

BOAT REPORT

SUNSEEKER

43

Smooth riding, 41-knot diesel performance and less smoke at low speeds. Those are the main features of a new Sunseeker/Sabre package.



OUR policy of running a vessel of around 30ft as our second boat test took a knock this month when Sabre invited us to run our equipment over a Sunseeker Thunderhawk 43. Since this was fitted with the most potent diesel outdrive package currently available — a pair of their in-line six cylinder 370L diesels coupled to MPM outdrive legs — it was an opportunity not to be missed.

Previous options have been centred on the larger Mercruiser petrol line-up of outdrives, plus diesels in the shape of Volvo's TAM41, but at 200hp apiece these barely taxed the performance potential of the Don Shead hull. With a total output of 740hp on tap, we hoped the twin

Sabres would really make the Sunseeker shine while still keeping fuel bills in the shade.

This boat is currently the largest in Sunseeker's Performance-Plus range, geared as it is towards top speeds and handling, albeit in cosseted luxury and with some restriction on accommodation, while the beamier Offshore Sports Cruisers offer more spacious interiors with separate cabins for longer-distance cruising. The Thunderhawk's principle underwater lines come from a championship-winning race-bred hull — the Class II veteran *Rejuga* — with modifications to the sprayrail configuration being the main alteration to the constant 20° deep-vee sections.

Beneath the slight swell of the coachroof,

Top and above:
Sunseeker's Thunderhawk 43 at high speed showing (top) her deep-vee hull and parallel spray rails. **Left:** at lower speeds, there is no smoke from Sabre's new 370L diesels.



Photographs by Brian Platt



Beneath the slight swell of the coachroof, above the deck, you find a convertible dinette plus a curtained-off sleeping area for'ard of it, a separate toilet/shower compartment and galley. None of these areas are poky or impractical. Five or six can lounge comfortably around the lacquered drop-table, and the double berth towards the bows measures 6ft 4in long and almost as wide at the shoulder. The toilet compartment is roomy and amply appointed with stowage — as indeed is the whole accommodation, including the galley sited adjacent to the companionway.

The cockpit is proportioned just right to entertain up to a dozen in comfort. Occupying the

centre section is the oval settee/dinette which readily caters for seven or eight, and the full-width sunbed, tucked just below coaming level and safely bordered with a stainless steel guardrail, remains sheltered even while on the move. A wet-bar to port, complete with icebox, sink and drinks cabinet, saves those wearisome trips down below. The helm is not only beautifully finished in walnut veneer but supremely comfortable, both the skipper and mate having racing-style seats with power-operated drop-away squabs. Having safely cosseted the helmsman, Sunseeker ensure every control and dial falls readily to his hand or eye. Positioned around the single-lever throttles are the tab and ►

power-trim switches, and ready-use panels are located either side of the padded wheel. Over towards his companion, yet still within view of the driver, are areas of angled fascia for flush-mounted electronic navigation equipment.

The slender hull has not tempted Sunseeker away from their practical approach to boating, and 9in-wide side decks bordered by a guiding toe-rail run full length. As far as guard and handrails are concerned, it is up to the owner whether he wants the full, extended pulpit or just the coachroof-mounted grabrail that runs from the wraparound screen to the stern.

All the ground tackle — electric windlass, 15kg Bruce anchor and chain — come as standard, as does a host of other motor-away equipment. Struggling to turn up more than one mooring line on a cleat is not Sunseeker style either: fore and aft deck hardware includes suitable 10in numbers, with two slightly smaller ones on each side to take care of the springs.

Engines

While other engine manufacturers content themselves with around 200hp in their diesel outdrive line-ups, Poole-based Sabre-Lehman have jumped in with a package designed to please boatbuilders who are starved of higher horsepowers unless they turn to petrol.

Their six-cylinder 6.8lt turbocharged/intercooled unit is rated in this case to 370hp at 2600rpm, although the same block, cast in Germany especially for Sabre, is used on their

350C and race-prepared units. Launched a couple of years ago this engine — and indeed the legs — served a hard apprenticeship in the Cruiser Class racing scene, powering *Miss Kent Koi* to victory in the Cowes-Torquay Classic.

One of the Sabre's attributes is an excellent power-to-weight ratio — bordering on 3.8lb/hp. The 370L also grabbed our attention more recently as the first unit in the series to feature three-cylinder idling, to reduce emissions. This is the first time we have encountered this concept in practice, and we can now vouch for its effectiveness — especially since these are direct-injection engines which are more prone to smoking than the more fuel-thirsty indirect type.

The gearbox incorporates a magnetic sensor which activates a valve in the high-pressure feed — shutting off the fuel supply to three cylinders — when neutral is selected. The installation is up to Sunseeker's usual high standard, but is somewhat different from normal outdrive configurations where the engine/gearbox is butted tight to the transom, Sabre providing a short shaft between gearbox and drive-leg coupling. As an engineering function this takes the stresses between the solidly-fixed leg and flexibly-mounted engine, while it also gives plenty of room around the complete installation.

The MPM drive leg is another offshore campaigner — developed in league with Fabio Buzzzi and originally fitted to Iveco's 8061-series engines — and the propellers are high-performance cleaver four-bladers from Rolla.

Below: twin Sabre 370L diesels nestling in the stern of Sabrehawk. Generating 370hp at a lazy 2600rpm, the straight-six units give race-bred performance, whilst a three cylinder idling system is designed to reduce smoke emissions around the marina. Below right: not only a fast sportster, the Thunderhawk also offers comfortable accommodation below decks.

Sunseeker Thunderhawk 43

Engines: twin Sabre 370L diesels, 370hp at 2600rpm, 6 cyl, 6798cc.

Conditions: wind SE Force 4, sea moderate. **Load:** fuel 50%, water 25%, crew 6.

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	Sound levels (dB(A))		
						accom	helm	ckpt
1000	8.2	—	—	—	—	68	77	79
1400	10.5	6.2	28.2	1.69	373	72	78	82
1800	18.8	13.8	62.7	1.36	300	75	80	83
2200	26.6	16.6	75.5	1.60	352	77	86	89
2400	31.8	22.6	102.7	1.41	309	79	86	89
2600	37.9	28.8	130.9	1.32	290	81	86	89
2700	40.8	32.8	149.1	1.24	274	81	86	89

Acceleration: 0-25 knots, 13.5sec.

Loa	44ft 0in (13.4m)	Fuel capacity	220gal (1000lt)
Hull length	43ft 0in (13.10m)	Water capacity	29gal (132lt)
Beam	11ft 0in (3.30m)	Price ex VAT	with twin Sabre 370L diesels with MPM drives £135,000
Draught	3ft 10in (1.17m)		
Displacement	7.25 tons		

Boatbuilder:

Sunseeker International Powerboats, 27-31 West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JF.
Tel: 0202 675071.

Engine manufacturer:

Sabre-Lehman, Ferndown Industrial Estate, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 7PW.
Tel: 0202 893720.

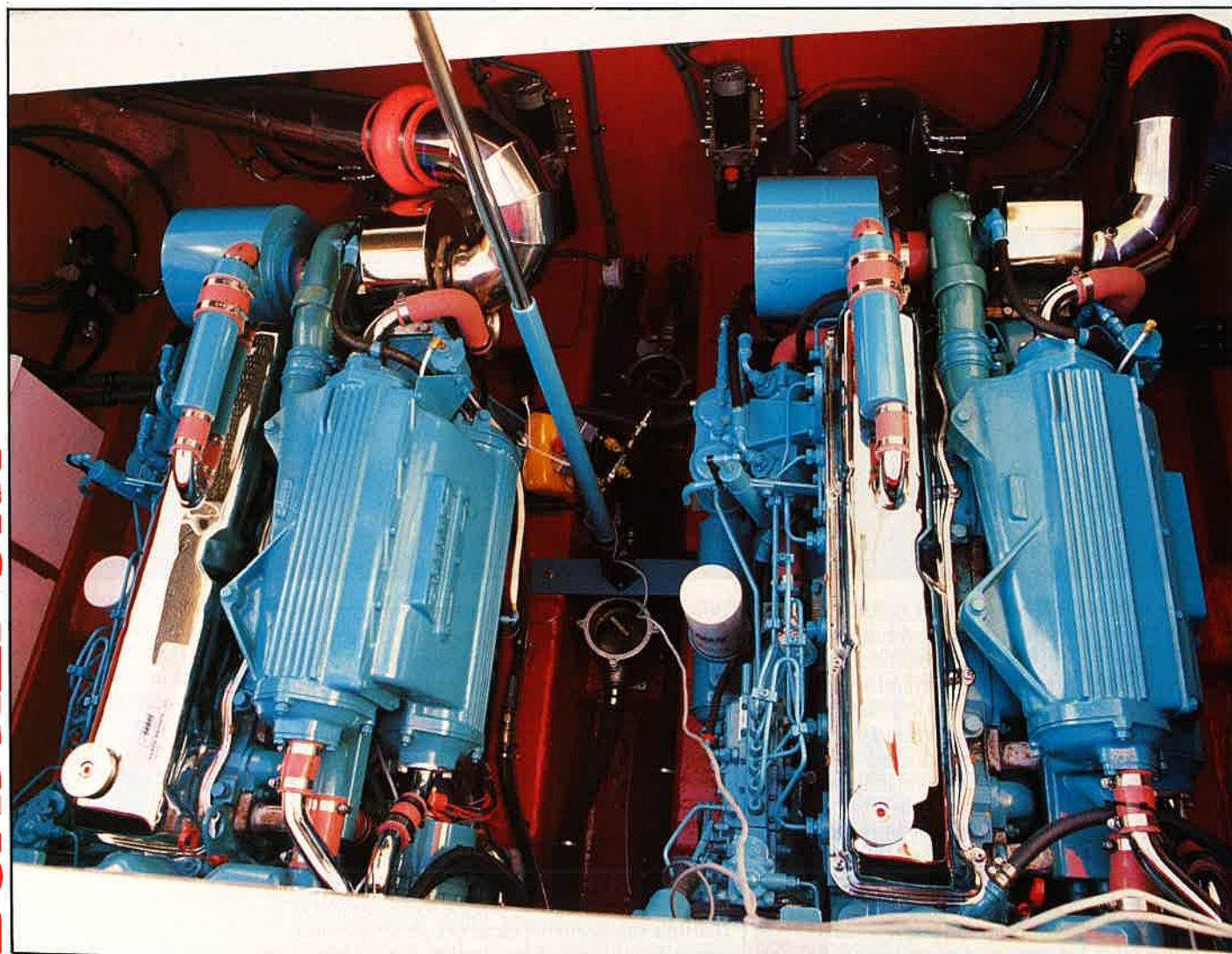
Performance and handling

Putting the accompanying figures in context, and comparing them with test data obtained from a twin-420hp petrol-powered model requires a further word or two.

The Thunderhawk we tested was owned by Sabre, so some criticism might be levelled that the engines were somehow tweaked to produce more power, or that the boat was in 'light' condition. But we can confirm that the 43 was well-laden, with well over half-filled 220gal (1000lt) fuel tanks, 25% water, a crew of six and a full cruising inventory. Some double checking on power curves, brake specific fuel consumption (bsfc) figures and our own considerable pool of data showed the 370L's performance to be well within the norms for this size and type of engine; extra power has to come from somewhere, and would have shown in an uncommonly high fuel figure.

Full throttle, 2700rpm, gave a trimmed-out top speed of nigh on 41 knots with consumption for both engines at 32.8gph (149lph), giving a creditable 1.24mpg. Resisting the urge to wedge the throttles wide and find Alderney (less than two hours from Poole at that speed) for lunch, we found the most economical setting to be nearer 26 knots, at which consumption fell to 16.6gph (76lph) and a fuel-conscious 1.6mpg. This gives a theoretical range, draining the tanks completely, of an impressive 350 miles.

A previous test on the Thunderhawk with twin



◀ 420hp petrols indicated a top-speed of just over 43 knots. This would have sucked the tanks dry in under three hours, while our diesel-powered model could have maintained her top speed for twice as long, offering almost twice the range with any given speed setting.

We expected a marked difference in acceleration times between the rather higher-powered petrol boat and our latest test model, but again we were well satisfied at the responsiveness of the diesel. The latter achieved a 0-25 knot time of just under 14sec, petrol power having pushed the Sunseeker to 30 knots over the same period.

Handling is everything we have come to expect from Sunseeker, the 43 cutting and cleaving aside the seemingly toy-like waves being pushed up by the wind-over-tide chop. And the short, steep, confused seas generated by a distant storm were dismissed with an easy nod of the dry-riding hull near Poole Harbour entrance. Pushing out past Old Harry, the Thunderhawk positively seemed to enjoy the gallop over the longer swell, whether running with or against the wave pattern.

We had expected the throttles and drives — coupled to the immense torque of the diesels — to require some deferential treatment. But, apart from trimming in to around 0° or less when opening the throttles very quickly, the whole soundly developed combination of boat, engines and drives could be driven as lamely or as hard as we liked without shedding performance or safety. The diesel's governor dutifully kept the required revs on, under the fluctuating load conditions, while the props were happy to take up the power without continuous adjustment to

throttle and trim — an important consideration on longer journeys.

In further praise of the hull, some over-enthusiasm when trimming the drives for maximum efficiency, into the short sea, and we were stem-up and flying; bracing ourselves and backing off the throttles for a hard landing was not necessary of course, the fineness of the hull cushioning, rather than merely soaking up, the full pounding. A small amount of tab corrected this, easing the nose down, and once again we were running comfortably at full speed.

Conclusion

The Sunseeker marque, speeds in excess of 40 knots and engines producing several hundred horsepower hardly conjure up visions of economy. Indeed, if you are fortunate enough to be purchasing such a craft, is the difference between spending £200 on a diesel fill-up (a spin over to see the smart set at Deauville and back) and the £500 on an equivalent petrol bill important? Possibly not, but wining and dining half-a-dozen family and friends on the savings should make for an even more enjoyable trip.

Of course, this is just one angle to consider. Add to this the pure, readily-driven impetus that diesels maintain under the ever-changing loadings an offshore powerboat endures, diesel peace of mind and a fuller cruising range. This combination of Sabre and MPM legs was impressive and will surely satisfy — for the moment at least — the demand for increased outdrive diesel power. And if your requirement is for an exacting, finely-engineered, exciting sports cruiser, this Sabre-powered Sunseeker must be a sparkling contender.



Left: now very much a Sunseeker trademark, the walnut dash is finished in epoxy to give a durable finish to a high-quality feature. And not only are the cosmetics of note but all items around the contoured helm fall easily to hand.