

Swinging Single

OUTFITTED WITH A STEPPED-BOTTOM AND BOLD NEW GRAPHICS, THE SUNSATION 288 INTIMIDATOR RAN STRONG AND TURNED HEADS.

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E BEGAN SEEING "MILLENNIUM" EDITIONS of powerboats this summer at various shows and—for the most part—they were based on cosmetics. No one, as far as we know, has been holding back

any change-the-face-of-performance-boating power or hull innovation for model-year 2000,

No, the millennium thing has been mostly about graphics, and from what we saw in Sarasota, Fla., few companies have a better handle on it than SunSation Offshore Powerboats. The Algonac, Mich., builder sent us a strong-performing 288 Intimidator dressed in a stunning Signature Series Millennium color scheme.

Base price for the 28'8"-long, 8'1"-wide model with a MerCruiser 5.71, 250-hp motor is \$56,609.

As tested with the upgraded graphics, a Mercury Racing HP500EFI motor and Bravo One chine, the price will still

PERFORMANCE

During our Performance Trials in Sarasota, the HP500EFI was the most common engine we saw in offshore boat-s. That's saying something, considering its 520,000-plus sticker.

Our test boat came with that coveted motor, as well as a 24-degree single-step bottom with a delta pad keel, a 3"-wide flat chine and a notched transom. None of the boat's strakes ran full length; the

inner pair terminated at the 1/2" step about 8' forward of the transom, and the outer strakes ended approximately 4' beyond the inner set.

With the 470-hp fuel-injected big-block putting its power to a Bravo One drive spinning a Bravo 15 1/4" x 26" four-blade stainless-steel propeller through 1.0:1 reduction, top speed for the boat was 73.7 mph at 5150 rpm.

To get the 288 Intimidator to that speed, our test driver had to trim up the drive to the edge of its limit. The downside was—at that high trim setting—the 288 Intimidator was susceptible to cross chop and wakes that caused a chine walk. Applying a little negative drive trim was all it took to settle down the boat.

Time to plane, an average 6.1 seconds, improved dramatically to 4.4 seconds with the Bennett trim tabs deployed. Visibility coming on plane was better than average for a boat with a long nose and some bow rise, and once on plane forward visibility was perfect.

From a standing start, the 288 Intimidator hit 57 mph in 10 seconds and 66 mph in 20 seconds, plenty peppy for a single-engine offering. Equally respectable was the boat's performance in mid-range acceleration chills. It ran from 30 to 50 mph in 4.8 seconds and 40 to 60 mph in 7.7 seconds. Going from 40 to 70 mph, however, took 18.6 seconds to be exact.

At idle speeds, the 288 Intimidator wandered slightly from side to side. While the boat didn't hop in low-speed slalom and circle turns to the left and right like more than a few stepped-bottom models we've seen, it did pulse somewhat. The boat performed best in mid-speed agility chills, where it leaned it nicely and felt decidedly settled and secure. In high-speed maneuvers, the Intimidator did nothing unpredictable.



From left: The helm areas well-appointed, but not cluttered. The Gauges and controls were a perfect fit for this off-racer. Below, the large 1' berth raised oil gas shocks, under which was a pump-out Porta Potti. Aft was seating for three. In the cockpit, we enjoyed the comfort of a McLeod design—as usual.

TestResults

2000 PERFORMANCE REPORTS SUNSATION 288 INTIMIDATOR

HULL INFORMATION

Deadrise at transom	24 degrees
Centerline	28'
Beam	8'1"
Hull weight	4,500 pounds

PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail	\$56,609
Price as tested	\$84,901

ENGINE & PROPELLER

Engine	Mercury Racing HP500EFI
Cylinder type	V-8
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	502/470
Lower unit gear ratio	1.5:1
Propeller	Mercury Bravo 15 1/4" X 26"

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Stand-up bolsters, Gaffrig gauges, Mercury Zero Effort controls with trim, Sony CD stereo, race faring, dual-ram Bennett trim tabs, automatic bilge pump, thru-hull exhaust, hydraulic engine-hatch lift, integrated swim platform, stainless-steel hardware, courtesy/navigation lights, cockpit cover, lockable cabin door, embroidered cockpit and cabin carpet, Porta Potti, custom graphics.

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to Mercury Racing HP500EFI engine (\$22,923), hydraulic steering (\$5,418), McLeod cockpit interior (\$4,307), Mercury K-planes with Indicators (\$1,728), Millennium Signature Series graphics (\$1,500), depth-sounder (\$428), colored bezels (\$405), swim ladder (\$338), stainless-steel angle tips (\$311), bull horns (\$278), pump-out Porta Potti (\$257), drive shower (\$260), engine flush kit (\$139).

ACCELERATION

5 seconds	25 mph
10 seconds	43 mph
15 seconds	57 mph
20 seconds	66 mph

MID-RANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	5.8 seconds
40-60 mph	7.7 seconds
40-70 mph	18.6 seconds

RPM VS. MPH

1000	7 mph
1500	9 mph
2000	16 mph
2500	21 mph
3000	34 mph
3500	44 mph
4000	54 mph
4500	61 mph
5000	72 mph

TOP SPEED AT RPM

Speedometer	NA
Radar	73.7 mph at 5150

PLANING

Time to plane	4.4 seconds
Minimum planing speed	13 mph

FUEL ECONOMY

At 45 mph	2.4 mpg
At 55 mph	2.2 mpg
At 65 mph	1.8 mpg
At WOT	1.8 mpg

FUEL CAPACITY 110 gallons

TEST CONDUCTED AT Sarasota, Fla.

MANUFACTURER

Sunsation Offshore Powerboats, Dept. PB, 9666 Kretz Drive, Algonac, MI 48001, (810) 794-4888, www.sunsationboats.com.

In open water, the 288 Intimidator proved rock-solid for its size in 2' to 3' head-on and following conditions. It wasn't quite as authoritative in quartering seas, although judicious application of drive trim and trim tab earned it acceptable marks. In all conditions, we found the McLeod bolsters with power drop-outs to be a major ergonomic plus.

WORKMANSHIP

Sunsation hand-laminates all its boats with a variety of materials including Neste ISO gelcoat and multiple layers of 1 1/2-ounce and 24-ounce material. Stringers—all wooden—are fiberglass-encapsulated, and the hulls and decks are cored with Balteck balsa. Strakes are putty-filled, and hulls and decks are also putty-bonded together, as well as laminated with 3408 Knytex fiberglass.

To complete the 288 Intimidator, the manufacturer applied the gold, silver, black and gray Millennium Signature Series graphics in polyurethane paint, followed by two layers of Clearcote for a brilliant shine. The finished product was protected by a well-installed plastic rubrail with a rubber insert.

Hardware on the boat included a nav light and a cleat on the nose, followed by a deck hatch with the boat's color scheme carried onto it in paint. There was another cleat on each side of the faring. The faring itself was noteworthy; not only did it fit perfectly on the boat, it was integral to the mold that included the dash for the co-pilot and driver.

A single hydraulic Bennett ram raised the engine hatch, which took most of the backrest for the bench seat with it. Inside the engine compartment, the fuel-injected motor was secured with L-angles thru-bolted to the stringers and the standard Mercury mounts. While the installation was well executed, an offshore-style cradle mount for the motor might be a better setup.

All wiring in the engine compartment was protected in conduit and supported by nylon cushion clamps. Thanks to the angle to which the hatch

opened and the relatively spacious engine compartment, access to minor services and cleaning the bilge should not pose a problem.

INTERIOR

A clever suspended track system made opening the cabin door particularly smooth and easy. Inside, the cabin was well-outfitted, yet not overstuffed. The center V-berth cushion raised on a gas shock to reveal a portable head. Under the other berth cushions and lounge bottoms were additional stowage lockers. A shelf above head level on both sides of the cabin provided stowage for small items.

To port, the cabin lounge could accommodate two people. The lounge to starboard was designed for one person, as the aft section of it was dedicated to a sink, a locker and a mirror.

Comfortable as the cabin was, we couldn't imagine spending much time there with McLeod power bolsters on deck. McLeod bolsters are the ulti-

mate in comfort and support. To port, the co-pilot stared from his comfortable seat at molded steps and a grab handle in the dash; another grab handle was supplied for the co-pilot on the port gunwale.

At the helm to starboard, our drivers found an array of Gaffrig instruments in dazzling gold bezels around the steering wheel. Mechanical indicators for the drive and tabs were a welcome addition, as were rocker switches for the accessories and a Mercury Zero Effort throttle (with trim on the handle) and shifter.

OVERALL

No one wants to ride into 2000 in a boat that looks like a relic. In Sunsation's capable 288 Intimidator with brilliant Signature Series Millennium graphics, that won't be a problem.

WORTH NOTING

✓ For those searching for a new look in a sport boat for 2000, the dazzling 288 Intimidator with Signature Series Millennium graphics won't disappoint. We haven't seen anything like it to date.

✓ With an HP500EFI under the hatch, the 288 Intimidator will likely see some hard-running duty. McLeod bolsters should keep the ride comfortable for the driver and co-pilot.