

WAYNE'S WORLD

Sunsation Powerboats' founder Wayne Schaldenbrand and crew celebrate 15 years in business with a new Vortex step-bottom on their perennial performer, the 32' Dominator,

FEW BUSINESSES HAVE MORE RAGS-TO-RICHES STORIES THAN the marine industry. It seems half the companies that build boats got their start in someone's garage. Still, when it comes to inspirational tales, none warms the heart more than that of Sunsation Powerboats in Casco, Mich.

Thirty-five years ago, 7-year-old Wayne Schaldenbrand went to the laundromat and came home with a bunch of detergent bottles. He strung them together to make a raft. Then, his friends wanted their own rafts, and Schaldenbrand's future was set.

Schaldenbrand, 42, is president of Sunsation, which is celebrating its 15th anniversary. Wayne is joined in business by brothers

and vice presidents Joe, 38, and John, 32.

To commemorate his company's anniversary, Wayne Schaldenbrand decided to step up things in the performance department. He developed a step-bottom design, the Vortex, and applied it to the three models Sunsation builds: the 32' Dominator, the 25' Aggressor and the 28' Intimidator.

The Schaldenbrands will probably be the first to tell inquiring folks boatbuilding hasn't made them wealthy, and by looking at the sticker on our 32' Dominator, it's easy to see they don't believe in a big markup. With twin MerCruiser 7.4L MPIs and a few options, the boat priced out at \$98,052. The test engines are the base power for our test model, which starts at \$90,310.

P E R F O R M A N C E

Most designers use a step to aerate a bottom by reducing the friction between the running surface and the water, which works well in calm conditions. But on the Great Lakes, the water rarely lays down. Sunsation wanted to develop a step that improved the boat's efficiency and worked in rough water.

The result was the Vortex, which can best be described as a partial step. The step, which was at about the 24' mark, ran through the chine and stopped at the outer strake. Aside from the step, the 24-degree deep-V bottom is the same we've seen before with an 8" wide

delta pod that started about 15' forward of the transom and flared as it extended aft. Inside strokes terminated 8'

forward. The outer set ran full-length.

The new model performed -well in rough water; earning high marks running with, against and quartering to the waves.

In maneuvers, the 32' Dominator handled slalom passes at 30 and 40 mph well. At 50 mph, S-turns weren't as smooth, as the boat leaned and hopped slightly. We noted that tendency if we went too tight in circle turns at cruising and high speeds.

In straight-line runs, the boat tracked well, especially at mid-range speeds, say around 50 mph. Given the boat's rather narrow 8' beam and light 6,400-pound displacement, we weren't surprised it was more weight sensitive than some wide-body offshore offerings.

Our test model featured mild power, twin 310-hp MerCruiser 7.4L MPIs, because Sunsation wanted us to see what most customers are buying. The engines turned 14 1J2 x 25 MerCruiser three-blade Mirage Plus props through 1.5:1 gears in Bravo One chives.

The efficiency of the Vortex bottom showed itself in a 60.5-mph radar rum at 4600 rpm. At 2500, we saw 37 mph, moving up to 47 at 3000, 57 at :35(10 and 61 at 4000. The onboard speedometer read 73 at top end.

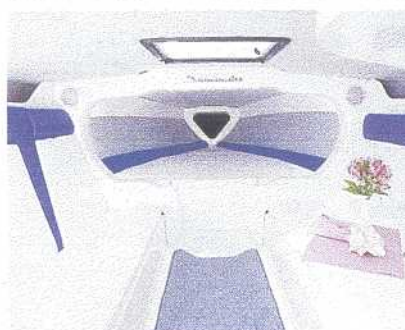
We were also impressed when it came to throttle response. Our test model planed in 3.9 seconds and ran out to 27 mph in five, 51 in 10, 63 in 15 and 67 in 20. It came as no surprise that the engines were pretty stingy in fuel consumption. At 45 mph, our test. boat, got. 2 miles per gallon, and we recorded readings of 1.8 at 55, 1.5 at 65 and 1.4 at wide open.

From an ergonomics standpoint, we appreciated the McLeod bolsters, but when our 5'10" test. pilot stood up, he felt too high in the boat. When he tried to sit down, his knees hit the bottom of the dash.

I N T E R I O R

Sunsation switched from flip-up wind deflectors on last year's model to a new full race-style facing that turned up at the top, effectively keeping the wind off us dining the test.

Making good use of the space on the inside of the faring, Sunsation placed the twin tachometers and speedo, along with the fuel gauge and Lowrance 3500 depthsounder in this



From the top, the tachometers and speedometer were in clear view on the inside edge of the new fairing, and the 32' Dominator's cabin had plenty of space for a weekend getaway. When it comes to getting you to that hidden spot and back, twin MerCruiser 7.4L MPI engines were up to the task.

area, just ahead of a Ritchie compass, which was on the upper flat section of the dash. In a single tier just forward of wheel, remaining gauges were grouped by function.

W O R T H N O T I N G

- ✓ It's risky to change a proven product, but Sunsation played it smart with its new Vortex bottom, dialing in the design to perform well in the rough.
- ✓ Being able to build the new model in the same molds means not having to create tooling. This saves the manufacturer money, which can be passed along to the customer.
- ✓ More power would have been nice, and the boat could definitely handle it. We also like to see trim indicators if tabs are on a boat.

Zero Effort throttles and shifts were installed for drivers to take advantage of the padded armrest on the bolster. Drive and tab trim buttons were just ahead, but we preferred using the switch for the chives on the throttle. There were no indicators for the tabs, which we like to see. On a positive note, Sunsation put the fuel-cap key on a Velcro strip on the gunwale just alongside the bolster:

Behind the bolsters, passengers have the choice of standing and hanging on or sitting on the bench seat. Aft, the sun-lounge could accommodate one person.

Our test boat offered excellent storage capacity. In addition to spacious gunwale trays, we found lockers in the sole behind the bolsters that will help make up for the presence of the batteries in the bench-seat base.

A white, opaque hatch slid open

smoothly for access to the 32' Dominator's practical cabin. To starboard when we first entered, we saw an area for an optional refrigerator and microwave. Ahead was a small galley with a sink aft of a one-person loveseat.

Just across was a longer lounge that could seat three people, but the padding felt thin. There was voluminous stowage in the base of the lounge, but getting to the contents meant wrestling with the

large one-piece bottom cushion. Splitting the cushion or hinging it would make it easier to manage.

Five cushions--three up the middle and two on the sides made up the two-person V-berth. The aftermost center cushion raised on a gas shock to reveal the Thetford 735 head, which had plumbing for a pumpout. We liked that the Ed raised with the help of a gas shock. The two forward cushions were attached to the locker lids with Velcro, making it easy to raise them.

On a warm summer night, folks sitting in the lounge will appreciate the breeze the deck hatch lets in, and we think a second one over the berth would be a good idea.

W O R K M A N S H I P

Adding the inserts for the new bottom certainly didn't take away from the clean mold work were used to seeing from Sunsation. The boat's sides and deck were free of imperfections with sharp edges and smooth curves where they were supposed to be. New for 1998, the manufacturer

switched from in-gelcoat graphics to artwork done in polyurethane paint with a clearcoat protectant.

The job of protecting the new graphics from clings fell to a white plastic extruded rubrail with a large vinyl insert, that exhibited a clean installation.

When it comes to engine access, it's hard to beat a hatch that includes the bench-seat backrest, which was the case on the 32' Dominator. We had a clear view of and access to the Win big-blocks and all the accessories. The engines were equipped with Corsa Quick & Quiet exhaust cutouts. Sunsation installed the motors with factory mounts thru-bolted to aluminum L-angles.

All mechanical accessories were easy to find. The trim pumps were mounted on the transom, and each was fitted with a shield to protect them from any water that enters the compartment through the side vents. In a sanitary rigging display; the wine looms ran aft from the dash in flexible plastic conduit, supported with nylon screw-down tiewraps.

When checking the white and black spatter gelcoat in the bilge we noticed some bottom stiffeners had been added from the keel to the outside stringers to beef up the boat and that the hull and

deck had been bonded together. To handle the rigors of running in the closely

spaced chop of the Great Lakes, the manufacturer laid up the boat strong in 3/4" balsa core and filled the strakes to avoid any air pockets. The laminate started with a skin backed up by 1708 Knytex and alternating layers of 1 1/2-ounce mat and 24-ounce woven roving. Two more coats of 1708 wrapped the stringers to seal them against water penetration.

Looking at the overall structure, the deck mold included the bench-seat base, and the cabin was a single-piece liner that

made for easy cleanups and a smooth finish. We did notice some fit-and-finish inconsistencies with the fiberglass pieces around the V-berth bulkhead, but they were minor.

OVERALL

Wayne Schaldenbrand's world has grown quite a bit from the day he built his laundry-bottle raft and since he started Sunsation 15 years ago. The 32' Dominator

continues to be a proven product, and the new Vortex bottom gives the company a step up in the sportboat and offshore-performance crowd.



HULL INFORMATION

| | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Hull Type | Deep V |
| Deadrise at transom | 24 degrees |
| Centerline | 32' |
| Beam | 8' |
| Weight as tested | 6,400 pounds |

PRICING INFORMATION

| | |
|-----------------|----------|
| Base Retail | \$90,310 |
| Price as tested | \$98,052 |

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Full instrumentation, Lowrance depthsounder, Ritchie compass, throttle with trim on handle, Clarion stereo, stand-up bolsters, power engine hatch, snap-in carpet in cockpit and cabin, indirect cabin lighting, cockpit lights, Bomar deck hatch, pump-out, Mercury Marine Mirage propellers, external tie bar.

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

McLeod cockpit interior (\$4,571), Corsa Quick & Quiet exhaust (\$2,571), 4" angled exhaust tips (\$600).

ENGINES & PROPELLERS

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Model | MerCruiser 7.4L MPI |
| Cylinder type | V-8 |
| Cubic inch displacement | 454 c.i. |
| Lower unit gear ratio | 1.5:1 |
| Max prop horsepower @ rpm | 310 @ 4600 |
| Propeller | Mercury Marine Mirage Plus 14 1/2" x 25" three-blade stainless |

POWERBOAT TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION: ZERO TO...

| | |
|------------|--------|
| 5 seconds | 27 mph |
| 10 seconds | 51 mph |
| 15 seconds | 63 mph |
| 20 seconds | 67 mph |

RPM VS. MPH

| | |
|------|--------|
| 1000 | 9 mph |
| 1500 | 11 mph |
| 2000 | 29 mph |
| 2500 | 37 mph |
| 3000 | 47 mph |
| 3500 | 57 mph |
| 4000 | 61 mph |

TOP SPEED AT RPM

| | |
|-------------|------------------|
| Speedometer | 73 mph at 4600 |
| Radar | 69.5 mph at 4600 |

PLANING

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| Time to plane | 3.9 seconds |
| Minimum planing speed | 22 mph |

SOUND LEVEL86 dBA (open)

FUEL ECONOMY

| | |
|-----------|---------|
| At 45 mph | 2.0 mpg |
| At 55 mph | 1.8 mpg |
| At 65 mph | 1.5 mpg |

FUEL CAPACITY110 gallons

TEST CONDUCTED ATSanibel Island, Florida

MANUFACTURER

Sunsation Products Inc., 5827 Hessen Road, Casco, MI 48064, (810) 725-8020.