

Steering Committed

small change makes a big difference in the performance of Sunsation's Dominator SS

WHEN you're RUNNING 70 MPH IN FOUR-FOOT SEAS. You want to know your boat isn't going to do anything funny. The only thing that'll have you laughing in the Sunsation Dominator SS is the adrenaline rush you get busting through wave after wave.

We weren't exactly singing the same tune a year ago, but all it took was a steering upgrade to make this boat one of the smoothest handling 32-footers on the water. Sunsation president Wayne Schaldenbrand got together with his vice presidents, brothers Joe and John, and installed a Hynautic hydraulic steering system on the boat they brought to our '94 Performance Trials.

As we discovered in our tests off Panama City, Fla., the new steering was the final piece that brought everything together for this 21' boat with 8'1" beam. Factor in the price, \$115,010 with a pair of carbureted MerCruiser 502 Magnums and a few options, and you've got a winner for Outstanding Offshore Value. With MerCruiser 7.4 Ls and Bravo One chives, suggested retail pricing starts at \$98,000.

PERFORMANCE



rough

Living up to its name, this boat dominates the water with a 78.4-mph top end, smooth handling and a stable ride in conditions. The Schaldenbrands build it light at only 6,200 pounds, but the Dominator SS had a solid feel on re-entry in following, quartering and head-on seas. In turns, the boat tracked consistently well and carved S' out of the froth in the Gulf of Mexico.

Set up with stock 1.50:1 gears in the drives and 143/8 x 27 Mirage stainless props, the boat reached plane in 4.8 seconds, giving it one of the quickest hoeshots out of all the offshore boats we tested. Keeping the throttles down, we hit 24 mph in five seconds, 50 in 10, 73 in 15 and 78 in 20 with the motors exhibiting excellent throttle response. We left the Bennett tabs neutral for our tests, but tried them afterwards to see what effect, if any, they had. The boat picked up speed at all but the

20-second mark, hitting 30 in five, 57 in 10 and 75 in 15.

Starting out in a sharp entry at the bow, the Dominator SS' keel flares out into a pad that measures about 10" wide at the transom. Aside from that it's a straight deep-V with a flat 3" chine and two pairs of strakes with a full-length outer set and an inner pair that terminates approximately 12' forward of the transom. Experimenting a little with our test boat, the Schaldenbrands installed a center tab on the boat., figuring it might hell) keep the bow down in rough water. We'd leave it off, not wanting to spoil this boat's excellent manners. Checking out the helm, the stand-up bolsters provided excellent support with firm padding in all the right places. Sunsation

used a different variation of trim in the throttles with individual buttons for raising and lowering the drives bolted to the level-. They worked well and were positioned right where you'd want them, as were the drive-trim indicators. However, there were no such instruments for the tabs, something this boat should have. Flip the switch for the optional Corsa Captain's Call exhaust cutouts (\$2,000) to quiet engine noise. At 35 mph, they reduced the decibel output on our test boat by 12.

WORKMANSHIP

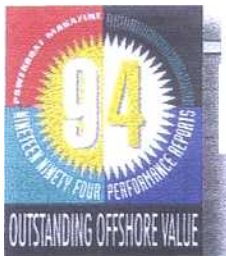


THUMBS UP

The Schaldenbrand family has been running the show at Sunsation since 1982. During those 12 years, they picked up excellent laminating skills-we couldn't find a trace of any flaws in the boat's gelcoat. No print-through. No waves. Nothing to mar the finish on the white hull. Additional evidence that the hull and deck came out of the mold clean, the black rubrail had an arrow-straight fit.

Sunsation usually does all the hull colors in the gelcoat, but, the green, yellow and black graphic in our test boat was a prototype pattern done in polyurethane paint. Nonskid on the deck and swim step, however, was done in the mold.

Behind the wild paint job, hand-laid materials include multiple layers of 1 1/2-ounce neat and 1708 Knytex biaxial glass



SUNSATION DOMINATOR SS

Even when it's sitting still, Dominator SS has an aggressive stance on the water.



with a single coating of 34-ounce Knytex. Corebond and Baltek balsa add strength, yet keep the weight down. Liners make up the bulk of the cabin and cockpit structures, which gives the Dominator SS a clean appearance.

You don't see windshields on many offshore boats these days and SunSation did a nice job of installing the swept-back, wrap around model on the Dominator SS. Deck hardware, including twin Nibo hatches, stainless cleats, fuel fills and the bilge vents, received proper attention, as did the exhaust tips and hydraulic steering system, which included a beefy tie bar, on the transom.

Bennett provided the hydraulic ram that opened the fiberglass engine hatch. Combining flare and function, SunSation molded the company logo into the bottom of the hatch and added spotlights.

Securely mounted thru-bolted aluminum L-angles hold the twin MerCruiser big blocks in place between the stringers with standard transom hardware linking them to the Bravo One drives. Trim pumps for the drives and tabs are outboard of the engines on either side, and the oil tanks for the stern chives are mounted along the

sides of the compartment. Engine wiring is well supported and protected in flexible plastic conduit.

Our test boat's narrow beam means that space around the engines could be tight, but the Schaldenbrands made sure they left enough elbow room for you to get in there with a wrench. You should be able to clean any stains off the spatter finish in the bilge with a sponge or rag.

In the cockpit, the stainless frames for the bolsters bolt through the sole, which the bench-seat base also mounts to. Wood-based bottom cushions open on two-position, flop-over-style hinges to access twin batteries and inspection plates that let you check the fuel tank pickups and sending units.

Belowdecks, finish work on the cabin liner is flawless and the installation of the carpet and the headliner shows marked improvement over last year's boat.

INTERIOR



Michiganite Michael McLeod to lend his design expertise on the Dominator SS' interior. Matching the exterior graphics, which McLeod also devised, the

upholstery is predominantly gray vinyl with yellow, black and lime-green accents. In addition to their good looks, the power bolsters and bench seats feel good with thick padding. Back-seat passengers should find the padded armrests with two position cup holders to their liking. Grab handles on the back of the bolsters are close enough so you can reach them from a sitting or standing position.

If you choose to ride standing, you can lean into the padded gunwales, which also have stowage trays. You'll also find space in small trays alongside of the navigator's seat and directly beneath the throttle podium. On either side of the cockpit, rod-holder-style racks along the sole secure the transom light and frame for the optional cockpit cover (\$725). The most logical place for the anchor and line will be the rear-seat base, which has space remaining for other items.

SunSation keeps the dash from looking cluttered by installing infrequently used gauges, such as the hour meters and a clock, and an ash tray and 12-volt power source in front of the navigator, while the remaining VDO Blueline instruments are ahead of the driver in a two-tier dash layout. In the top lev-

SUNSATION DOMINATOR SS

el, a compass separated the twin ; tachometers and engine synchro-

nizer from the 75-mph speedometer and optional Impulse depthfinder (\$360) and fuel gauge. Down

below are twin indicators for trim, volts, water temperature and oil pressure. We'd like to see the trim gauges closer to the corresponding buttons on the right side of the panel. You can rest your arm on the bolster pad while operating the Zero Effort throttles and lighted accessory switches are easy to reach behind the wheel.

One of the few offshore boats with a walk-thru windshield, the Dominator SS makes it easy to get out on deck. There is a molded step just ahead of the port bolster that helps you start your climb. Nonskid on the top of the cabin door provides the nest step before you head out on deck, but don't kick the Maxxima stereo, which is installed right under the opening.

Open the sliding, one-piece door to gain easy entry into the cabin. Soft gray fabric covers the lounges,

while the V-berth has a contemporary pastel pattern on white cushions and matching throw pillows. Two lounges, a three-person to port and a single-seater on the starboard side offer passengers plenty of space, although we would like to see thicker padding. The lounges can convert into a second berth, but it takes a little bit of doing because you have to completely disassemble the one-person seat and use it for filler cushions.

One of the ways Sunsatation keeps prices down is by using a portable head under the center section of the V-berth. To keep from having to carry it over to the disposal area at the docks, you can get an optional pump-out system (\$225). You'll find your most spacious cabin stowage under the sleeping area in the form of a tapered 4'6" x 1'8" locker. There is space under the lounges and beneath the fold-up step in the cabin entryway.

Aft of the starboard lounge, a basic galley contains a standard sink and optional appliances, including a Norcold Tek 11 refrig-

erator (\$865), a General Electric microwave (\$475)

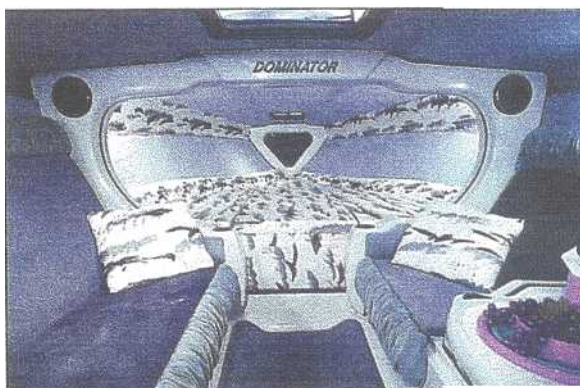
and a Princess single-burner alcohol electric stove

(325). There is fully carpeted, molded-in stowage in the galley, which you can access after moving the starboard arm rest on the one-person lounge out of the way. Just above the galley are a mirror and an AC power panel, which includes an outlet for the optional shorepower (\$890).

Twin deck hatches (the second one is a \$300 option) let in sunshine and fresh air above the V-berth and lounge area.



OVERALL
All it took was hydraulic steering to make the Dominator SS one of the finest-dinning 32-footers we've tested. And at this price, it's one of the best values in the offshore performance market.



• Relax lbr the evening in the con cabin, which has such comforts of home as a mir-ror and optional microwave in the small galley area.

SUNSATATION DOMINATOR SS

HULL TYPE: Deep-V
Deadrise at transom24 degrees
Centerline32"
Beam8'1"
Bare hull weight.....3,488 pounds
Weight as tested.....6,200 pounds

BASE RETAIL: \$98,000
PRICE AS TESTED: \$115,010

STANDARD EQUIPMENT: McLeod interior, stainless props, gelcoat graphics, Zero Effort throttles, courtesy lights, trim on throttles,

fiberglass liner construction, trim tabs, twin MerCruiser 7.4 Ls.

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT: Upgrade to twin 502 Magnums (\$9,950), Corsa Captain's Call exhaust cut-out (\$2,000), shorepower (\$890), refrigerator (\$865), microwave (\$475), stove (\$325), cockpit and bow covers (\$1,300), depthfinder (\$360), second bow hatch (\$300), head pump-out (\$225), halon extinguisher (\$210), automatic bilge pumps (\$90).

ENGINE
Modeltwin 502 Magnums
Cylinder typeV-8
Bore and stroke4.47" x 4"
Cubic inch displacement502 c.i.
Lower unit gear ratio1.5:1
Max prop hp @ rpm.....390 at 5000

PROPELLERS: Quicksilver 14 3/8" x 27" stainless three-blade Mirage.

MANUFACTURER: Sunsatation Products, Inc., 5827 Hessen Road, Casco, Mich. 48064, (313) 725-8020.

POWERBOAT TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION
Zero to 5 seconds....24 mph
10 seconds....50 mph
15 seconds....73 mph
20 seconds....78 mph

TIME TO PLANE:4.8 seconds
Min. planing speed.....24 mph

RPM VS. MPH
1000.....9 mph
2000.....23 mph
3000.....46 mph
3500.....56 mph
4000.....65 mph
4500.....74 mph
5000.....80 mph

TOP SPEED AT RPM
Speedometer80 mph at 5000
Radar78.4 mph at 5000

FUEL CAPACITY: 110 gallons
Test conducted at sea level in Panama City, Fla.

SOUND LEVEL: 96 dBA