

# SUNSATATION

3 1 0 I N T I M I D A T O R

Accolades have closely followed each in the series of Sunsation's high-performance sport boats that have graced our annual test event, and even as this talented, 15-year-old company remains somewhat of a secret in some parts of the world, it's gaining prominence in others. The Schaldenbrand brothers (Wayne, Joe and John) continue to show not only resilience in what can only be described as an extremely tough industry but also a solid resolve to continue building the kind of boats that set their entrepreneurial spirit afire in the first place.

Sunsation's 28-foot Intimidator was the final link in their coverage of the 25- to 32-foot offshore sport class.

Released in '94, it is the most recently created of the model trio—all of which ride on the same 24-degree deep-vee platform.

Our driving team had taken previous note of the Sunsation



hull's resilience to rough-water hills and had become equally enamored with the solid nature of its design and workmanship on those occasions. This year, Sunsation spiced their test act with some serious performance pepper: a nasty, B&M Megablown, 540-cubic-inch Chevrolet that made more than twice as much power as an entry-level big-block I/O package. Firecracker's pyrotechnic display included a serious top-end whip-ass on every other single-engine 28-footer we tested this year, to the tune of an

80.9-radar showing.

*Firecracker* owner Jeff Roberts prevailed upon the master fabricators at The Bravo Shop to harden the internals of the stock 1.36:1 outdrive in anticipation of the blown motor's estimated 800-horsepower output and outlandish torque. Meanwhile, Crockett Marine (Ruby, Michigan) built the 540-inch from the Dart Merlin block up, filling it with top-drawer aftermarket parts. To date, Roberts has logged more than 35 reliable hours on his *Firecracker* (named in salute to his Independence Day birth), with no ill effects at the hands of the big-inch blower.

## THE PACKAGE

Crockett profiled the 540 project around a goal for a reliable, high-output power source that would thrive on pump gas, while still dropping the blower's hammer on the big end without creating owner stress over the potential for twisted pieces.

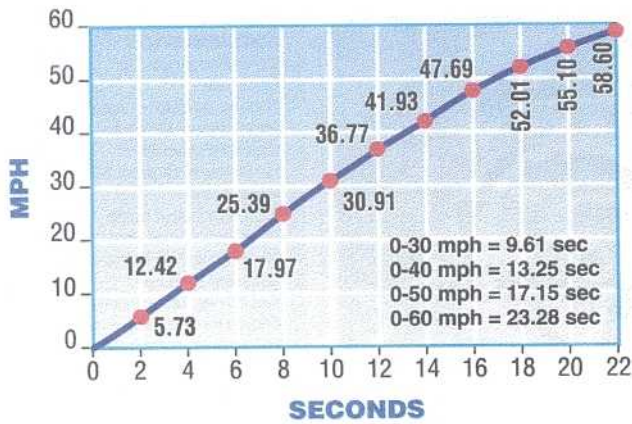
Longevity was assured by running 8.2:1 compression, topping the blower boost off at about eight pounds and fitting the B&M huffer with a copy of PFM's highly touted Super-Chiller intercooler.

Selected motor internals included Brodix heads, JE Pistons, Callies crank, Eagle rods and MSD Ignition. Waste gas flowed through beautifully crafted CMI exhaust. The resulting motor added \$25,000 to the bottom line—only a few thousand more than a MerCruiser 525SC engine. Hydraulic, dual-ram steering (\$3,500) melted the torque we expected in an 80-mph vee.

All this added grunt did nothing to test the capacity of Sunsation's 24-degree vee, which remained stable even as it took top-end flight—no small feat for a deep-vee under this kind of power. The Intimidator's underside is softened with a pie-shaped keel pad and notched transom that preceded jacking the X-dimension to maximum effective height.

Sunsation's clientele are almost exclusively open-water inhabitants who draw on a sound, solid production schedule for insurance of their security amidst the suddenly hanging elements that are indigenous to open water. In response, 15 molds (half of which produce





cabin elements) create components that are almost all balsa cored. Strength-to-weight is paid proper homage throughout the production of the Intimidator, which is supremely stout and absolutely loaded for a package weighing 4,500 pounds, especially in the cabin. With that in mind, Sunsation cores virtually every fiberglass component, including hull, deck, sides, inner-liners, V-berth frame, rear seat and galleys. Supportive plywood bulkheads are encased in glass, and hull and deck are glassed together around the perimeter seam.

All of this helps to account for the hull's solid nature and lack of flex. We pushed the Intimidator through a variety of water conditions with the same result:

whether blasting through wind-blown, two-foot chop at 55 miles an hour or letting the blower scream at 80 mph in water that was only slightly better, the Sunsation quietly served up its great, rattle-free ride.

Sunsation draws upon the familiar magic of McLeod to insure passenger comfort in the Intimidator, and one truth rings as clearly today as it did ten years ago: no one builds passenger seating like this talented aftermarket entity. The interior design and execution on our test boat reflected a level of forethought and quality found only in offshore powerboating's most heralded of transportation, and everything pertaining to the Sunsation's seating-roominess, comfort, design, padding and layout-elicited best-possible marks from our evaluation team. Mechanical drop-thru bolsters are standard on the Intimidator, but those on *Firecracker* were appropriately upgraded to power-assist status. The accompanying, standard foot rests catapulted the comfort level up still another notch. The mounting hardware was screwed into the floor and bolted to the sides in the gunnels. The graphics on the seats effectively complimented the gelcoat.

McLeod took similar care of the Sunsation's rear inhabitants with a deep, roomy, comfortable bench. Stainless grab bars are integrated into the front seat hacks, providing additional security for those riding the bench.

Our test boat's standard, snap-out carpeting-obviously of very high quality-removed easily in the interest of cleaning the fiberglass cockpit liner. The interior is flush with storage, which is molded into all seat bases, in the side panels and in variously sized areas placed throughout the cabin area. Standards included a basic sound system,



compass, horn, Halon system and a rock-solid, electrically activated engine hatch.

The optional raised deck fairing (\$3,000), a separately molded piece that incorporates the raised deck on one side and a horizontally placed gauge panel on the other, also offers an opportunity for gelcoat accent; ours was sprayed in Imron, like the rest of the boat. The back-side of the panel was dressed with a black aluminum face, which housed four white-faced Gaff rig dials (tach, speedometer, trim indicator and fuel level) and a depth gauge. Two smaller stacked panels framed the remaining Gaff rig gauges (\$1,000), also against a black aluminum backdrop, along with an array of rocker switches with indicator lights and circuit breakers. It's busy but it's also very organized, and its layout is smartly prioritized by function.

The fairing incorporates flip-up deflectors that are activated by wind resistance and which smoothly rose from the dash just about the time the Sunsation was gathering a head of steam (around 35 mph). They worked extremely well and drew unanimous positive feedback from our drivers. The deflectors can also be secured with a supplied safety strap.

Sunsation is stepping up its gelcoat options this season, but this Intimidator was delivered to its owner with only a glossy white exterior. Mitchell Tolan's Mitcher T Custom Painting and Design Studio of Middleville, Michigan, took it from there with the application of a spectacular Imron graphic treatment (\$6,000) that combined vibrant color work, an appealing design and superior technique.

Supplied exterior hardware, included six docking cleats, sculpted flush into the Intimidator's lines and its large, integral rear-boarding platform with grabhandles.

To the starboard side of the driver, another molded fiberglass piece houses the trim tabs and indicators and, in the case of our test boat, the pro-level, Kiekhaefer race-styled throttle/shifter control, which had trim on the handle. The housing for the controls was carved into the drivers-side gunnel, offering great support and easy, ergonomically sound access to trim, throttle, tabs and exhaust selector (thru-hull or hub).

Controls were easily operative from both a sitting and standing position. Sunsation has always built a *driver's* boat, and this one excelled in every functional area.

The Intimidator's large, lock-



ing cabin door design incorporates a convenient step-up to the top deck, and a dash-mounted grabhandle also helps in that regard. In addition to its lavish cabinet work (all glass), the cabin also contained a comfortable bed and spacious, curved modular seating—all of which was very comfortable. Fit and finish of the fabric, mounting and glasswork was simply outstanding. Drink holders, the standard sink, bulkheads and a series of other highly detailed design nuances were molded seamlessly into the glass in Sunstation's outstanding cabin design.

### PERFORMANCE

This stunning Sunstation creation tapped the full potential of a stand-out design, blending the incomparable thrill of a reliable, supercharged motor with a great rough-water ride, gorgeous cosmetics and interior work. The Intimidator has evolved into one of sport-boating's most satisfying experiences, and the abundant power reserve supplied by Crockett only made it better.

It showed crisp action out of the hole, with instantaneous throttle response and a clean, quick planing capability. We lost none of the horizon on takeoff, and even when loaded with five passengers, use of the tabs weren't required. Our somewhat lackluster acceleration numbers deserve a footnote: Our drivers treated this package with the kid-gloves it deserved, consider-



ing the \$25,000 replacement cost of the motor. We could have squeezed better than the recorded 9.61 second elapsed time from 0-to-30 but didn't consider hammering it worth the risk in this privately owned boat.

Besides, this boat was set up mostly for use at high rpm. We settled into a leisurely 54-mph cruise at 4,000 rpm and felt the blower work its magic every time we goosed the throttle. The Intimidator showed no chine-walking tendencies whatsoever—remarkable for a single-engine vee-hull running 80 miles an hour. Even when trimmed to the sky, this obedient, sure-handling vee-bottom never showed a sign of breaking loose from its sticky, stable stance.

We became intimately acquainted with the Sunstation's innate turning ability after encountering a maze

of neon buoys—signaling lobster traps—at about 70 miles an hour. It proved explicitly reactive to wheel play, threading the buoys effortlessly and leaving a tightly woven series of S-turns in its froth.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

The Intimidator has a smooth, comfortable presence in the luxurious world of high-end powerboating, where no convenience or extravagance is overlooked. Sunstation's practiced production regime runs on equal parts inspired engineering, passion for craftsmanship and drive for enhanced performance, with consistent, excellent results. The resulting 28-footer, out the door at \$107,295 with the fun-filled 540 in its well, offered a delightful, close-up perspective of Sunstation's ongoing evolution.

### SPECIFICATIONS

Centerline length: 28'  
 Beam: 96"  
 Bottom: 24-degree vee w/pad  
 Engine/drive: 540-cubic-inch Crockett/Bravo Shop  
 Horsepower @ prop: 800 (est.)  
 Ratio: 1.36:1  
 Prop: Mach four blade  
 Base Retail Price, incl. trailer: \$61,580 (w/7.4L Bravo I)  
 Standard Features:  
 7AL/Bravo, Mirage prop, Trimon throttle, tabs, stereo, g alley, snap-out carpet, power hatch, integrated drink holders, three gelcoat colors  
 Options on test boat: Wind fairing w/air-activated wind screens (\$3,000), hydraulic steering (. \$3,500), dual batteries (\$250), angled exhaust tips (\$225), Halon system (\$200); auto bilge (\$100), McLeod interior package (\$3,200), VHF 400 (\$3,700), cockpit/bow covers (\$950), refrigerator (\$695), Shore Power (\$635), depth finder (\$360), microwave (\$500), pump-out (\$200); custom paint (\$6,000), Gaffrig gauges (\$500), Crockett 540- (\$25,000)  
 Price as tested: \$107,295  
 Performance  
 Top speed, radar: 80.9 mph  
 Builders estimated top speed in optimum conditions: 82 mph  
 Maximum rpm: 5,200  
 0-30 mph: 9.61 seconds  
 0-40 mph: 13.25 seconds  
 0-50 mph: 17.15 seconds  
 0-60 mph: 23.28 seconds  
 Speed at 3,000 rpm: 38.2 mph  
 Speed at 4,000 rpm: 54.3 mph  
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