

TEAMING UP FOR SAFETY

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Photos by Duane Adams, FreezeFrame & PRA



For many years, participants at Poker Runs America events have become accustomed to seeing the bright yellow Fountain and Scarab paceboats. This year the 47' Fountain changed colors thanks to the corporate sponsorship from Fiji Water.

At the 2016 Poker Runs America season-ending poker run in Cape Coral, Fla., a new boat joined the Poker Runs America fleet, a Sunsation 32 CCX center console powered by twin Mercury Racing Verado 400R

outboards. The white hullsides sported Official Safety Boat decals and the new vessel will provide support and assistance to poker runs and other major events including offshore races around the country in the future.

"The safety of all our poker runners and all performance boaters is of utmost importance," said Poker Runs America president and publisher Bill Taylor. "This boat will give us the opportunity to provide even more support to them in the future."



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Poker Runs America, Sunsation Powerboats and Mercury Marine join together to build a new safety boat for the 2017 Poker Runs America tour.

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Previously Poker Runs America and Sunsation (www.sunsationboats.com) had worked together on a Sunsation 32' Performance Boat to promote poker run attendance for smaller performance boats. “It got Sunsation a lot of exposure,” said Joe Schaldenbrand, Vice President at Sunsation. “I liked the way that all went. Then we started talking about doing a center console.”

The initial discussions took place between Bill and Todd Taylor (Poker Runs America Vice President of Sales) and Schaldenbrand at the 2014 Miami International Boat Show. Mercury Racing (www.mercuryracing.com) agreed to join the cooperative effort by supplying the motors and the plan for the new Poker Runs America Safety Boat was set in motion.

At 32' long with a 9' beam and a weight of 7,000 pounds, the 32 CCX is a good size for the assignment. The twin-stepped bottom was designed with well-known performance-boat consultant Tres Martin, who owns the Tres Martin Performance Boat School (performanceboatschool.com) and it features the proprietary SS Taper Ventilation Technology. The boat should run close to 80 mph once it's dialed in, said Schaldenbrand. The 32 CCX is designed to accommodate a variety of recreational activities and is big enough to be able to handle the confused seas that can come with a poker run, but is also small enough that it can be easily towed to the various events around the country. The boat comes with trim tabs, six pop-up cleats, a cabin and a private head with a pumpout toilet. The cabin measures 8' fore to aft, by 4'6" wide by 6'2" headroom.

Up front in the bow, there are high-backed bucket seats, plus a forward-facing chaise-style lounge on the front of the console. The helm has side-by-side bolsters with fold-up bottom cushions so the driver and a companion can choose their riding position. An angled footrest on the bottom of the console adds more comfort. In the dash, twin Garmin GPSMap 7612 chartplotters flank the Mercury VesselView screen. The custom Livorsi steering wheel is offset to port with the Mercury Digital Throttle & Shift levers positioned for comfortable operation. In the dash and throughout the boat, there are Livorsi Marine stainless-steel cupholders conveniently located.

Providing protection from the elements is the T-top. It has aluminum legs fabricated by Ashley Welding (www.ashleywelding.com). Sunsation provides the fiberglass top and any integrated components such as speakers, grab handles and lights. The framework is designed to be easy to climb and on top, there is Seadek flooring so sunbathers stretch out and soak up some rays. Schaldenbrand said the Poker Runs America Official Safety Boat is equipped the way most of the boats in the CCX line are purchased. In addition to Garmin and Livorsi Marine providing equipment, Dekka supplied the batteries.

“We built this boat exactly like the ones we are producing for customers,” explained Schaldenbrand. “It was extremely important to us to build exactly what we're manufactur-



Left: PRA's Bill Taylor, Sunsation Powerboats Joe Schaldenbrand and at the Cape Coral Poker Run.

ing now.” Sunsation must be doing something right because the company is sold out on its center consoles for more than a year.

To ensure that the 32 CCX arrives at each event in style Myco Trailers designing a custom triple-axle all-welded aluminum trailer. Myco sales manager Bill Tweedy worked closely with the Taylors and Sunsation on all the boat and trailer specifications and longtime Myco engineer Don King will set the axle and bunk placement for the proper center of gravity to ensure that the boat and trailer roll across the road as smoothly as possible. The trailer will be equipped with electro-hydraulic brakes, under-hull lights and a ladder to make it easy to climb aboard.

The next event for the Poker Runs America Official Safety Boat will be the Superboat International 36th Annual Key West World Championships the week of November 7. To see where the boat will be in the future, check out www.pokerrunsamerica.com. **PRA**