

A Stunning and Versatile Offshore Vee

Michigan-based Sunsation Powerboats has made a mission of chipping away with improvements to their hand-built, sport-caliber vee-bottom line through the years, and the dramatic culmination of those efforts swept through our Florida test proceedings with a flourish, in the form of a quite incredible dual HP500EFI-powered, 32-foot Dominator.

The appropriately named Dominator is the big gun (and is second in sales) in a pad-bottomed-vee stable that also includes a 25- and a 28-footer. In 1997, Sunsation raised the bar on performance levels across the board throughout the line with the integration of their Vortex step-bottom, an elaborate ventilator configuration that uses a step, carved into the running surface about two-thirds aft, to break the bond of surface-to-glass traction.

2000 HOT BOAT PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

Under the hard load of 940 prop-rated HP horsepower, the Dominator was a certifiable scorcher. This hard-biting Sunsation is, in point of fact, among the fastest HP-powered vees we've ever tested, ringing up an 87.6-mph radar number during test flight. And this was no fat-whacked, light-layup sleeper boat: Our Dominator showed off one of the most sophisticated and best-built liner cockpits and cabins in sport boating today.

Capping a truly remarkable test

performance, the Dominator was also quickest boat of the week in measured acceleration drills. Hammering a 0-to-60 spin in a jaw-dropping 11.50 seconds. Nothing in its size range was remotely close. It was also quickest of everything tested off the line, hitting 30 in 6.36 seconds. Just goes to show, with the right hull, rigging and setup, you don't have to run blowers to dominate. And Sunsation wraps this enthusiast-level driving experience with a driver-friendly feel that invites indulgence in the upper

spectrum of its rpm range: Tall numbers in the Dominator are not reserved for those who have cut their teeth behind the wheel of a high-performance powerboat.

THE PACKAGE

The Dominator is drop-dead gorgeous from every angle, a dynamic that begins with the hull's outstanding and very nicely detailed fiberglass tooling. The dash glides upward to form a deep, protective cowl around its human cargo—there's enough freeboard to feel comfortable running this boat virtually anywhere—and softly cut accent lines lend a gentle, understated elegance to its shapely cut.

One of the largest and most practically positioned integrated nonskid swim steps in sport boating is absorbed with clean grace into the Dominator's design, and Sunsation took the opportunity to engineer additional flat, horizontally introduced ventilation into its top and vertical ventilation into its sheer step to the motor hatch. Large, stainless steel transom cleats are also flush tooled into the aft corners of the transom and also midship. Like the trim molding, deck hardware was mostly powdercoated billet except for the stainless cleats.

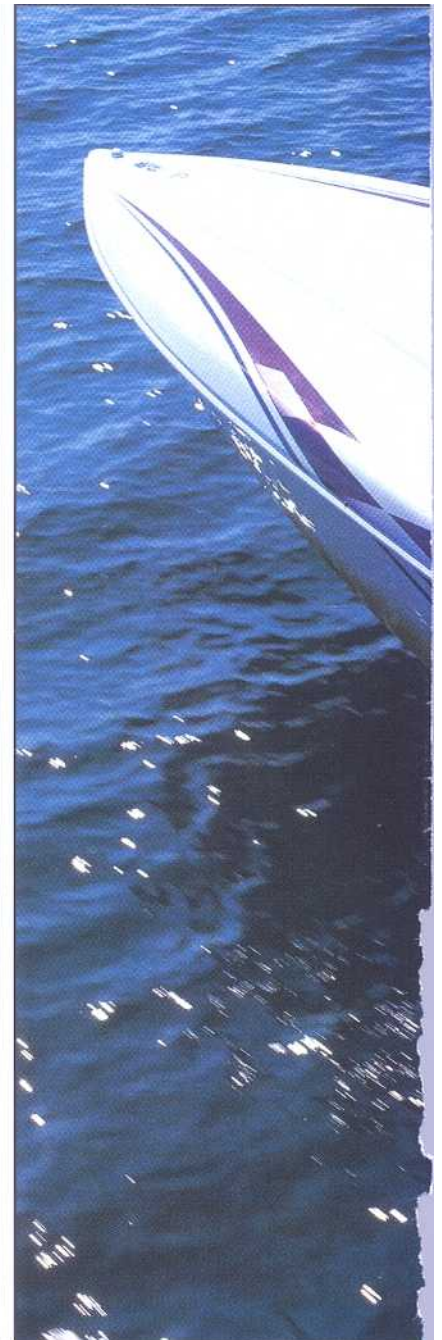
The boat's base (\$89,600, with twin small-block 5.7L/ Bravo mills) covers pure white gelcoat, a condition that inspired dramatic remedy on our test boat at the hands of talented Imron artist Mitcher T Design and Custom Painting (Middleville,

Michigan). A clean, well-stained Imron barrage of purple, yellow, black and grays (\$2,000), Sunsation's Signature graphics package (including vinyl lettering) lent the requisite visual punch to match the prowess that lay beneath the electrically activated, checker-laden, padded engine hatch.

There will be no joy while performing maintenance chores on the jammed, shoe-horned 500s, but Sunsation did the best they could with available space, with through-bolt motor mounting and installation of most below-hatch hardware and brackets. Cable and wiring were neatly routed. The HPs ran exhaust through CMI headers through stainless, four-

inch angle tips (\$516) from Corsa. An auto Halon fire system (\$351) provided peace of mind. The Bravos, which ran 1.5:1 internals and turned 28-inch Mercury four-blades, were cooled with IMCO showers. Kiekhaefer K-planes and indicators (\$1,728) displaced the standard-issue Bennett tabs. Dual-ram IMCO Stern Advantage steering (\$5,418) sharpened the feel behind the wheel. Stainless tie bar was standard.

Our Sunsation was rigged out with optional McLeod interior (\$4,307), a highly recommended step up that went a long way in



setting the boat's palpable high-end tone. Large, electrically adjustable drop-out bolsters are anchored to the fiberglass liner with a subplate. They offered superior comfort, excellent support during high-speed running and nothing short of magnificent styling. The solid, white fabric was double stitched to perfection and offered an unobstructed view of the three-tiered dash, with its myriad gauges (all Gaffrig white-face), switches and standard Ritchie compass.

Dials were dressed with Eddie Marine bezels, inlaid into a thin,

aluminum powdercoated panel, with a very clean result. A flat panel, inches to the right of the steering wheel, housed the standard-issue Zero-Effort controls, with engine and throttle sticks grouped separately. The driver had the option of synchro trim (in the port throttle handle) or individual drive and tab controls on the dash, in another small panel. Molded kick panels provided more driver and passenger security while under way.

All the dials and the Gaffrig mechanical trim indicators were easily visible at speed. A stain-

less grab rail was mounted for front passenger use, and a high-output Sony system (with four speakers) is standard. The Dominator's dash and control layout, familiar to our test drivers, lent a strong degree of ergonomic sensibility to the installation.

A molded, walk-up step provides relatively easy access to the deck, where a low-slung center railing hugs the deck in a nonskid center path; the sides are also textured for a surer foot grip. Rear passengers were wrapped in the lap of luxury within a large, deep bench that was roomy enough for

four adults. Padded armrests are built into the design, and the rear seat hinges forward to access finished storage. Stainless railing is inlaid into the front bolster backs. Interior workmanship is a Dominator highlight, and our team raved about the upholstery's fit, finish and visual appeal. Indirect lighting throughout the hull was individually adjustable. Finished storage capacity is built into the cockpit floorboard, and there's also abundant, variously sized compartments engineered into the Sunstation's cabin.

A heavy-duty, locking, sliding cabin door invited open, roomy

EVALUATIONS

access below, where Sunsation showed off more of its exquisite fiberglass work in a self-contained design that was very nicely detailed. Cabinet cupboards are engineered into the design, along with a stainless steel sink, portable head, sleeper berth and wrap-around seats. The fit and finish below were beyond reproach, and we especially liked the embroidery accents. There was less headroom below than some other boats in this size class, and six-footers were guaranteed a bad-hair experience when seated.

PERFORMANCE

Ah, the joys of Mercury Racing's deservedly vaunted, fuel-injected HP packages: They're simply incredible. The HPs started easily every time, shifted with the fluid grace of stock motors and bottled incredible throttle response. The Sunsation made the transition from idle to plane in an instant, leveling its shapely foredeck into a determined, prolonged surge that defined the pleasure of hard-core, hard-acceleration powerboating. It also moved nimbly around the docks, and the twins were a bonus in crabbing it into tight spaces. Prolonged idle was problem-free, and the hull tracked wonderfully well both at low and high rpm. Slammed with the dual HPs, this was an incredible package.

One key to the Sunsation's wonderful drivability was its outstanding use of available power.

To our amazement, summoning up 3,000 rpm from the hand-built 502s yielded a 53-mph cruise—a faster pace than everything tested at comparable rpm. At just 4,000, we roared up the Florida coastline at 72 miles per hour, and there was plenty left in reserve.

The Sunsation didn't miss a beat when we sent it into our series of low-, medium- and high-speed turning maneuvers, and it handled all of them with the same effortless grace. It turned equally well in both directions, and neither hard carving nor lazy sweepers produced any water, splash or spray over the sides. There was no residual blowout.

The Dominator required a very short runway to find its 88-mph clip; it was extremely responsive to trim along the way. The ride at speed was utterly controlled and highly responsive and produced a very secure feel within the cockpit. The ride didn't want to drop off to one side or another at speed, and there wasn't a lot of bottom movement filtering through the seats, which can be a by-product of some step designs. There was no discernable deck flex at speed, and the hull handled rough water beautifully. In short, we loved it.

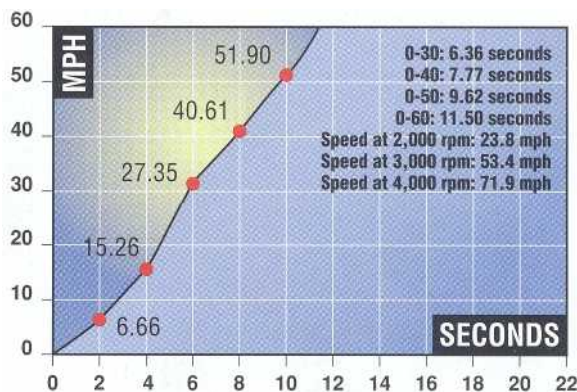
THE BOTTOM LINE

Sunsation has nailed the high-performance driving experience with the twin-HP Dominator, which is quite simply one of the best all-around offshore vees in

Test conditions: Moderate
Centerline length: 30'5"
Beam: 96"
Bottom: Stepped 24-degree V
Engines/drives: Twin Mercury Racing HP500EFI/Bravo Ones
Horsepower @ prop: 470 each
Ratio: 1.36:1
Props: Bravo One 28-inch four-blades
Overall weight: 6,500 lbs.
Base retail price (incl. trailer): \$89,600
Standard features: Twin Mercury 5.7L/Bravo Ones, stand-up bolsters, cockpit and cabin cup holders, stainless grab handles, stainless cleats, cockpit cover, dual batteries, auto bilge, locking cabin door, dual-ram Bennett tabs, hydraulic hatch lift, stainless tie bar, Bomar deck hatch, cockpit/cabin embroidery, cabin cupboards, cabin lighting, portable head, Ritchie com-

pass, Gaffrig gauges, Sony CD stereo, Zero Effort controls w/trim, cabin lighting, circuit breakers, lighted rockers.
Options on test boat: Twin HP upgrade (\$52,104), IMCO Stern Advantage steering (\$5,418), four-inch stainless angle tips (\$621), K-planes w/indicators (\$1,728), auto Halon system (\$351), bull horns (\$556), freshwater flush (\$278), McLeod interior (\$4,307), powdercoated bezels (\$473), signature graphics (\$2,000), Coast Guard package (\$628).
Price as tested: \$158,402
Top speed, radar: 87.6 mph
Builder's estimated speed in optimum conditions: 90 mph
Maximum rpm: 5,400

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creation. Beautifully styled, luxuriously appointed and rocket ship fast, the Dominator has car-

ried this exciting company to new and glorious heights in value, as well as performance.