



SUNSATION 32' DOMINATOR



Bring On The Big Boys

AT SUNSATION, THE SCHALDENBRAND BROTHERS, President Wayne and Vice Presidents John and Joe, view the offshore market from a very matter-of-fact position. "If it's long and it's pointy and it's got two motors, it's competition," said John.

Paranoid? Maybe. But it's better to be careful than arrogant when entering uncharted waters. Until last summer, the biggest boat that SunSation built was its 25-foot Aggressor. When the Casco, Michigan manufacturer stepped up to the new 32' Dominator, everywhere the Schaldenbrands looked they saw a rival.

So they made sure their new boat

would stack up with everyone from Fountain to Cigarette to Envision to Powerquest. The Dominator is 32' long with a 97" beam, and it weighs 6240 pounds

rigged, 3994 pounds bare. Care to compare performance figures? With a relatively tame pair of MerCruiser's 7.4 Ls, the company claims the boat will run 74 mph and we'll vouch that it does it in less-than-ideal conditions. How about construction? The Dominator is solidly built and very attractive. Finally comes the attribute that could put this boat over the top in any head-to-head comparison-price. Retail numbers start at \$71,300 and as tested, it's an affordable \$83,315.

**Sunsation is more
than ready to take
them on with
its 32' Dominator.**

SUNSATATION 32' DOMINATOR

FOR A LIFETIME

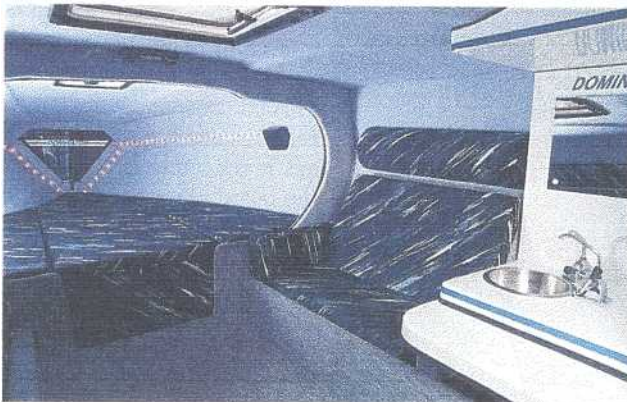
Right away, it was obvious to us that SunSation builds this boat to back up its lifetime hull warranty. All-fiberglass liners in the cockpit and cabin mean superior fit and finish and no wood rot. In fact, the only wood used in the boat is the balsa core, lit" and 3/4" in the deck and 3/4" exclusively in the hull. The hand-laid laminate around the core consists of a total of five layers of 1 lit-ounce mat in alternating applications, Coremat and 34- and 18-ounce knytex biaxial glass. Hull and deck are tabbed together with knytex and full-length encapsulated stringers are set into adhesives.

Mold work on the Dominator is straight and free of waves or other imperfections. The shiny white hull is finished in black and turquoise stripes that are serrated, resembling arrow feathers that widen as they near the transom. Topsides, the same color scheme is used with lines that follow the deck contour. SunSation offers over 40 different color choices in any combination for the boat.

Matching up well with the black in the gelcoat, the Hehr tinted tempered glass windshield is a seven piece wraparound unit with a walk-thru center. It looks good, inset into a deck recess in a clean installation. A black plastic extrusion with a rubber insert, the rubrail is straight and caulk-free.

Keeping prices down, SunSation uses production hardware, but it custom installs much of it, including the five stainless cleats and the fuel fills. A navigation light and a waste outlet are installed in the bow and farther aft are two Nibo deck hatches in a non-skid walkway. Along the right side beneath the

windshield are the shorepower inlet and gas fill. Molded into the deck, intake and exhaust vents are flush in a very sanitary installation and the bilge pump outlet is tucked up under a lip in the side of the hull, which hides it, yet keeps it effective. Bravo drives are linked with a stainless-steel tie bar and equipped with optional Sidewinder steering (\$950), while twin-ram Bennett tabs are securely installed on the lower corners of the transom.



Raising on a hydraulic Bennett jack, the engine hatch is all fiberglass finished on the underside in nonskid and the SunSation logo. Sun lounge upholstery attaches securely and for superior accessibility, the backrest for the rear seat raises with the hatch.

Two MerCruiser 454 Magnums mount. with stout thru-bolted L-angles to wide sections of the keel stringers and to the outside stringers. The exhaust is upgraded with Corsa Performance's Captain's Call exhaust diverting sys-

tem (\$2000). The compartment is also equipped with bilge blowers and a Mayfair bilge pump with an automatic switch (\$90).

In this tight engine compartment, SunSation does a good job of keeping everything accessible. With the seat back out of the way, you don't have to crawl into the bilge to work on the motors. Most of the wires are protected in plastic conduit, but we would like to see more used on the engine harnesses

around the carburetors and manifolds. The bundles are secured with plastic Adels and tie-wraps.

Batteries are housed in plastic boxes that are accessible from the engine compartment or by lifting the bottom cushion for the rear bench seat. The base is molded fiberglass and the rear edge that serves as part of the firewall has a removable panel to access the fuel tank pickups. For extra support, stainless stanchions bolt to the side of the seat and to the hull.

The front seats are built on stainless frames that sit in special floor recesses and attach with seven lag bolts each into the stringers. They are equipped with pull-out cushions. When you pull up the snap-down carpet, the floor is finished in a slight nonskid.

Installed in an aluminum dash panel, the instrumentation is solid, but we couldn't get to the wiring. You have to remove the panel, but SunSation assures us that they have extra slack in the harness so you can pull it out far enough to work on it comfortably. Steering is a Teleflex system and the Kiekhaefer Zero Effort shifts and throttles are well located with a comfortable arm rest behind.

Sensation Installs V00 Blue Line Instruments In three easy-to-read tiers at the helm top driver convenience, and outfits the cabin with plenty of amenities for passenger comfort.

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Belowdecks, the V-berth is its own molded drop-in piece and Sunsation says it is now using a similar configuration for the lounge area, although ours was basically built off the stringers and bulkheads. We would like to see a little more substantial installation on the sink counter and the materials used for, and the installation of, the

headliner and carpet need improvement. A heavy-duty piece that



Top-Quality marine upholstery and carpeting are used throughout the cockpit top looks that attract and longevity.

slides in a track on the forward side of the cabin bulkhead, the fiberglass hatch is good looking and functional.

THE THEORY OF PERFORMANCE

More often than not, solid construction means solid performance and the Dominator verifies that theory. A classic offshore V-bottom, the boat actually measures 30' down the waterline (the other two feet are the swim platform) with a

24-degree deadrise and two strakes per side, one that runs to about 7' forward of the transom and a flat chine.

As previously stated, Sunsation says the boat shows 74 mph on the VDO speedometer with the stock 7.4 Ls. For another \$6150, the 4.54 Magnums will raise the number to 80 and 77.5 mph on radar. Worth it? That's your call. The 350-hp 454

Magnums in our test boat turn 1.5:1 gears and Mirage 14 x 25 stainless-steel propellers. Before we made the speed runs, we checked the speed at rpm and noted 6.5 mph at 1000, 20 at 2000 41 at 3000, 54 at 3500, 60 at 4000, 70 at 4500, 75 at 5000, 78 at 5100. From a standing start, the Dominator hits 28 in five seconds, 54 in 10, 70 in 15 and 80 in 20. Time to plane is quick-4.1 seconds-and the minimum planing speed is 17 mph. Throttle response receives our highest marks across the board. Around the docks, send the exhaust through the propeller hubs and you'll lose eight decibels from the open setting-86 verses 94.

Tracking is exceptional at lower speeds, yet the boat gets a little light as you approach top end. Even though the Dominator doesn't really need trim tabs, we like the trim switches positioned in the steering wheel. You don't have to trim the drives that much, maybe out to the level setting on the gauge and that's it. Rough seas are a welcome challenge. The boat is very well-mannered in head-on, following or quartering seas.

If we had our druthers, we

would toss the Sidewinder steering and upgrade to a hydraulic system from Mayfair or Latham. The way the system is now, the Dominator is too sensitive to adjustments of the wheel. There is also an unacceptable amount of play in the wheel for a 76-mph boat. It feels as if there is too much slack in the steering cable. To the boat's credit, however, once you get used to the current setup, it slaloms well and makes circles in a tight radius.

In addition to the trim buttons, we like the way the dash is laid out. The view of the instruments is fine, but we would like to have the trim gauges closer to the switches.

The throttles and trim-tab switches are comfortable to operate, however, we would like to see the addition of tab indicators. And because it's so swept back, the windshield does very little to deflect 80-mph wind from your face.

Seat comfort is always a subjective topic, but everyone in our team agreed that the Dominator's bolsters need work. From petite editors to six-foot, 200-pound test drivers, the comments are the same. They're not comfortable from a standing or seated position and when you do stand up and try to press your legs out to brace yourself, the retainer for the bottom cushion digs into your thigh or hip, depending on your height.

MOVE IN CONDITION

Our overall impression of the Dominator's interior is a favorable one. The 60" x 80" cockpit has room to move about and the molded step in the dash makes getting on deck to handle lines a breeze. Little details such as armrests for the driver and navigator are a nice touch.

Belowdecks, the boat is comfortable and practical with 53" of headroom, 33" from the lounges to the ceiling and 30 1/4" from V-berth. The wide 24" x 36" opening facilitates cabin entry and we especially like the smooth slitting action of the fiberglass hatch.

The main salon has convertible lounges in an arrangement that has room for one person to port and two or three on to starboard. The couch

SONSATION 32' DOMINATOR

is plenty long for sleeping, but a little narrow at 18" across at its widest point. Storage underneath is available, but it's limited.

All the way forward, the V-berth is enormous with plenty of room for two. There is storage space underneath, with the head located under the center cushion. For our tests, Sunsation installed the extra 12" square hatch to accompany the 18-inch and we would recommend spending the extra \$300 to help light up the cabin. Side ports might not be a bad idea, either.

Set in a fiberglass cabinet, the galley includes a sink, counter top, optional microwave (\$475) with a small shelf below and a large storage box that appears to be intended for a refrigerator, which is also an available option.

Artificial lighting is in the V-bunk, over the galley and in the salon, but we think it's silly that you have to go all the way out to the dash panel to find a switch for it. Also, we'd like to see a couple of small forward lamps with their own switches. Stereo speakers are mounted in the V-berth. We'd prefer to see some type of storage netting or shelf for small items located in this area.

In the cockpit, the square bolsters seem rather old-fashioned with pull-out bottoms that fold up when not in place for seated travel. Driver and passenger have drinkholders nearby and there are grab handles for rear passengers if they want to stand. Another bar runs all the way across the base of the 65" x 18" bench, but it could bang your legs up, or if you're reaching down to hold on and the boat comes off a wave and lands bow first, it could pull you forward. For tan improvement, the sunlounge is 32" wide by 70 1/2" long.

Storage under the rear seat and in cockpit floor lockers is easily accessed and has room for all the usual fenders, lines, vests and the like. There is also some room for smaller items in gunnel trays.

Atop the two-tier dash panel, the Ritchie compass is in a good line of sight. On the top row, the VDO Blue Line series tachometers and synchronizer, speedometer, fuel gauge and Impulse depthfinder (\$60) are



right in front of the driver with the engine monitoring gauges and the trim indicators grouped in pairs across the bottom. Directly above the cabin door is the AM/FM cassette stereo and further to port are the clock and the hour meters. A schematic layout to the right indicates when an electrical accessory is activated.

To the driver's right, the Kiekhaefer shifts are comfortably mounted directly behind trim switches for the drives and tabs, while across the bottom of the dash on each side of the steering hub, accessory switches with pop-out

breakers are easily identified with engraved labels. To port, the navigator has a grab handle in convenient reach in the dash.

The windshield has a walk-thru section, which makes getting out on (leek easier, but most people will probably just step over out of habit. Sunsation plans to offer a fairing on future models and there is nonskid for sure footing, but no anchor locker in the bow.

Sunsation considers all offshore boats competition and our test model is ready to challenge the elite. Best of all, you get all this quality at an attractive price.

Sunsation builds the Dominator to more than back up the lifetime hull warranty—stoutly, cleanly and with high quality.

SUNSATION 32' DOMINATOR

HULL TYPE: Deep V
 Deadrise at transom24 degrees
 Centerline32'
 Beam97"
 Bare hull weight.....3994 pounds
 Weight as tested.....6200 pounds

BASE RETAIL: \$71,300
PRICE AS TESTED: \$83,315

STANDARD EQUIPMENT: Walk-thru windshield, convertible cabin lounges, trim buttons in wheel, twin MerCruiser 7.4Ls, external tie bar, AM/FM cassette, Bomar bow hatch, stand-up bolsters, rocker

switches with breakers, removable carpet, full VDI gauges, courtesy and nav lights, recessed cleats, twin batteries, sun deck with electric lift, flush intake and exhaust vents, bilge blowers, sport wheel, power steering, bow lifting eye.

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT: Upgrade to twin MerCruiser 454 Magnums (\$6150), Corsa Captain's Call exhaust (\$2000), Sidewinder steering (\$950), shorepower (\$890), cockpit cover (\$575), microwave oven (\$475), depthfinder (\$360), additional bow hatch (\$300), auto-

matic bilge pump (\$90)

ENGINE
 Model.....Twin Merc 454 Magnums
 Cylinder type.....V-8
 Bore and stroke.....4.25" x 4"
 Cubic inch displacement.....454 c.i.
 Lower unit gear ratio.....1.5:1
 Max prop horsepower.....350
 Max rpm.....5000

PROPELLER: 14 x 25 stainless Quicksilver Mirage three-blades

MANUFACTURER: Sunsation, 5827 Hessen, Casco, MI 48064

POWERBOAT TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

Zero to 5 seconds16 mph
 10 seconds44 mph
 15 seconds54 mph
 20 seconds62 mph

TIME TO PLANE: 4.1 seconds
 Min. planing speed17 mph

RPM VS. MPH

10006.5 mph
 200020 mph
 300041 mph
 350054 mph
 400060 mph
 450070 mph
 500075 mph
 510080 mph

SOUND LEVEL: 94 dBA (open)

TOP SPEED AT RPM

Speedometer80 mph at 5100
 Radar.....77.5 mph at 5100

FUEL CAPACITY: 110 gallons

Test conducted at Ft. Myers, FL at sea level