

# ROCKET SCIENCE

*The Dominator 32 - fast, flawless  
and fabulous fit and finish.*

by STEVE SANDLER

**L**ooking for a sharp boat that is beautifully built and appointed, easy to trailer, eats up the rough water, and provides a solid, stable ride at 90 mph stock right out of the box? Check out the Sunsation Dominator 32.

Sunsation Performance Boats was founded in 1982 by brothers Wayne and Joe Schaldenbrand in Algonac, Michigan. The boys began repairing boats in their early years and found problems in construction. They also found ways to improve the boats they repaired and began to learn about fiberglass. Knowing they could build better boats, they started with a 16-foot offshore, right in their garage. Their first boat ran very well and they wound up selling 13 of them.

In 1985, they moved into a new facility and began manufacturing the 24-foot Rocket, a true deep-V with 24 degrees deadrise at the transom, Sales began to increase. They modified the Rocket to create the 25-foot Aggressor, a model they still produce. The 32-foot Dominator was designed next, with the intention of downsizing it to create the 28'8" Intimidator, All three models make up their current product line. Today, the company produces about 60 boats per year and distributes them through a dealer network in America and Canada.

The 32 Dominator is, of course, 32 feet long, including an integrated swim platform, has an eight-foot beam and weighs approximately 6,500 pounds. This deep-V has 24 degrees of deadrise at the transom and an 11-degree transom angle.

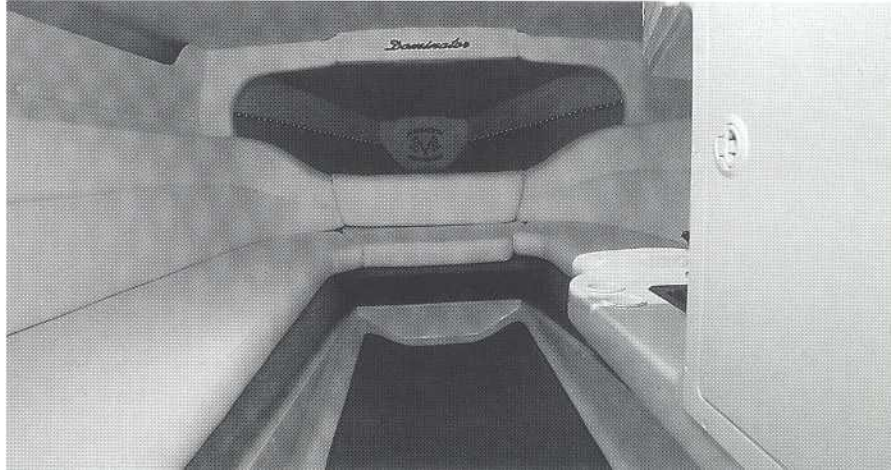
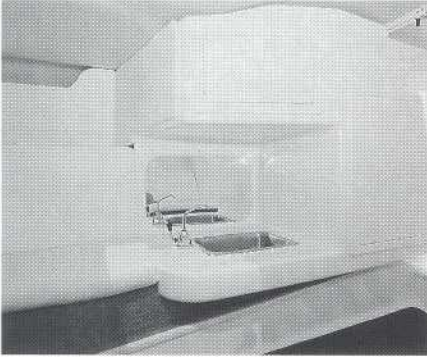
The hull design, called the Vortex Step, is interesting. Along the keel is a delta or triangular-shaped pad running from the bow to a 10-inch width at the transom, The inner pair of two pairs of lifting strakes goes from the bow to about 10 feet from the stern, The outer pair runs the length of the boat. The chines are flat, and approximately 2-1/2 inches wide. A single step, six feet from the stern goes only from the chines to the outer strakes.

The purpose of a step is to generate water pressure distribution so that the center of water pressure lines up with the center of gravity and the hull maintains its optimal angle of attack as the boat rises in the water with increasing speed. In this case, drive trim, which reduces the thrust available in the direction of travel and changes the angle of attack from optimal, is not required to hold the bow up.

While conventional steps typically run across the bottom, the Sunsation's

## SUNSATION TEST

*Clockwise from right. a V-berth covering a porta-potti is forward; optional fridge; galley area with sink.*



partial step is an interesting deviation. With the complex water flow over the delta pad, lifting strakes and step, it is difficult to visualize how this partial step works. The proof of its effectiveness would be in the testing.

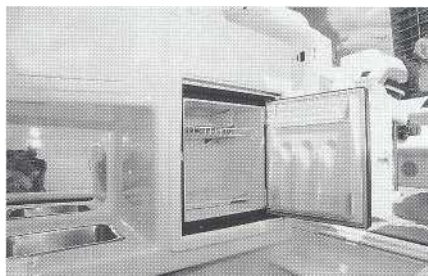
Sunsation vice president Joe Schaldenbrand and company director David Hare brought their Dominator 32 to the Lake Ontario Poker Run for our test. The boat came equipped with twin HP500 fuel injected MerCruiser engines and Bravo One drives with a 1.5:1 reduction

gear and 30-inch pitch, 4-blade lab finished stainless steel Bravo propellers. Engine packages are available from twin 250 hp Mercs up to the 500s on our test boat, which was also equipped with an optional Corsa Quick & Quiet muffler system that proved very effective in reducing engine noise,

Poker Runs America's Todd Taylor joined Joe, Dave and me on the Dominator as we followed the camera boat out the Port Credit Marina inlet to the lake. We were carrying roughly 800 pounds of passengers and a half tank of fuel.

The wind kicked up two to three foot seas. I had mixed feelings about this test. On the positive side I wanted to see how the boat would handle the rough water. On the other hand, I had recently had surgery to repair a torn triceps tendon and was concerned about my ability to hang on without reinjuring it. I asked Joe to put the Dominator through its paces, explaining what I was interested in evaluating.

While top speed and acceleration are important, my experience is that boats with similar bottom configurations, lengths, weights and power trains have similar top speed and acceleration. Generally, significant differences in such performance can be attributed to differ-



ences in setup, passenger and fuel loading, and weather and sea conditions. Of greater interest to me is stability,

I visualize a new boater taking his family out for the first time in a fast boat. I see him nail the throttles to show them how fast his new pride and joy goes. As he gets up to speed he sees a hazard approaching. He panics and suddenly cracks back the throttles.

A solid and stable boat can forgive such a transgression and track true after rapid deceleration. An unstable boat will hunt when the bow drops and may swap ends, even barrel roll. Now, I'm not implying that running a boat at 90 mph is ever safe. But an unstable boat that doesn't handle predictably will certainly be unsafe,

Joe assured me his boat would satisfy my interests. We put on our life jackets and I used my injured arm as an excuse to justify a position in the passenger bolster as we entered the lake. I braced myself as well as I could and gave Joe the OK. He looked back to alert the others, slammed the throttles forward, and dropped his arms to his sides,

While I urge you not to try this at home, I must say the results were impressive. The boat's bow rose and fell as we instantly came up on plane. In very little time we were running rock solid into the waves at 70 mph. After I nodded approval, Joe took the wheel and throttles

and trimmed up the drives. The Dominator quickly accelerated and the needle on the Gaffrig speedo bounced to near the 85 mph mark,

Joe took us through some turns to hit the waves from all directions. The boat tracked true and predictably. When we flew off the waves, it remained level and landed the same way, without any creaks or groans. Except for its rocket-like acceleration, the Dominator 32 felt like a much bigger boat.

Joe then set up for a top speed run. He pointed the Dominator into head seas, adjusted trim and put the throttles to the wall. The needle hovered around the 90 mph mark as the boat skipped along the waves. Joe later commented that he didn't think he was running a true 90 yet. He had hit the rev-limiter a number of times and felt that the props were too small. He figured that a 31- or 32-inch prop would generate speeds over 90 mph.

I next had Joe pull back the throttles sharply. The bow dropped and we were thrown forward as the boat rapidly decelerated. Still, it continued to track as if on rails in the heavy seas. Really impressive, I thought; this hull configuration works very well.

Joe advanced the throttles and executed some short radius turns in each direction. The Dominator leaned sharply into the turns but there was no hint of instability or propeller ventilation. The formal test was over. I had all the data I needed. The boat performed flawlessly. I also noted during the entire run that we never once had to use the trim tabs,

We had run a 32-foot boat with a load of passengers at 90 miles per hour in three-foot seas and I was able to hold on securely with only one hand during the entire test. There was no excessive pounding. I had to try my hand (so to speak) at

the wheel, I took it easy, trimmed the drives in to come up on plane and then raised them as the boat accelerated.

I was completely comfortable at 80 mph. As I moved the throttles back and forth, I noticed no unstable behavior whatsoever. The bow dropped and rose without a hint of hunting. I executed some turns at 70 mph and only had to hold the wheel gently. Steering was light and responsive. The boat tracked true and predictably. Acceleration was excellent, probably due in part to under-propping. I turned the controls over to Todd, who made much the same observations. I believe this boat would make a great Factory 11 Class race boat. Use 30-inch pitch props in rough water where acceleration is important and 31- or 32-inch pitch props in flat water for top end.

Sunsation prides itself in its glasswork and workmanship. Manufacturing and assembly processes utilize computer support. There are 900 checkpoints in the processes and workers initial work sheets at each checkpoint when they complete the respective job. Joe estimates that it takes 680 hours to complete a boat of which slightly less than half the time is spent in rigging. This high level of effort is clearly evident in the quality of the boat.

Sunsation boats are 100 percent hand-laid. The lamination schedule is impressive and is available in full detail from the company. Hull and deck are cored with 3/4-inch balsa and the sides are cored with 1/2-inch balsa. Stringers are placed on a bed of adhesive and radius put on. Stringers are pre-coated with resin and encapsulated with two layers of 1708 Knytex Owens Corning. Hull and deck are laminated together with 3408 Knytex.

Non-skid walkways, incorporated into

the deck, provide lots of grip and reduce glare without detracting from the boat's appearance. Stainless steel bow rails, recessed cleats and accessories are through-bolted wherever possible. The high impact rub rail has a changeable insert. A selection of custom graphics and matching upholstery is available. Workmanship and attention to detail is excellent. The hull comes with a five year warranty; components are warranted for one year.

Fit and finish are superb. McLeod stand-up bolsters with electrically-controlled seats are provided up front in the cockpit and a four-person bench seat is situated aft. Storage is provided below the cockpit sole under the bolsters, under the bench seat and along the cockpit sides. An ample number of stainless grab handles are well placed for passenger security when the going gets rough. The padded engine hatch, including the bench seat back, raises hydraulically, providing access to a well designed and neatly finished engine compartment.

All the necessary Gaffrig instruments are positioned on the helm console for easy viewing; a Lowrance depth sounder is included. Kill switches are conveniently

situated below and to the left of the steering wheel. Throttle controls are comfortably placed and include a built-in drive trim switch in the port throttle handle. Drive and tab trim switches are located in front of the throttle and shift controls. Hydraulic power steering and a stainless steel tie bar are standard, as are dual ram Bennett trim tabs, Mechanical trim indicators locate drive and tab positions. Rocker type electrical switches are well positioned with rubber covered circuit breakers above each one. A CD stereo is enclosed in a covered compartment above the

cabin door. A 110-gallon fuel tank sits centered below the cockpit sole. An embroidered removable carpet is included.

Access to the cabin is through an extra-wide 1/2-inch acrylic sliding door that can be locked. A V-berth covering a porta potti is forward. Access to the toilet and storage is assisted by a gas shock. The berth area is lit by bead lights. Adjacent to

the berth is a U-shaped bench seat that runs aft to storage on each side of the cabin entry. Berth and seats are vinyl covered. Starboard storage consists of a cupboard while port side there's a closet. A sink sits below the cupboard, and there's room for the optional refrigerator. Like the cockpit, there's embroidered carpet: lighting is indirect. A low-profile Bomar hatch opens to admit fresh air and sunlight.

The 32 Dominator is an impressive boat - if you'll pardon the pun, it's pretty "Sunsational" It's stable and forgiving for the performance boater moving up to the 90 mph class, and responsible, nimble and fast enough to satisfy the seasoned racer.

When I later raved about it to my wife, she asked me if I would trade my boat for one. Is anyone interested in a 49-foot, triple-stepped deep-V that weighs 22,000 pounds, has three 900 hp blower motors, Ameson drives and runs over 100 mph? Oh, did I mention that it isn't stock out of the box?



## VITAL STATS

Length	. . . . .	.32'
Beam	. . . . .	.97"
Weight	. . . . .	.6500 lb
Deadrise	. . . . .	.24 degrees
Transom angle	. . . . .	.11 degrees
Draft	. . . . .	.36"
Fuel tank	. . . . .	.110 gal
Engine	. . . . .	twin MerCruiser HP500 EFI w/Bravo One drives
Price as tested	. . . . .	.\$165,402

(price includes boat, motor, trailer and the following options: auto halon; hydraulic steering; Corsa muffler system; angle tips; motor well lights; K-Planes; engine flush kits; McLeod cockpit interior; depth sounder; refrigerator; logo graphic/fairing; additional bow hatch; Coast Guard package; Hubble shore power plug; raised color bezels)

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