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SUNSATION

32 Innovator / Twin HP500EFIs

When Sunsatation calls their new 32-footer "Innovator," they aren't kidding around. This open-water machine redefines the concept of unique.

HOT BOAT's encounters with top-of-the-line open-water powerboats are relatively common. Far more rare is the boat test that leaves the driver commenting: "I have never seen anything like *this* before."

With its new 32-foot Innovator, Michigan-based Sunsatation Powerboats has created an impressive offshore machine that it hopes will make customers say exactly those words, followed by, "And I must have one." A highly respected builder of rough-water performance boats, Sunsatation has gained notoriety through a combination of excellent reviews, top-heavy production hours and growing industry awareness. With each passing year, it has sharpened its focus of its premium-caliber line of open-water powerboats. Owned and overseen by the Schaldenbrands, a talented band of boating brothers, Sun-

sation has kept its standards high with models like the 288 Intimidator, 32-foot Dominator and the new 32-foot Innovator, which features a truly innovative dash panel: divided into two halves like doors on an electric engine hatch, the dash actually opens up electrically to allow easy entrance into the cuddy. Nobody in the industry has anything remotely like this unique split-dash system, conceived by Mike McLeod and executed by Sunsatation in-house engineer Dave Moriarty, who did all of the hard homework, from hinges and relays to the actual dash functions and mechanical operation.

"Our race team wanted to sit side by side at an angle to be down low into the boat," explains Sunsatation owner Wayne Schaldenbrand. "So we put everybody together in the boat, pushed the seats

together, cut the cabin out, put electric footrests and electric bolsters in snugly, side by side. We placed the shifters in the center with a console, and we dialed the boat in." The new design includes the lifting dash doors, which will be incorporated into the pleasure version of this race boat. While one switch may be pressed to flip open both doors simultaneously dockside, another will allow the port-side dash to lift up separately while the boat is underway (even at speeds of up to 40-50 mph in relatively calm water).

Sunsatation's new concept for its dash also includes small mirrors that allow the driver to keep tabs on the traffic or the passengers behind him. All dash panels are 1/8-inch aluminum powdercoated and are held in with 3M Dual Lock. They are all flush with the fiberglass ▶







and are removable from behind—no more screws to hold the panels in; just push on them, and they'll pop out.

But the dash isn't the only feature intended to intimidate the competition. This 32-footer is the result of nearly three years' worth of research and development, and all of the tooling, mold construction, fabrication and rigging were done by SunSation. Our test boat was the third boat produced and the first one available for consumer purchase. The first version featured a Dominator hull underneath; the second was a prototype that SunSation gave a whoopin' to all year on the water as the boat was tested and pushed to the limit. The boat tested here is number three, a Michael Peters

design. Even so, SunSation plans to continue testing and massaging various elements of the hull and ride, from the bottom and strakes to various props. The first Innovators, including our test boat, were built to compete in Factory II offshore racing, so they're powered by HP500EFIs (for the consumer version, the base engine will be a 496 Mag). Virtually everything on the



Innovator runs through a central computer; touch a button, and the blower comes on; touch another, and the lights will dim. The side-by-side seating, with controls in between the driver and navigator, make the Innovator an ideal poker-run rocket. The dri-

boat during rough-water rides—we always like to see those on the fast boats.)

McCleod has done an outstanding job on the Innovator's interior. Perhaps taking a cue from Formula, footrests are now electrically operated to change, adjust and return to the original position as desired and even swing out of the way completely—a savvy use of technology. Other amenities aboard the boat are impressive almost to the point of astonishing. There's air conditioning, microwave, enclosed head, electric bolsters, full cabin, lounge seats, vee-berth, fiberglass walkway and much more. Even with the extra weight of all the extras and add-ons, the boat can run very close to 88 mph.

Another cool innovation from SunSation is a new engine hatch designed by the race team, which allows air

ver has all of the override controls right at his fingertips. All tabs and drives are on the shifter, meaning you never have to move your hands.

The layout of the cockpit allows room for three passengers in the backseat and two up front; additionally, two more passengers may ride standing up behind the driver and navigator. (SunSation has done a great job with grab rails, which provide extra security for the folks in the back of the

to enter through a vent. "The hard air comes in, swirls around and drives it right into the flame arrestors so the motor is running cool air,"

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SUNSATION

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he says. "The engine hatch comes off with three pins—there's no nuts or bolts, so if you're a gearhead, and you don't want it, just take out the pins and walk away with it."

The 32-foot sports aircraft ignition, tethers, starters and starter switches, gas tanks, fills and fuel cap. Weather-resistant and waterproof connections are seen throughout the boat, so all of the boat's switches are sealed in it—a nice touch. The modular cuddy features a plush interior, inlaid mirrors and a full head. Featuring a paint job by the phenomenal Mitcher T, the boat is simply drop-dead gorgeous from every angle.

We have tapped into the awesome efficiency of Sunsation's hull design on many occasions, but there is no stopping the Sunsation boys in their determined march for optimum dial-in; this was one of the best of our numerous, highly enjoyable turns in the Sunsation seat. Feeding the throttle, our drivers lost sight of the horizon for two to three seconds before the boat rolled over on plane. The boat finds plane almost immediately, however, and then it's nothing but low, level and lovely. Once on plane, the Innovator's bottom performs even better than the Dominator's did; the new boat continuously rides flat. This Innovator does require a bit of trim to make it perform and get to the high numbers, and while the bottom isn't quite as forgiving of a ride as the Dominator's, that will no doubt be finessed by the time this review is published, as Wayne Schaldenbrand is continuing to tweak the angle of the strakes. We detected no porpoise in the hull, although we noticed that it was possible to deliberately create a rocking condition by moving to the full trim position. Typical of Sunsation's stable, the boat tracked well in the standard left- and right-hand turns. The ride is dry and secure, and acceleration was very good as well—of the seven boats tested in Miami, Sunsation's was the second-quickest out of the hole, reaching 60 mph in a respectable 20.74 seconds. Top speed was 87.9 mph in windless and flat-water conditions, the second-fastest boat tested in Miami. Our drivers reported better-than-average handling capabilities.

DRIVER BUZZ

Driver 1: "When you actually raise the dash to get in and then set it back down, the floor's footrests will go right back down to where you had them, just like car seats when you get in and out. It's just unbelievable. The boat has everything that you could want. The gelcoating on the outside is perfect. Mitch did a perfect job at custom paint-

ing it. He put on a beautiful pearl coat under the paint on the deck, which gives it a lot of depth, very typical of all Sunsations."

Driver 2: "This is a phenomenal piece of work. The dash is incredible; nobody in the industry has anything like this. The Sunsation boys are commended again on their technology. The mirrors give you accessibility to know what's going on in back of your craft. It's really a plus. I haven't seen anybody in the industry in the last ten years that has come out with the kind of technology of this boat. They are the trend-setters. They have stepped up to a level that the big manufacturers, the production guys, haven't even dreamed of reaching yet. It's incredible see a small company with the limited funds and resources that they have do this type of innovative work that they've done in the 32. It's a home run. This boat will sell because it is totally different than anyone else's out there. Their thought process and their ability to come up with the ideas that the industry needs and hasn't seen is there. They're 2010, and everyone else is 1990." ■

SPECIFICATIONS

Test conditions: Smooth
Centerline: 31'7"
Beam: 8'1"
Bottom: 24-degree deep vee
Engine/Drive: Twin MerCruiser
HP500EFI/Bravo drives
HP @ prop: 470
Ratio: 1:50
Prop: Four-blade 30-inch pitch Bravo
Overall weight: 6,800 lbs.
Base Price: \$150,000
Standard Features: McLeod Power
side-by-side bolsters, power footrests,
custom rear seating, race hatch, split-
dash cabin-entry system, custom dash
panel, hydraulic steering, K planes
w/indicators, stainless grab handles,
high-impact changeable rub-rail system,
stainless cleats, thru-hull exhaust
Options on test boat: HP500EFI pack-
age, Livorsi Silent Tips, Motor well
lights, Kiekhaefer K Planes w/indica-
tors, depth sounder, Sony Total Sound
system, full bow cover, Shore Power
with battery charger, microwave, power
electric navigation lights, anodized
throttle and drive controls, enclosed air
conditioner, GPS speedo, custom
graphics package
Price as tested: \$199,900
Top Speed, radar: 87.9 mph
Mfg. est. speed: 88 mph
0-30: 7.53 seconds
0-40: 11.63 seconds
0-50: 15.92 seconds
0-60: 20.74 seconds
Speed at 3,000 rpm: 35.2 mph
Speed at 4,000 rpm: 67.3 mph

Sunsation Powerboats
9666 Krete Dr.
Algonac, MI 44801
(810) 794-4888