

We have noted with interest through the years the ongoing evolution of the deep-vee Sunsation sport-boat line, an enterprise that first took shape as the unlikely dream of the tightly knit, hot-boating Schaldenbrand brothers of Michigan. With 15 summers of boat-building experience now in the company's books, this is a milestone year for Sunsation; and it invites a sharper focus on just what the company stands for.

We engaged such an opportunity with the hot-boat base-camp arrival of a spanking new 32-foot Dominator, the flagship of the Sunsation line and the best-seller over their 25- and 28-foot offerings by a three-to-one margin. Our latest foray in a series of many such Sunsational outings revived much of our driving team's previous testimony to its polished manners, rough-water resilience and enviable performance.

It also prompted a look at the Sunsation from a number of new angles. Foremost was the latest in the annual yield of refinements that Sunsation engineers into its line; in tests past, we've seen the cabin completely transform shape, elements of the interior design radically change and hull graphics utterly rethought. This year's most notable refinement was the implementation of a small, partial step (and the contribution

of a hired naval architect), which will probably see even more exploration in days to come.

From a larger perspective, within a performance industry in which pricing has spiked dramatically, we renewed our periodic observation of the Sunsation package's intrinsic value, a commodity that surfaced repeatedly in this year's enthusiast bow-to-stern analysis.

THE PACKAGE

The good news is that the scalpel work on the bottom indeed seems to have pumped Sunsation's numbers, which have never been soft, upward a bit more. Our fully loaded Dominator, with its true bottom length of 30 feet, 6,400-pound weight, 96-inch beam and sharply cut 24-degree vee, used a pair of MerCruiser's new, base MPI big-block/Bravo One setups to hit a clean 70-mile-per-hour mark. The hull made the most of its allotted 620 prop-rated horsepower and posted some downright eye-opening acceleration numbers for a 32-foot boat whose sticker hovers around the hundred-grand mark.

The better news is that Sunsation didn't screw anything up in the process of reworking the Dominator's bottom. The hull still delivers one of the best rough-water rides in its size class, and the changes didn't create any of the searching movement that has invaded so

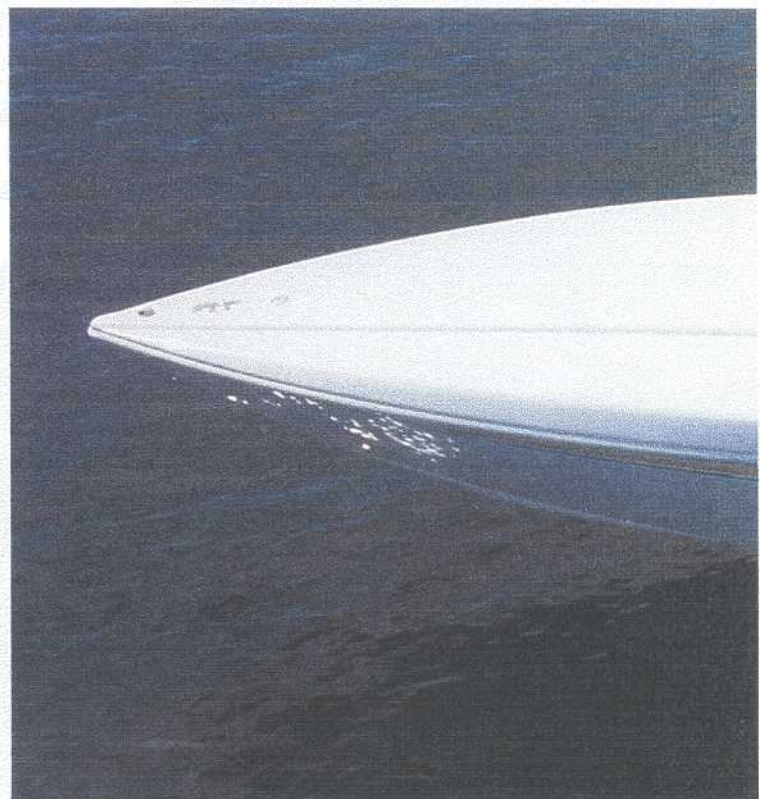
many of today's new performance-oriented bottom de-

signs. While its effect wasn't dramatic on the top end, it was, says Sunsation, at least partially responsible for quicker planing (the numbers back it up) and improved rough-water performance.

The package's power train was left predominately stock, with the exception of through-transom, steel-tipped Corsa Captain's Call exhaust system (\$2,571), and offshore-styled Kiekhaefer tabs and indicators (\$1,674). Mercury Mirage three-blade 25s spun through the 1.5:1 gearing of Bravo drives. The engine and drive rigging, wiring, and mounting of hoses and hardware was extra-clean and very functional.

The Dominator is a smooth mix of classic offshore vee styling and dressy, contemporary tooling that stands out dockside. Sunsation's glassmen showed strong technical skill in executing the design, which integrated a softly sculpted deck fairing, side vents and a large, gorgeous rear boarding step. Five mooring cleats laid nicely into glass enclaves, as did the fuel fills. White rubrails dressed the boat's predominantly white theme, installed with stainless screws.

Our cockpit liner's fine fiberglass detail work was a frequent topic of our drivers' notes, along with the brilliant white gelcoated bulkheads, storage



cabinetry and galley below. We couldn't find one flaw in the glasswork, white gelcoat base or inclusive Imron-painted graphics. The look of the clean, nicely detailed exterior color work and matching checkerboard swath that splashed the rear deck and seat scored large in our camp, and by the end of our test session, we'd even grown fond of the brilliant red carpet that snapped into our cockpit liner.

It also showed some great engineering, such as the integrated driver and passenger footrests, and the rear seat-back and hatch design, which prompted easy access to the engine compartment (electrically activated Bennett ram hydraulics allowed manual lifting in the event of a dead battery). The rear-seat cushion was double-hinged to allow access to a neatly finished storage area.

Sunsation's cockpit is sculpted nice and low in the boat, creating good freeboard without sacrificing all-around passenger visibility, and it has a roomy,

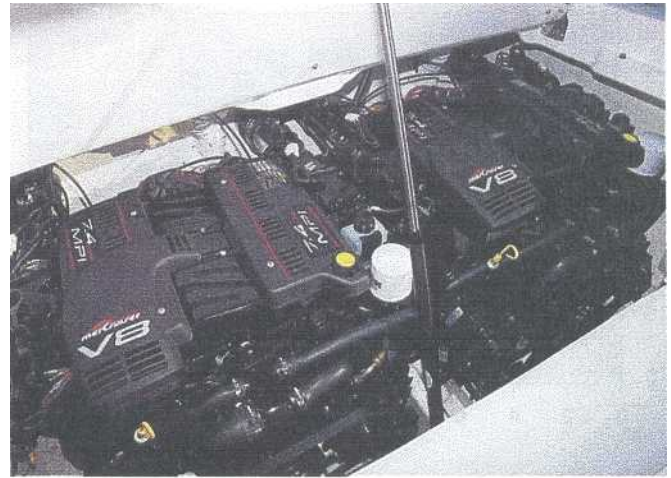
open feel. A set of race-standard, electrically adjusted McLeod bolsters with a matching color panel projected and delivered superb comfort and support in our tester, and its

stainless-steel tube mounting was staunchly rooted into the floor. Footrests were integrated into the liner, one of a series of details that left our evaluation team suitably impressed. The rear McLeod bench yielded more of the same spectacular support and underscored our long-held notion that nobody builds it better.

Optimum driver positioning, a sensible stacked layout of the standard-issue Gaffrig gauges and an easily accessible Kiekhaefer throttle/shifter control (with handle trim) rounded out the boat's excellent ergonomics. Lighted rocker switches controlled functions, and the gauges were inset in a removable panel that provided access to circuit breakers, with the oversized speedometer and tachs raised for easy, quick monitoring. Tab controls and indicators were placed within easy reach of the shifter control.

Stainless grab handles were built into the bolster seatbacks, tucked into the gunnels and anchored within arm's reach of the end-occupants of the bench. Cup holders (four top-side, four below) were standard, and padded storage was melded into the gunnels.

Sunsation has gone to great



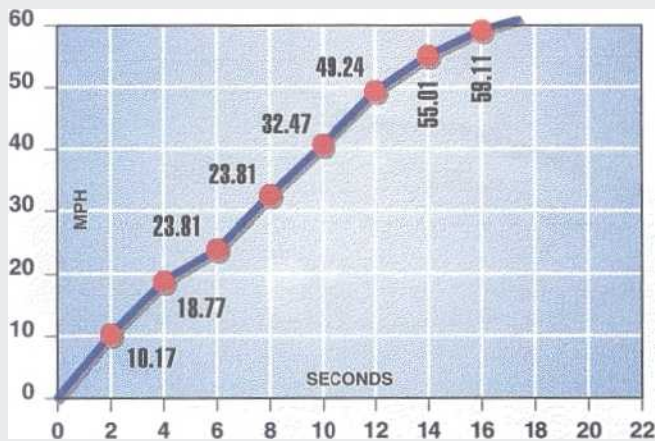
efforts in its cabin design, and it's paid dividends. A proper fit of the fiberglass door precipitates rattles and unwanted movement, and it opens to reveal comfortable seating for five adults. The optional refrigerator (\$893), combined with a pressurized freshwater sink, portable head, stereo, countertop and comfortable eight-foot sleeper berth, provided the requisite comforts. The fiberglass work below was exceptional and created capacious storage potential beneath the bed and seats, and in the gelcoated bulkheads. Pleated, interior color panels allowed for an owner-directed, custom-decor look.

PERFORMANCE

Sunsation is an enthusiast-run company, which assures a constant flow of information to its clientele, a dynamic that has been fully exploited in the set-up of each of its models. This 70-mph twin-stocker drew unanimous raves among our driving team for its clean, soft ride at every point in its power curve, a trait that yielded excellent acceleration numbers down the line.

This 30-footer, in point of fact, hit a 50-mile-per-hour clip from idle in 12.30 seconds, right in the range of other offshore-vees we tested with much bigger power sources. In fact, this three-ton deep-vee luxo-liner





won't get left behind by the lake boats; it was as good as anything we tested above 25 feet at our West Coast event this year.

Low-rpm backing and docking were simplified by the twin configuration, and tracking was on the mark during low-rpm motoring. Given throttle, the Dominator rolled onto plane easily, and surrendered only momentary loss of visibility before laying over smoothly and tending to the business of driver commands. It responded instantly to trim, and proficiently adapted its attitude and altitude to varying water conditions.

We cruised into an easy, 46-mile-per-hour glide at a barely jogging 3,000 rpm, and another grand brought us to 62 miles per hour—great stuff for what's now considered the base big-block. As we moved up and down the midrange, we noted the Sunstation's uncanny ability to shine under rapidly changing water conditions. Whether engaged in a gentle, 55-mile-per-hour cruise or hammering

through two-foot chop at 70, the Sunstation's ride was consistently stable, always forgiving and constantly controlled.

We strongly recommend it as a rough-water people mover.

The only evidence of even the slightest porpoise surfaced in absolute, early-morning glass and during speed runs, a state that was quickly quashed with trim. This boat loved a little surface chop. In everything, including brutal three-foot swells, its ride was soft, comfortable and rattle-free, and Sunstation's solid hull workmanship was ev-



SPECIFICATIONS
 Centerline length: 30'
 Beam: 96"
 Hull design: Deep-vee w/pad
 Engines/drives: Twin Mer-Cruiser 454 MPIs w/Bravo Ones
 Horsepower @ prop: 310 ea.
 Drive ratio: 1.5:1
 Props: Mirage 25-inch three-blades
 Base retail price, incl. trailer: \$99,749
 Standard features: Twin 454 7.4 MPI MerCruisers, trim tabs, custom graphics, Gaffrig gauges, trim on throttle, Kiekhaefer throttle controls, stand-up bolsters, InDirect lighting, electric 11 ft. wind fairing, bow hatch, compass, CD stereo, pump-out head, carpet, cockpit cover.

Options on test boat: McLeod interior (\$4,571), four-inch angle tip exhaust (\$600), depth sounder (\$414), Kiekhaefer tabs w/indicators (\$1,674), refrigerator (\$893), Silent Choice exhaust (\$2,571).
 Price as-tested: \$110,472

Performance
 Top speed, radar: 70.4 mph
 Maximum rpm: 4,650
 0-30: 7.45 seconds
 0-40: 9.83 seconds
 0-50: 12.30 seconds
 0-60: 16.86 seconds
 Speed at 3,000 rpm: 45.8 mph,
 Speed at 4,000 rpm: 61.9 mph ;'

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ident in this boat's resounding feel. It was only under these conditions that we found the need to use the Kiekhaefer tabs, which were highly effective in cutting through the rough stuff with our angular bow.

Slow, deliberate sweeper turns yielded a flat, smooth attitude, and hard-cornering attempts were met with precise movement and instant positive

THE BOTTOM LINE

Sunstation has turned a major corner in the evolution of its Dominator, which is clearly a big-league value within its size and price range. In its 15th year, this company is at the top of its game, a state that is bound to make a lot of new Sunstation owners very happy this summer.

