

SUNSATION 288 OPEN BOW

# FRESH TAKE

SUNSATION TOOK A NOVEL-AND TRULY FUNCTIONAL—  
APPROACH WITH ITS MIDCABIN 288 OPEN BOW

AYNE SCHALDENBRAND, principal of Sunsatation Boats in Algonac, Mich., admits that he wasn't thrilled at the prospect of building a bow rider. He

knew the demand existed, but the entire concept offended his stylistic offshore sensibilities.

"I wanted a boat that didn't look like a bow rider because I never really saw us actually building bow riders," he says. "So I had to build something that I thought looked really good in the distance."

The result is the Sunsatation 288 Open Bow, which features a rigid cover for its bow section and removable lounge cushions on the deck over the midcabin. And guess what? The 28' 8"-long, 8'-wide boat looks "really good" up close, too.

Base price for the 28-footer with a MerCruiser 5.7-liter EFI engine is \$72,670. Upgrading to a MerCruiser 496 Mag motor and additional options upped the price of the model we tested in Placida, Fla., to \$87,915.

## PERFORMANCE

Sunsatation outfitted its 288 Open Bow with its single-step "Vortex" bottom, which is the same hull used in the closed-deck 288. The step didn't run completely across the bottom. Instead, it went through the chines and outer strakes. The hull's delta pad also featured a small step. The strakes ran full length, but the inner pair stopped 8 feet from the transom.

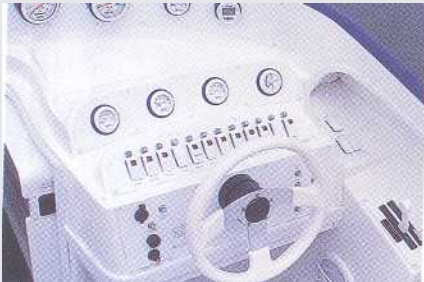
Married to the boat's 375-hp motor was a Bravo One drive with a 1.5:1 gear set and a lab-finished Bravo One 15 1/4" x 24" four-blade stainless-steel propeller. That somewhat mellow propulsion package pushed the boat to a top speed of 64.2 mph at 4,850 rpm.



Time to plane with the dual-ram Bennett trim tabs down was 4.9 seconds. With the tabs up, time to plane rose by a full a second. In 20 seconds, the boat reached 59 mph. Not blazing, but adequate.

That description also applied to the 288 Open Bow's midrange acceleration. The boat went from 30 to 50 mph in 7.1 seconds and from 40 to 60 mph in 12.5 seconds. A 470-hp HP500EFI engine from Mercury Racing is offered for the model, and for those who want more zip, that option might be worth exploring.

The 288 Open Bow earned high marks in slalom and circle turns at various speeds, all the time feeling connected to the water and showing no tendency to slip or catch. The only time the boat felt loose, though not alarmingly, was during speed runs when the drive was all the way up. Running at that attitude, the boat was



FROM LEFT: SUNSATON KEYS TO THE DASH AND A DECK HATCH ALLOWED IN SOFT, NATURAL LIGHT. SUNSATON | ON THE 288 OPEN BOW Clean AND SIMPLE IN THE MIDCABIN DOORS AT BOTH ENDS PROVIDED SHELTER FROM THE ELEMENTS INSTALLED IN THE COCKPIT ELECTRIC DROPOUT BOTTOM BOLSTERS FOR THE DRIVER AND CO-PILOT.

### HULL INFORMATION

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

### PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail	\$72,670
Price as tested	\$87,915

### ENGINE & PROPELLER

Engine	MerCruiser 496 Mag
Cylinder type	V-8
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	496/375
Lower-unit gear ratio	1.5:1
Propeller	Mercury Bravo One lab-finished 15 1/4" x 24"

### STANDARD EQUIPMENT

MerCruiser 5.7-liter EFI engine, molded bow cover, cockpit cover, dual-ram Bennett trim tabs, Gaffrig gauges, dual auto bilge pumps, Sony AM/FM CD stereo, cockpit and cabin carpet, indirect lighting in cockpit, cabin and open bow, standup bolsters, Kiekhaefer drive and throttle controls, custom graphics by Mitcher T and in-floor cockpit Coleman coolers.

### OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to MerCruiser 496 Mag engine (\$7,213), upgraded Mitcher T graphics (\$3,000), fiberglass racing-style rear hatch (\$2,500), deck cushions (\$650), swim ladder with grab handle (\$513), gauge cluster set in open bow (\$475), depthsounder (\$446), open-bow filler cushion (\$225) and tender cleats (\$223).

### ACCELERATION

5 seconds	25 mph
10 seconds	43 mph
15 seconds	54 mph
20 seconds	59 mph

### MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	7.1 seconds
40-60 mph	12.5 seconds

### RPM VS. MPH

1000	7 mph
1500	9 mph
2000	14 mph
2500	28 mph
3000	38 mph
3500	45 mph
4000	52 mph
4500	58 mph

### TOP SPEED AT RPM

Radar	64.2 mph at 4,850
Speedometer	64 mph
Nordskog Performance Products GPS	64.2 mph

### PLANING

Time to plane	4.9 seconds
Minimum planing speed	18 mph

### FUEL ECONOMY

At 25 mph	2.6 mpg
At 35 mph	2.9 mpg
At 45 mph	2.8 mpg
At 55 mph	2.2 mpg
At WOT	2.1 mpg

### FUEL CAPACITY

85 gallons

### TEST CONDUCTED AT

Placida, Fla.

### MANUFACTURER

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

upset a bit by cross-chop and quartering seas. On the plus side, the trim tabs settled it down.

In head-on and following seas, our test driver left the tabs in neutral position. The 288 Open Bow knifed through 2- to 4-footers, and rode down their backs with no problem.

## WORKMANSHIP

In years past, we've seen vinyl graphics on Sunsation boats and we've always felt that the application didn't fit with the strong overall quality of the products. That wasn't the case with the 288 Open Bow—all of the clean graphics were applied in paint on shiny gelcoat. Protected by a sturdy rubrail, the boat's hull sides were straight and smooth.

Hardware was appropriately chosen and stoutly installed. Just aft of the nav light on the nose was an Accon Pop-Up' cleat. A standard raised Perco cleat was mounted on each side of the fairing. Two more, as well as a pair of mushroom-style cleats, were on the stern. Also in the hardware selection was a Bomar deck hatch and numerous stainless-steel grab handles.

Smooth and unpadding on top and reinforced with Kevlar, the boat's fiberglass engine hatch raised on a hydraulic actuator. The motor was installed in proper offshore fashion on MerCruiser mounts and L-angles through-bolted to the stringers. The bilge was finished in white gelcoat and easy to reach for cleaning. Described by our lead inspector as "very sanitary," engine compartment wiring was protected in conduit, mostly hidden and supported by nylon cushion clamps.

## INTERIOR

Going with a rigid cover for the open-bow and cushions on deck above the midcabin did more than give Schal-denbrand the "look" he wanted. It enabled Sunsation to offer a smooth fiberglass engine hatch, rather than the standard engine hatch/sunpad, as an option. Buyers who choose the uncush-ioned hatch aren't out of luck when it comes to a sunpad—it's up front on the

midcabin/covered open bow area.

With the cover off, the open-bow lounges could accommodate two people reclining or four sitting up. They'll have more to look at than the scenery flashing by, because Sunsation installed a Gaffrig speedometer and air/water temperature gauge in a vertical section of the nose.

Another welcome feature was a door at each end of the midcabin. With both doors closed, the cabin never felt cramped or stuffy, thanks to the overhead deck hatches. Cabin amenities included a galley with a sink in a cabinet and facing lounges.

Bolsters with power dropout bottoms were installed in the cockpit for the driver and co-pilot. For access to the mid-deck area, steps were molded into the co-pilot's dash to port. Also at the co-pilot's station were two stainless-steel grab handles (one on the gunwale, one on the dash). Mounted above the aft cabin door was the Sony CD stereo. Snap-in carpet covered the cockpit sole.

At the helm station to starboard, our test drivers enjoyed a clear view of Gaffrig gauges in angled purple bezels in two rows above the steering wheel.

## OVERALL

Creative thinking went into the 288 Open Bow's design. Craftsmanship went into its construction. The result is a midcabin bow rider that even the most traditional performance-boat lover could be proud to own.

## WORTH NOTING

✓ Sunsation tapped otherwise wasted space, the deck above a midcabin, to create a sunlounge. That freed up the company to offer a smooth fiberglass engine hatch without a sunpad as an option. Plus, the rigid cover for the open bow makes functional sense—and looks great.

✓ Little things count. To help passengers in the open bow feel like they're part of the action, the manufacturer supplied a speedometer and air/water temperature gauge. To enhance midcabin privacy, and keep out the elements, the builder went with fore and aft doors.