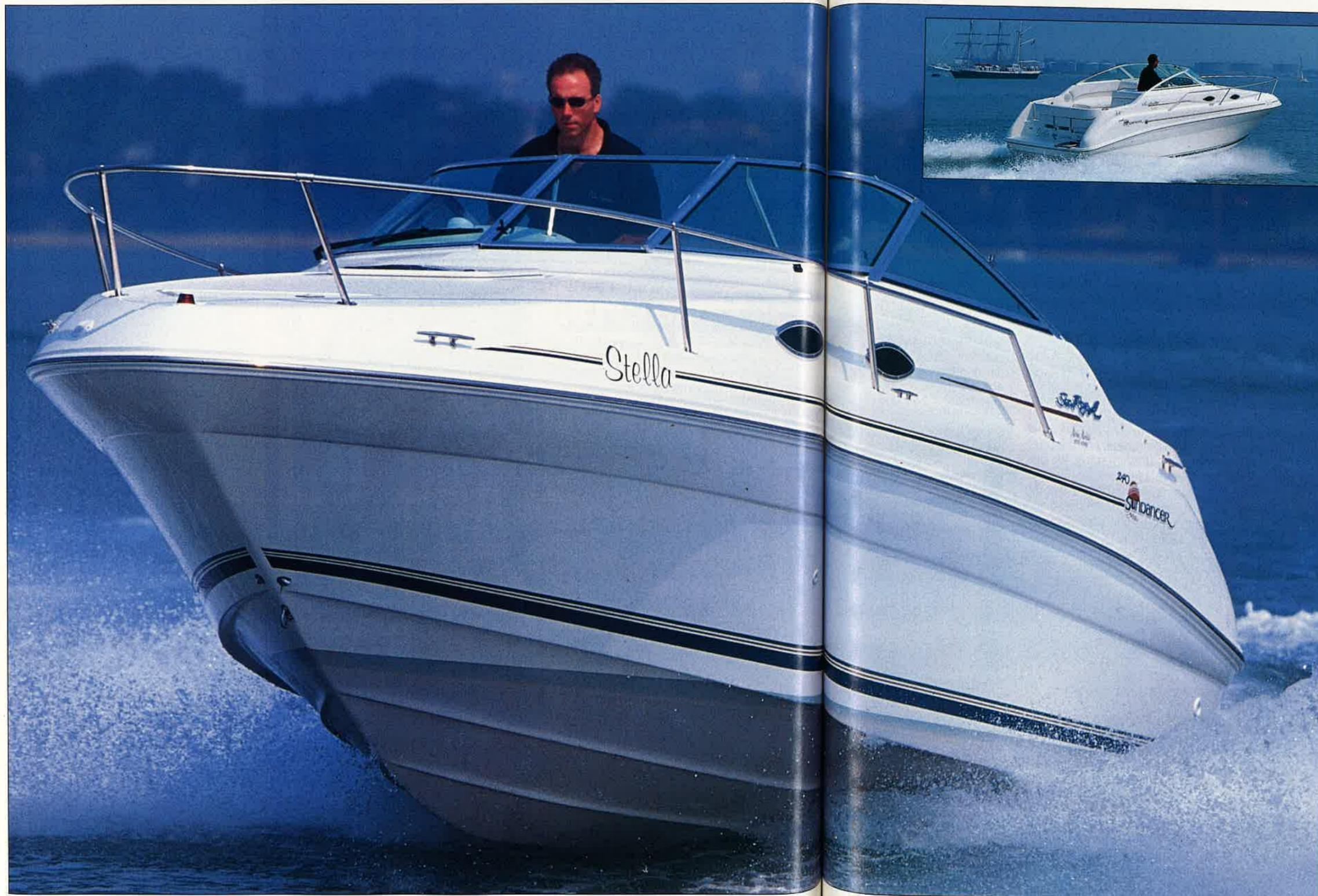


SEARAY 240 SUNDANCER



Refined but understated, this midi sports cruiser offers a good compromise between accommodation, sound engineering and performance.



A decade ago Sea Ray had the quality end of the mid-range sportsboat and sportscruiser market pretty much to themselves. Their reserved styling seemed to appeal to British buyers more than the brasher offerings of some of the other American builders, and they offered more finesse than most equivalent UK-built craft.

Now there is stiffer competition in this sector, but Sea Ray have stuck to their principles, and the 240 Sundancer is typical of their well made and refined range of sportscruisers.

Design

The 240 sits on a hull with a 17° deadrise at the transom, allowing a wide beam for plenty of internal space at a time when many other builders are opting for a greater deadrise to help out with sea keeping.

There is some height in the design, but this does not mean slab-like topsides; in fact they flare slightly outwards near the rubbing strip, and are also broken by a simple graphic. Bow rails complement the flowing lines.

Allocation of space between cabin and cockpit is excellent, neither being cheated, and this is at the heart of the boat's functionality.

Exterior

The helm position has a double seat, but this is not adjustable and gives minimal side support. There is no tilt-adjustment of the steering wheel either, but the average-sized helmsman at least has a comfortable driving position.

Although very simple, the console is effective. A wood-effect dash lays the instruments out tidily, with lit rocker-switches for the electrical functions, and a compass sits on top.

The other forward seat, to port, is a reclining one, offering either sunbathing for one or seating for two. This makes the cockpit quite sociable, linking the forward and aft sections.

Aft of the helm is a rear-facing double seat, and across most of the transom a bench seat. A table can be fitted in between, or alternatively an infill cushion will create another generous sunbathing area if required. The table is stored in a locker in the helm seat-back, which would also be a convenient place to stow fenders and warps.

Access to the bathing platform is through a transom door to port, and a locker here contains the battery master-switches and the optional shorepower lead.

With the side decks typically narrow for a sportscruiser of this size, steps set in the cabin door and an opening central section of the windscreen show the way forward to the bow, which has a large locker with an anchor retainer.

Interior

Two steps down from the cockpit provide the access into the cabin, and the effect of the boat's wide beam is immediately obvious. The forward dinette is nice and wide, with sitting headroom all round, and the double berth it converts into is of a good size if you sleep across it.

Although the table is a little small, this enables it to be stowed out of the way under the forward cushion. There are two lockers under the side seats, and further stowage behind the seat-back cushions, wide and deep enough to accommodate a pair of



Sea Ray 240 Sundancer

Loa
23ft 6in (7.16m).
Beam
8ft 6in (2.59m).
Draught
2ft 9in (0.84m) with drive down.
Displacement
4300lb (1950kg).
Water capacity
9gal (42lt).
Fuel capacity
50gal (227lt).
Engine
220hp Mercruiser 5.7EFI.
Price
£29,915 ex VAT.
Builders
Sea Ray Boats Inc, 2600 Sea Ray Boulevard, Knoxville, Tennessee 37914, USA.
Tel: (1) 423 522 4181.
Suppliers
Marina Marbella (UK) Ltd, Firefly Road, Hamble Point Marina, Hamble, Southampton, Hampshire SO31 4JD.
Tel: 01 703 453005.

skis, for example.

To port, the galley has ample standing headroom. It is a fairly simple affair with a single-tap sink, a single-burner stove and a fridge, and there is open stowage outboard, plus a cupboard underneath and a deep compartment aft of the fridge. A grab-handle is well placed above the fridge, and the electrics panel is mounted behind the stove.

The top step in the adjacent companionway incorporates more convenient storage, with a pull-out bin.

Although the sales brochure claims there is standing room in the toilet compartment opposite, we think that a little optimistic. The moulding incorporates a sink but no tap or drain hole, and therefore no shower. The flushing toilet, macerator and holding tank fitted on our test boat are extras.

The entrance to the mid-cabin with its fair-sized double berth is concealed behind a concertina door. The whole area is fitted out with a mattress, and there is a hatch out onto the cockpit for ventilation and daylight plus two small lights.

Light-coloured fabrics are used throughout, and there is a pleasant but understated ambience.

Engine

A difficult decision facing buyers of the 240 concerns engine selection.

Our test boat was fitted with a 220hp Mercruiser 5.7EFI petrol engine. Drop the EFI and take the 5.7L model, and you will save £1000. Alternatively, pay an extra £600 ex VAT and you can upgrade to a 250hp LX, or pay another £1200 on top of that and you can have this engine with fuel injection.

Getting into the engine compartment involves the removal of several panels in the cockpit sole, and the engine is set deep, so access is a little restricted. But everything down here is nicely laid-out, and the finish matches the build quality of the rest of the craft.

Performance

The 240 Sundancer is not a light boat, but the fuel-injected 5.7-litre Mercruiser ensures it is no slouch.

From standstill, you will be up onto the plane and at 15 knots within 4.1 sec, and then onto a

comfortable cruising speed of 25 knots in another 4.2sec. Even with a pretty quick sportsboat you would be looking at around 3sec in each case, so this cruiser has serious sporting appeal.

At that 25-knot mid-range cruising speed the engine pulls 3100rpm, with plenty to spare, as we found out by opening it right up to 4600rpm to record a top speed of 36 knots on our radar gun.

Our enjoyment of the Sundancer's cruising abilities was enhanced by its seakeeping. We had wondered how it would fare with its fairly low deadrise, which gives a larger hull 'footprint' in which to work but also reduces a boat's ability to slice through the water. As it turned out, the ride was most comfortable, admittedly on a fairly calm sea but crossing the wash from other craft to give some challenges.

Handling, like performance, retains a sportsboat feel, with good response to the wheel, and the boat belies its weight as it powers through turns. We did encounter some propeller ventilation on tighter turns, but this is readily controllable with the throttle.

The driving position is excellent, both seated and standing, giving you a good view and allowing you to drive accurately through the water.

Noise levels at cruising speeds are manageable, 90dB(A) at 25 knots and 92dB(A) at 30 knots.

Conclusions

The 240 Sundancer is a craft that most buyers looking for a small sports cruiser would put high on their list. Those trading down from a larger craft will not be disappointed with the accommodation, and those trading up from a sportsboat will not lose too much in terms of performance.

The builders' distinctive simple but refined lines work well, and will not date as easily as the more extreme styling used by other manufacturers. All some buyers might want is a slightly fuller standard specification. To compare prices like-for-like, you may have to add 'essential' items from Sea Ray's options list.

All the same, they have done well to keep the base craft under the £30,000 ex VAT mark. And we would be more than happy with the engine as fitted to our test boat, which offers a good mix of performance and value. □

Above: the forward dinette capitalises on the full beam of the 240. There is full standing headroom opposite the galley, although we found this not to be the case in the rather basic toilet compartment (below). Bottom: engine access is a little restricted, but engineering is sound and the Mercruiser 5.7EFI proved a good match.

