

SEA RAY 450 SUNDANCER REVIEW: GRAND STAND

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Sea Ray 45: The view from the top...

BEFORE THE TEST OF SEA RAY'S new 450 Sundancer near the builder's Palm Coast plant in northern Florida, I did breakfast, with a capital B.

MENU

Of course, it wore off by noon, primarily because Boat Testing's so demanding nutritionally. And Palm Coast's Engineering and Quality Control Manager Bill Trudeau and I had been hard at it, ramming around the Intracoastal Waterway, taming the savage seas for hours.

"Nice place for lunch over there," Trudeau pointed toward an evergreen-encroached lagoon with a sign on the far end - Palm Coast Marina. I put a little wheel on the 450 and turned in.

I love a good challenge as much as a good meal. The most obvious parking spot, dead ahead, on the facedock at Flagler's Restaurant, looked miniscule from my vantage point at the raised helm. And the 450's a *big* boat - with two comfortable staterooms, a broad, expansive salon/galley area, two heads and a cockpit large enough to host a Baptist Church fish fry.

"Get set for a little difficulty," I told myself, bumping the Teleflex engine controls exploratorily. But despite its size, docking the 450 went down smoother than an Apalachicola oyster. Why? First, the diameter of the 450's four-blade Nibral props is considerable, verging on 2'. At maneuvering speeds, nothing moves a big boat like a big inboard prop. Second, there's a lot of turning leverage inherent in the hefty distance between the 450's wheels - a whopping 4'10". The boat twin-screws like a pinwheel. Third, one of the most noticeable characteristics of big diesel boats is bottom-end torque. Just a couple of revolutions of the 450's props produces tremendous oomph.

So, with the Teleflex/tilt steering wheel centered and the throttles drawn back to idle, I bumped the shifts in and out of gear a couple of times and felt the 450 glide into place with geometrical precision.

CHEEEERS - For a really big Sundancer, with a whole lot of standard equipment, including an 8kw generator. Top speed with twin Caterpillar 3126s: 34.9 mph.

WHITE TRANSOM?

Handling isn't the 450's only strong point. Its engine room gets top marks as well. Our twin Caterpillars, for example, were a full 2'2" apart. Not to belabor the engine offset issue, but this certainly facilitates service.

The way the four Racor fuel filters for the mains are mounted makes for easy service, too. They're all lined up neatly on the engine room bulkhead. And the batteries are right between the Cats, well off the bottom of the boat, ensconced in vacuformed boxes.

Moreover, through-hulls have Apollo ball valves and are bonded, like most other metal fittings aboard, with heavy #8 wire; bulkheads and hatches are backed with 2" sound-deadening foam insulation; stuffing boxes are dripless and hose clamps have red plastic ends. One last thing.

The 450 has the new "Slipstream Exhaust". While this system is designed to reduce station-wagon effect and noise, another advantage boldly announced itself as I gazed at the 450's transom from a table strewn with voluptuous cheeseburgers - no soot.

WHAT PRICE SEA RAY

Our 450 had a load of standards, including a couple of fancy VacuFlush heads, an 8kW Westerbeke generator and an undercounter Marvel freezer (alongside the standard Marvel reefer).

All this produces a pricier price tag, at least by comparison with predecessors. Base retail for the 450 with standard engines is \$369,040. Upgrade to test boat power and you're looking at #399,000. Comparisons? The Tiara 4000 Midcabin, with twin 407-hp Cummins Diamond Edition diesels, sells for \$386,000, a price that reflects more displacement and beam, an LOA that's a couple of feet shorter and some choice specialties, among them a welded-aluminum windshield, Bose stereo and Fountainhead countertops instead of fiberglass.

Trojan's new 440 Express costs just a bit more, too - \$369,995, with a set of Caterpillar 3126s and a 9kw generator, Besenconi windshield and high-end McCleod upholstery.

GIT GONE

MENU
 The 450's built the way Sea Ray's been building big boats for years. Outer hull laminations are layed up with vinylester resin (to increase resiliency and resist osmosis). The inner stuff is done up with general-purpose polyester. There are four stringers, each glass-encapsulated wood.

Design and layout are just as substantial, with cedar-lined closets, Taylor hatches, stainless-steel opening ports and oak trim. The mid-cabin, with almost 7'10" of headroom forward and a sliding door, is a true stateroom. It even has its own head, a smaller version of the master, but without a stall shower.

The two SeaLand VacuFlush MSDs onboard, by the way, are covered with cosmetic fiberglass lids which flex and sometimes lose their grip on the molded fiberglass stops underneath. These lids need beefing up.

The huge cockpit of the 450 can be converted for fishing by removing the wraparound lounge. The guts of the helmseat are roto-cast plastic and the lounge is framed with Starboard. The passenger seat forward is the only seat that contains wood, although that will be changed to roto-cast soon.

One disconcerting detail - our prototype had a port list. But Trudeau has since corrected the problem by moving the waterheater and battery for the generator to the starboard side.

After finishing lunch at Flagler's with a third round of iced tea - a beverage brewed brewed properly only in the South - we headed back to the Sea Ray plant. En route, I got to thinking about how honest American food agrees with me ... honest American boats, too.

CERTIFIED TEST RESULTS Sea Ray 450 Sundancer

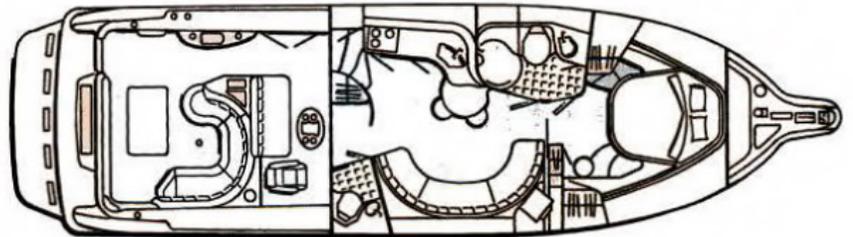
Standard power: ; twin 407-hp Cummins 6CTA8.3-M2 Diamond Edition in-line-6 diesel inboards

Optional power: twin 291-hp Caterpillar 3116 in-line-6 diesel inboards; twin 340-hp Caterpillar 3116 in-line-6 diesel inboards; twin 407-hp Caterpillar 3126 in-line-6 diesel inboards

Test boat power: twin 407-hp Caterpillar 3126 in-line-6 diesel inboards with 439 cid, 4.33" bore x 5.00" stroke, turning a set of 22" x 25" four-bladed Nibrall props through a 1.64:1 reduction

rpm	speed			fuel use		efficiency			operation	
	knots	mph	% of max.	gph	% of max.	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	angle	sound level
900	7.3	8.4	24	2.6	6	2.79	3.21	1005	0.0	74
1200	8.6	10.0	29	6.2	14	1.39	1.60	502	2.5	75
1500	10.4	12.0	34	12.8	28	0.81	0.93	292	4.0	79
1800	17.6	20.3	58	18.0	39	0.98	1.13	353	4.0	79
2100	22.9	26.4	76	24.2	53	0.95	1.09	341	4.0	84
2400	26.9	31.0	89	32.0	70	0.84	0.97	303	4.0	85
2700	29.6	34.1	98	40.3	88	0.74	0.85	265	3.5	87
2800	30.3	34.9	100	45.6	100	0.66	0.76	239	3.5	91

Advertised fuel capacity 400 gal. Range based on 90 percent of that figure. Performance measured with four persons aboard, 1/2 fuel, full water. Sound levels taken at helm, in dB-A.



LOA (w/bow pulpit)	48'1"
Beam	13'11"
Draft	3'7"
Displacement (lbs., approx.)	22,500
Freeboard forward	5'0"
Freeboard aft	5'5"
Max. cabin headroom	6'9"

Bridge clearance (to top of radar arch)	9'10"
Fuel capacity (gal.)	400
Water capacity (gal.)	100
Base price (w/standard engines)	\$369,040
Designer	Sea Ray Design Team

Standard equipment (major items): Ship's bell; Good (rope) windlass; welded ss bowrail; 8 ss cleats; fiberglass radar arch; 4 deck hatches w/screens and covers; Teleflex Sea Star hydraulic steering; Teleflex engine controls; Teleflex instrumentation; Ritchie compass; Kenyon 3-burner stove; Panasonic

microwave oven; Grohe faucets; 20" TV/VCR; 13" TV/VCR; 25,000-Btu A/C; Racor fuel filters w/crossover; 3 Rule 2,000-gph bilge pumps; 10.5-gal. Attwood waterheater w/exchanger; Glendinning synchronizer; Bennett trim tabs; Tides Marine dripless, water-cooled shaft logs; Sea Fire auto. halon system.

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This review/article originally appeared in Boating Magazine, December 1995 and is written by Captain Bill Pike. For more great powerboat reviews, visit their website and subscribe at: <http://subscriptions.boatingmag.com/>