

Computerized Dominance

Using a high-tech assembly program, Sunsation Powerboats stepped up the performance of its rock solid 32' Dominator.

SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES MAKES FOR STABILITY. THE United States government's three branches--the Executive, Legislative and Judicial--have input into how America is governed, the goal being that the three make certain one branch doesn't dominate the others. Working together, they come up with the answers, and the country runs.

Boat companies use checks and balances, too, and this being the com-

puter-age, you're liable to see more and more laptops wired into the production process. As boats move through the assembly line at Sunsation Powerboats in Fiasco, Mich., each construction phase is entered into a computer file. When the boat is finished, its construction history is available for supervisors to review; helping to ensure that the customer gets a

In addition to computers, the folks at Sunsation are turning up the wick, to borrow a phrase from Sunsation president Wayne Schaldenbrand, and plan to build more than 50 boats for the 1999 model year. The company also unveiled a new cabin design for its 32' Dominator, which we saw.

With the step-bottom Vortex hull, which was introduced last year, the 32' Dominator we tested (which measured 31'7" long with an 8' beam) handled the stirred-up Gulf of Mexico waters with ease, powered by a pair of MerCruiser 454 Magnum MPI engines (the base engines are MerCruiser 7.4E MPIs). Options such as hydraulic steering, McLeod bolsters and the engine upgrade boosted the price of our test boat to \$118,167. The base price is \$90,876.

I N T E R I O R

Our Performance Trials just happened to coincide with some very wet Florida weather, so the cabin of the 32' Dominator provided welcome refuge. Stepping down from the cockpit through a sliding hatch, we looked toward a J-shaped lounge that started aft to port and wrapped around to a small molded-in galley area on the starboard side.

The galley did not include much: just a sink and pair of cupholders. But simplicity is a component of Schaldenbrand's construction plan with the 32'

Dominator: The lounge had room for six adults. Moving forward onto the long four-cushion V-berth, we found a portable head underneath a plastic hatch that opened on a gas shock. Lockers in the middle were ideal for PFDs and fenders,

A single Bomar deck hatch let in plenty of natural light, while strip lighting and spotlights under the valances helped light up the cabin at night. Working aft, we found two large lockers on the port and starboard bulkheads, both easy to access and tall enough for hanging clothes,

Moving into the cockpit, high-end twin McLeod bolsters showed that Sunsation is serious about taking care of the driver and co-pilot. Sitting in the pilot's seat, our chief tester found that the Zero Effort shifts and throttles (with trim on the thumb) were in a comfortable position. The individual control buttons for the tabs and drives were forward of the throttle.

The three-tier dash boasted Gaffrig White-faced gauges. The upper tier (actually built into the faring) featured a speedo and twin tachometers with built-in hour meters, along with the fuel-level indicator and Lowrance 3500 depth-sounder. On the flat section of the dash sat a mechanical trim indicator, along with a Ritchie compass. Closer to the driver, the second tier of the dash included instruments for volts, and water and oil pressure and temperature. Buttons activated the accessories, and next to each button was a pop-out breaker.

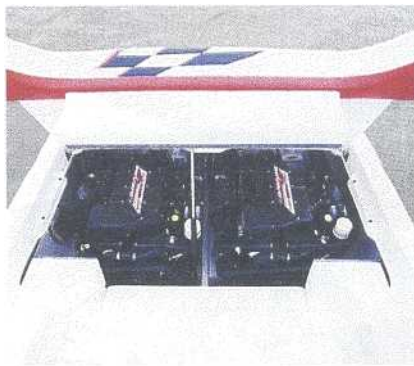
The co-pilot's dash was sparse (We would liked a glove box), but did have grab handles in front and on the port gunwale, along with two steps to help you get over the faring and onto the deck,

Passengers will appreciate the four-person, rear bench seat, although leg room was a bit compromised behind the bolsters. The two-person sunlounge was cozy, but swimmers will find it a bit of a scramble to get back into the boat since Sunsation didn't provide a reboarding ladder on the swim platform,

Carpeted gunwale trays provide[] plenty of stowage for towels and other items. The manufacturer also built in cockpit-sole lockers between the bench seat and the bolsters.

WORKMANSHIP

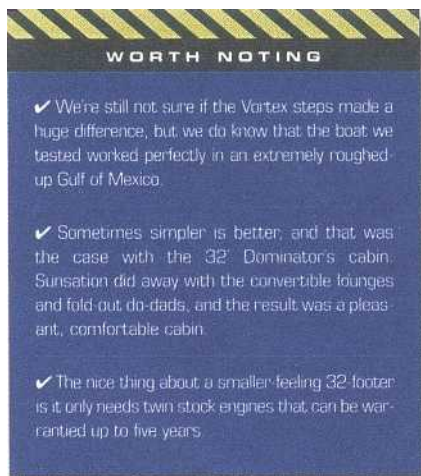
Sunsation scored a few points for its graphics job that featured the logo for the POWERBOAT 1999 Performance Trials,



and a top speed of 80 mph and two people can lie out on the Sunlounge, which is attached to the hull graphics. A ladder would be a nice addition to the swim platform.

And looking further, we found quality construction in the lamination schedule.

Sunsation's construction team started with a layer of shiny white gelcoat, followed by a layer of 1 1/2-ounce skin and alternating layers of 1 1/2-ounce mat and 24-ounce woven roving, Corebond and 3/4" balsa were added, followed by more



alternating layers of mat and woven roving, and finally two coats of 1708 Knytex.

Red and yellow stripes were tastefully applied in polyurethane paint, and all this

was protected by the rubrail-an extruded plastic piece with a rubber insert that exhibited a quality installation,

Continuing with the hardware lineup, the 32' Dominator had a white plastic navigation light on the bow with a four-bolt cleat just aft of that in a small well. A light non-skid surface covered the foredeck, and in the center was the Bomar smoked-glass deck hatch. Four more cleats-on each side amidships and off the transom—gave our test team ample places to secure dock lines.

The engine hatch raised evenly on a hydraulic jack that was placed in the center of the transom, and when it lifted it took most of the backrest with it. The hatch had a fiberglass mold on the underside with the Sunsation logo on it and was upholstered on the outside.

The engine compartment opening was finished off with trim lock, but we also would like to see this area fitted with scuppers and drains to carry off excess water. Inside the engine compartment, the twin 454 Magnum MPI engines were installed using the stock MerCruiser mounts, thru-bolted to L-angles that were thru-bolted to a built-up center stringer. All of the steering hoses were mounted on the starboard transom, adequately supported and logically routed, as was the electrical wiring.

Moving into the cockpit, we found the carpet loosely connected to the sole and it tended to blow around when underway. We would like to see them add snaps to better secure the carpet. Moving into the cabin, we did find some gaps in the headliner and in the upholstery, but those were cosmetic gripes. Construction-wise, the 32' Dominator was solid,

PERFORMANCE

The 32' Dominator is aptly named, because it encountered the worst Water the west side of Florida has to offer. Running into the wind, our test boat flew from peak to peak without a groan or creak, and we took some fairly hard landings.

The Vortex bottom featured a delta pad that started from nothing at the bow entry and flared out to about 10" wide at the stern. The two inside strakes were about 18" off the keel and terminated

about 10' forward, while the outside strakes ran full length inboard of the 2 1/2" wide flat chine. The bottom had a partial step that ran from each side from the chine to the inside strake.

As previously noted, our 32' Dominator was powered by twin 454 Magnum MPI engines, which channeled their power through Bravo One drives fitted with 1.5:1 gears, turning 151/4 x 28 Bravo One four-blade stainless-steel propeller. The Vortex bottom design and power packages helped our test boat hit a top speed of 80.5 mph on Stalker radar at 5000 rpm, while the speedo indicated 80 mph. Comparing mph to rpm, we hit 23 mph at 2000 rpm, 40 at 2500, 49 at 3000, 55 at 3500, 62 at 4000 and 70 at 4500.

Out of the hole, our test model hit 24 mph in five seconds, 47 in 10, 66 in 15 and 72 in 20. Time to plane with the tabs down was five seconds. Through mid-range acceleration tests, our boat went from 30 to 50 mph in 4.9 seconds and from 40 to 70 mph in 9.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption was surprisingly good and should give you acceptable range with the 110-gallon aluminum tank and readings of 2.2 mpg at 45 mph, 1.6 at 55, 1.5 at 65 and 1.2 at wide open.

The top-speed handling of the 32' Dominator was as good as it ever has been, comfortable and solid heading into the biggest of waves. The boat didn't perform as well as slower speeds, and left and

Cruising, say right turns at Cruising, 40 mph, left something to be desired.

Most likely the 32' Dominator will be driven at 60 mph and above, and that was where it liked to run the best. Confused and choppy water wasn't a problem, and we found it ran strong into the wind. Throttle response was best on the high end, and the drive trim was set up perfectly. Visibility coming on plane was hampered a bit by the faring, but once on plane we had perfect vision. Around the docks the twin-engine setup made the 32' Dominator simple to maneuver.

OVERALL

Big-water boating, whether it's off the coast of Florida or in the Great Lakes near Michigan, demands a boat that can take a pounding. The 32' Dominator we tested was just such a boat. SunSation has the computerized checks and balances in place to make sure the one you buy is an awesome performer as well.



HULL INFORMATION

Hull Type	Deep V
Deadrise at transom	24 degrees
Centerline	
Beam	8
Weight as tested	8,100 pounds

PRICING INFORMATION

Base Retail	
Price as tested	\$118,167

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Trim tabs, custom graphics, stainless-steel propellers, Gafrig gauges, Mercury Hi Performance controls with trim on throttle, standup bolsters, indirect lighting, power engine hatch with sunlounge, bilge pump/ halon, wind faring/ Bomar elect hatch, Ritchie compass, CD stereo, pump-out head/ carpet, cockpit cover, fiberglass galley with sink, power steering, drinkholders, circuit breakers, aluminum accessory and dash panel, recessed batteries in rear seat, flush intake and exhaustvents, sport steering wheel/ swim platform,

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

MerCruiser 454 Magnum MPIs (\$13,028), hydraulic steering (\$5,407), 4" stainless angled exhaust tips/ Mercury Hi-Performance K-planes, with indicators (\$1,811), automatic halon system (\$381), McLeod cockpit pthsonder (\$448).

ENGINES & PROPELLERS

Model	MerCruiser 454 Magnum MPI
Cylinder	4
Cubic in .a	54 c.i.
Pr der	Mercury Marine Bravo One 15 1/4" x 28 four-blade + ss

POWERBOAT TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION: ZERO TO...

5 seconds	24 mph
10 seconds	47 mph
15 seconds	66 mph
20 seconds	72 mph

MID-RANGE ACCELERATION

30-50	4.9 seconds
40-60	5.6 seconds
40-70	9.9 seconds

RPM VS. MPH

1000	8 mph
1500	10 mph
2000	23 mph
2500	40 mph
3000	49 mph
3500	55 mph
4000	62 mph
4500	70 mph

TOP SPEED AT RPM

Speedometer	80 mph
Stalker Radar	80.5 mph at 5000

PLANING

Time to plane	5 seconds
Minimum planing speed	17 mph

SOUND LEVEL

	88 dBA (open)
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FUEL ECONOMY

At 25 mph	2.2 mpg
At 35 mph	1.6 mpg
At 45 mph	1.5 mpg
At 55 mph	1.2 mpg

FUEL CAPACITY

	110 gallons
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TEST CONDUCTED AT

	Sanibel Island, Fla.
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MANUFACTURER

Sunsation Boats, 5827 Hessen, Casco, Mich 48064, (810) 725-8020, www.sunsationboats.com.