


**BOAT
TEST**
**SUNSATION 288
INTIMIDATOR**

NoPretender

Sunsation's Intimidator Lives Up To Its Name

There is a glut of single-engine offshore performance boats available today, and they are not all created equal. In fact, some of them are nothing more than glorified lake boats from manufacturers that want a piece of the pricey offshore market.

They extend an existing mold, put in an extra layer of laminate, add a bigger motor and an even bigger price tag and then label it as their offshore model. Buyer beware. On the other hand, there are some genuine single-engine offshore models that are designed and built from scratch to handle the rigors of the environment for which they're intended. The SunSation 288 Intimidator falls nicely into this latter category.

The Intimidator is 28 feet, 8 inches, with a beam 8 feet, 1 inch, and tips the scales at approximately 4,500 pounds, which is relatively light and, hence, easy to trailer. It has 24 degrees of deadrise, which is an ideal angle for slicing through offshore waves. However, it also sports a delta pad to provide a little more lift in the heavy aft section and increase lateral stability on re-entry. The pad runs about 10 feet forward, flaring from 10 inches wide at the transom to 4 inches at the peak. Four strakes supply additional lift to keep the boat from running too wet and deep in the water. The inner strakes run about 8 feet forward of the transom, while the outer set stops at 6 feet. To help aerate the hull for faster speed, SunSation incorporates a step in the outboard set of strakes; the inner strakes run uninterrupted for their entire length. And for a bit more performance, there is a 6-inch-tall notch in the transom that extends about 6 inches forward. This permits the water coming off the hull's running surface to begin

its upward ascent more quickly, which allows the propeller to be elevated a tad more and still get a good bite. With less drive in the water, there is less drag and, consequently, faster speeds can be achieved.

Hearty Performer

Several engine options are available for the 288 Intimidator, but you can also get it as a blank boat (without motor) in the event you're having a custom motor built. The blank boat sells for \$48,491. The base motor supplied by SunSation is a MerCruiser 350 5.7L, a 260hp EFI motor that will deliver an estimated 56 mph. So equipped, the boat costs \$59,859. The next step up is a 320hp MX 6.2 MPI (\$62,685) that SunSation says should run around 60 mph. The 375hp 496 MAG (\$66,101) will take you up to about 67 mph, and the 425hp HO version (\$71,190) will put you in the neighborhood of 70-plus mph, according to SunSation. (Also available with the 496 MAG HO are the new Bravo XZ and XR drives.) Or you can go all out, as with the model we tested, and install a 470hp HP500 EFI, which costs \$82,316 and delivers exhilarating speeds in the mid-70s.

We've had more than one opportunity to test drive the 288 Intimidator. One was on a calm inland body of water and the other in the Gulf of Mexico. Without question, the Gulf was the most



The SunSation 228 was upgraded with a McCleod interior. A Gaffrig gauge system adorns the dash panel.



inspiring. Greeted with three-foot seas, we were able to air out the bottom of the boat and were impressed at how it consistently re-entered the water in a stable manner.

Being relatively lightweight, the Intimidator accelerates like a rocket with the HP500 for propulsion. Zero-to-30-mph sprints take less than 7 seconds, and in 10 seconds we were at 44 mph. Zero to 60 took 15 seconds. The top speed we recorded was 74 mph.

Standard equipment includes dual-ram Bennett trim tabs, so you can fine-tune your ride to the conditions at hand. Without using the tabs, time to plane was about six seconds. But with the tabs down, we cut that time to slightly over four seconds, and bowrise was minimal. In turning maneuvers, the Intimidator carved a nice arc and did not exhibit any tendency to slide.

Built To Handle It

If you're going to take a boat offshore, you want to feel confident that it can handle the beating it will occasionally take and still get you home in one piece. For that reason, SunSation builds the 288 Intimidator with end-grain balsa coring, which is noted for its out-

standing strength-to-weight ratio. The boat's bottom and upper deck are reinforced with 3/4-inch balsa, while 1/2-inch goes in the sides.

Strong 2x12 pinewood stringers provide the boat's backbone. They are set in a polyester putty and are totally encapsulated in fiberglass to integrate them with the hull and provide protection against water. The engine is bolted to metal L-angles that are through-bolted to the stringers for solid support. Five plywood bulkheads provide a rigid skeleton onto which the cockpit liner bonds. The bulk of the transom is made up of two pieces of 3/4-inch marine-grade plywood. Finally, the entire perimeter of the hull/deck seam is fiberglassed inside for optimum strength. Little wonder that the boat carries a five-year hull warranty.

Interior Amenities

SunSation has been building boats since 1982, and the 288 Intimidator has been in the lineup since 1993. Over the years, it has undergone some refinements, mostly to the interior. When we tested the boat, the Intimidator was going through a transitional cabin-redesign phase, and our model did not include the changes. The



Future SunSation cabins will feature more storage space, an upgraded wet bar and wraparound bench seating.



newest versions will feature considerably more built-in storage space, an upgraded wet bar and a wraparound bench.

Entrance to the cabin is through a locking acrylic door that slides behind the helm. To port is a hanging closet that is approximately 3-1/2 feet tall. Ahead of it is the wraparound bench that goes along the port side and across the base of the V-berth. On the starboard side is a storage cabinet capable of housing an optional refrigerator (S959). Next to it is the wet-bar sink and cabinets, followed by a 2-foot bench seat.

A partial bulkhead separates the V-berth from the main cabin, in which SunSation has installed attractive overhead reading lights. Beneath the center portion of the V-berth is a compartment for a portable head (a \$178 option). As is, the cabin provides a comfortable setting and a nice reprieve from the outside. But if you want to make it truly luxuriant, you can add options such as a shorepower and battery charging system (\$1,080), an enclosed air-conditioning system (S2,106), microwave (\$405), TV/VCR with remote (\$594, cabin table (S209), electric cold-water sink with transom shower and a

22-gallon fresh-water tank (\$432) and thermoelectric in-floor Coleman coolers, just to name a few.

Cockpit Features

The boat we tested sported an upgraded McLeod interior, a \$4,455 option that includes electric stand-up/sit-down bolsters for the driver and copilot. Sculpted in appearance, these substantial units offer superb comfort and outstanding support. Stylishly inset into the bolster sides and back are stainless steel grab bars.

Comfort is further enhanced by SunSation's integrating footrests in the dash console.

The deck features a raised race fairing in lieu of a windshield. While it does little to deflect wind, it adds to the streamlined profile of the boat and complements its go-fast heritage.

Quality Gaffrig gauges, offset by anodized aluminum bezels spread over a tiered dash, offer the driver good (and accurate) readings of the boat's systems in an aesthetic presentation. There are gauges for volts, engine water temperature, oil pressure, trim, engine rpm with an hour meter, speed and fuel. The test boat also

Length:	28'8"
Beam:	8'1"
Deadrise:	24 degrees
Hull weight:	4,500 pounds
Base engine MerCruiser:	260 hp 5.7L EFI
Test engine:	470hp HP500EFI
Base price :	\$59,859
Price as tested:	\$94,832
RPM	MPH
1,000	7
1,500	9
2,000	17
2,500	22
3,000	36
3,500	45
4,000	55
4,500	63
5,000	74

had a Ritchie compass (a \$311 option) and a Lowrance digital depth sounder (\$446). The boat's accessories are activated by rocker switches equipped with indicator lights and independent circuit breakers. Mounted in the center of the race fairing, above the cabin door, is a high-output Sony CD player wired to four cockpit speakers.

Sunsation equips the 288 Intimidator with separate controls for the throttle and gears. For convenience and safety, the throttle has a built-in trim button to adjust the outdrive while simultaneously accelerating or decelerating. A switch on the dash permits effortless lifting of the padded fiberglass engine hatch, which also incorporates the bench seat backrest for better access. Sunsation provides a tidy engine compartment, with all the wires nicely routed and secured in cushion clamps.

Other noteworthy standard features included on the 288 Intimidator are through-hull exhaust with stainless steel tips and external flappers, cockpit cover and embroidered carpet. About the only thing lacking is you in the driver's seat.

When it comes to single-engine offshore performance boats, Sunsation's 288 Intimidator is no pretender. It is designed and



built from the bottom up with the intended purpose of running offshore, and it does so admirably. If you're shopping, the 288 Intimidator is definitely worth a test drive. . .

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