and the resulting center of gravity. All three bounce around a little, which is a lot of fun and not at all difficult to control. If you flip them over, the boats right themselves in a second or two.

The Mini Star probably offers more performance than any of the micro boats. It is the fastest in a straight line, and because you must supply your own speed control and battery, you can opt for more power if you wish. As long as you have the know-how to pick the parts and install them, it will be hard to beat the Mini Star.

data center

MANUFACTURER: Danvo Racing Products
MODEL: Mini Star
BEST BUYER: boaters with one or two models' experience
LENGTH: 13 in. (330mm)
WIDTH: 5.5 in. (140mm)
WEIGHT: 14.5 oz. (411g)
POWER: 380 electric motor (included); 6-cell NiMH rechargeable battery pack (not included)
RUN TIME: 10 to 15 min.
PRICE: \$99.99 (radio system not included)

DANVO RACING PRODUCTS
 (440) 779-7003; danvo.com.

COOL FACTOR	min.	▲	max.
PERFORMANCE	min.	▲	max.
SKILL LEVEL	everyone	intermediate	advanced



Even when the hulls are dragged well under water, their natural buoyancy pushes them back to the surface so forcefully that they leap as much as a foot out of the water! The weight distribution ensures that they always land right-side up and ready to race. We tried this stunt 20 or 30 times in a row, and it worked every time!

SELF-RIGHT-EOUS!

Think about what an advantage it would be if you knew that every time you tossed a coin, it would land heads-up? You'd never have to buy the next round or give up the last piece of pizza, and your team would always get to receive the kick-off! The HobbyZone Zig Zag and the Danvo Mini Star give you a heads-up in the world of mini boats—one that can save you a chilly swim or the hassle of rowing to a capsized craft in the middle of the pond. You see, these two are self-righting hulls, and that means it's just about impossible to strand them upside-down. The concept is pretty simple: put

the weight as low as you can in the hull, seal it so that no water can leak in and change the weight balance, and make the deck smooth and rounded. Think of it as an aquatic version of a Weeble Wobble toy! When the boat rolls, the weight of the running gear is suspended well above the waterline with the air-filled upper deck beneath it and no flat surface on which to settle. The deck tries to resurface while the hull tries to resubmerge. They quickly swap places and—bingo!—you are upright and on your way! ☞