



— Boat Report —

SEARAY 450DA SUNDANCER

Is this 50-footer the ultimate in sportscruisers? Where better to find out, than on the Mediterranean coast of Spain?



Sea Ray do make bigger boats, up to the 630SS with its tennis court-sized cockpit, but their 450 Sundancer is perhaps the ultimate in genuine sportscruisers. Its almost full-width cockpit will swallow up to a dozen people, and its interior layout — although open-plan for day use — makes up into two sleeping cabins overnight.

Having enthused about the 450DA when we first saw it at the 1995 Southampton Boat Show, we were invited out to the UK agents' head office in Spain to get our hands on a demonstrator.

Design

By running the engines through V-drives, which enables them to be located beneath the cockpit, Sea Ray have ensured they make minimal inroads into the boat's interior volume. And by sinking the

props into tunnels, the cockpit has been kept low and at a single level.

This runs through to what can be a two-tiered bathing platform; the lower extension, as featured on our test boat, is an option that adds a further 2ft 9in (0.83m) onto the boat's overall length, giving you a small private beach which is well enough braced to take a personal watercraft.

The hull is a very modest medium-to-deep vee, with a midships deadrise of 20°, flattening a shade to 17.5° on its run to the transom. Two sets of sprayrails fade at three-quarters length, whilst the chine is 6in-7in (15cm-18cm) wide and conspicuously toed in to deflect the water downwards. Parallel-sided, the tunnels incorporate the relatively small offset rudders.

In an effort to reduce the expanse of topside, the design includes a sloping rubbing strake and



Clockwise from below left: the 450 Sundancer we tested in Spanish waters features a lower second tier of bathing platform. Its cockpit will seat up to a dozen in comfort. In the main saloon, a mini breakfast bar extends from the galley, opposite a kidney-shaped dining table. A queen-size double berth and plenty of lockers furnish the forecabin, whose en-suite WC includes a separate shower stall.

knuckle, which starts right at the gunwale line but slowly falls away to bathing platform level. The effect is to link the upper works of the topside with the coachroof and coaming, thereby proportioning it more sympathetically to the bulk of the hull, and to give the otherwise all-white expanse some eyecatching relief.

Exterior

Even the standard version of the bathing platform extends the full beam of the 450, making it a simple hop aboard from aft or alongside, with access through to the cockpit via the wide transom gate. Alternatively, it is a reasonable climb up over the topside and a step down into the cockpit, assisted either by the small removable section of settee cushion to starboard or by a chunky fold-out

step in the port coaming.

Behind this step are the fuel shut-offs, and just ahead of it is a moulded-in sink tying in with the rest of the wet-bar arrangement, including icemaker and bottle stowage.

Aft of this, the main seating is in the form of a C-shaped settee which allows a dozen people to sit and lounge in comfort. A pair of moulded tables can be slotted into the sole for dining, or dropped to form a king-size sunbed.

Up at the raised command position ('helm' seems rather inadequate), the skipper has a fully adjustable armchair, and those keeping him company are cosseted by a three-seater settee equipped with handholds. Dual-lever gear and throttle controls are sited either side of the adjustable wheel, with the trim tabs just ahead of the throttles to the right, and there is plenty of room to



stand while manoeuvring if desired.

The rest of the console is tiered towards the wraparound screen. The nearest fascia incorporates the ready-use switches, the middle section the navigation heads, and the far one the engine instruments and compass. There is room between the latter rows to place a chart, and the dedicated radar fascia is angled towards the skipper. The standard instrument package includes a log, an echo-sounder, a GPS receiver and a VHF.

A pair of wipers cover a worthwhile portion of the screen, and a partially transparent canvas canopy infills between the stainless steel frame and the radar arch, giving a rather snug semi-enclosed-wheelhouse effect. In case it becomes stuffy under this, a small central vent section opens at the touch of a button to let through a welcome draught of air.

Stowage is bountiful around the cockpit and helm area, with both underseat and coaming lockers of all shapes and sizes. The one beneath the helm seat also gives access to the battery isolators and heavy-duty breakers, while a large gas strut-supported 'trunk' within the transom takes care of the fenders.

Moving forward is easy and safe via the 10in (25cm) side decks, which are bordered by a raised gunwale which becomes higher towards the bow. Right at the break of the cockpit there are grabrails on the arch and along a short section of the screen, but the run of coachroof handrails would have been better located nearer the side decks rather than so far inboard. The moulded non-slip of the rest of the deck areas extends over the coachroof too.

The increased height of the gunwale makes the foredeck area into a shallow well. A pronounced anchor platform extension runs into this, mounting the Lofrans electric windlass out of harm's way. A pair of hatches cover the locker below, which unfortunately is all one compartment so mooring warps and chain can easily become muddled. Pairs of 10in (25cm) cleats are sited forward and amidships, and a couple of sets on each side at the transom, which is useful when you are mooring stern-to and want to lay crossing warps.

Interior

It is an easy descent via a short stairwell to the saloon, past the main

AC and DC breaker panels, and you get an early introduction to the 450's domestic conveniences by way of the adjacent access to the central vacuum unit, for which there are suction inlets in all cabin areas.

They do not end there of course. The open-plan galley has all 240V-powered appliances, including a three-burner hob, microwave and grill, a coffee-maker and an American-sized side-by-

side fridge/freezer. Tucked away behind a set of sliding screen doors in the settee area is the full entertainment centre, comprising a built-in CD player, television and video. And also coming as standard is a reverse-cycle air-conditioning/heating system. When shorepower is unavailable, things are taken care of by an 8kW Westerbeke generator, installed beneath the cockpit.

The joinery throughout the boat is cream-coloured, and trimmed with solid oak. All lockers are lined and generally well finished.

With its 6ft 8in (2.03m) headroom and boxed-off ports hidden behind Venetian blinds, the saloon and galley area feels more like a condominium than a

boat. Off to port, the galley has round-edged worksurfaces and an array of cupboards and drawers to match any shoreside kitchen, although the curved moulded-in sink may be less than truly practical, an instance of form winning over function. A

forward section of the top surface drops away slightly to form a breakfast bar furnished with a pair of stools, while the cabinet space beneath gives yet more storage volume, not least for a bar unit.

Opposite is a curved settee and kidney-shaped table, really only big enough to seat four for dining. The table drops to form an occasional double berth. Outboard is a long run of useful-sized lockers.

The saloon area does not necessarily end here, because a good-sized cabin with full headroom and a settee/berth opens off aft via a pair of sliding doors. For day use this features a comfortable U-shaped sitting area and a small table. At night the solid doors can be slid across for complete privacy, and the settee will make into a 6ft 9in x 4ft 0in (2.06 x 1.22m) double berth.

There is plenty of clothes storage in and around this cabin, including a cedar-lined hanging locker, and access beneath the seat-base to an automatic bilge pump. The cabin even has an en-suite toilet/shower compartment tucked away to starboard. This neat,

Sea Ray 450DA Sundancer

Engines twin Caterpillar 3126TA diesels, 420hp at 2800rpm, 6cyl, 7.2lt.

Conditions wind S Force 2, sea calm. **Load** fuel 50%, water nil, crew 2.

							sound levels dB(A)		
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range*	trim	saloon	helm	cockpit
1800	16.3	—	—	—	—	3.0	70	75	80
2000	19.8	12.8	58	1.55	413	4.5	72	78	82
2100	21.7	14.6	66	1.49	397	4.5	74	79	83
2200	23.5	16.8	76	1.40	373	4.0	76	80	83
2400	25.6	22.2	101	1.15	306	4.0	78	82	84
2600	27.4	28.8	131	0.95	253	4.0	78	83	85
2800	28.8	38.0	173	0.76	202	4.0	79	83	86

Acceleration 0-20 knots, 11.1sec (* allows 20% margin)

Loa 50ft 10in (15.49m)

Hull length 45ft 6in (13.87m)

Beam 13ft 11in (4.24m)

Draught 3ft 7in (1.09m)

Displacement 10.7 tons

Fuel capacity 332gal (1514lt)

Water capacity 83gal (378lt)

Price from £255,315 ex VAT;

£268,763 as tested

fully moulded affair benefits from a good array of dry stowage and, like the master cabin's, is fitted with an electric vacuum-flush toilet.

In the bows, the forecabin is furnished with a central queen-size double berth, a full 5ft 0in (1.52m) wide at the shoulder. The periphery is lined with umpteen lockers, a dressing table and a pair of his'n'hers cedar-lined hanging lockers. There are also drawers let into the bunk-base, some under-sole storage, and a second television housed in the aft bulkhead.

The fully moulded WC is en-suite to the cabin and can also be entered by a door from the saloon. It sports a separate shower cubicle and a varied array of lockers, with the toilet itself largely concealed beneath a moulded seat.

A panel in the main saloon's sole gives access to the central grey-water/shower sump reservoir, as well as to a storage area.

The accommodation generally has plenty of opening ports, and if these are too well tucked away behind blinds and curtains to be opened easily then there are any number of deckhead hatches for ventilation. Both toilet compartments benefit from extractors in any case.

Engines

Our test boat had the largest of the Caterpillar engine options, a pair of 420hp 3126TAs. The less potent installations offered are the 300hp and 350hp variants of the same manufacturers' 3116 unit.

Access to the engine compartment is through a large, gas strut-supported hatch to the rear of the cockpit. There is plenty of room to get at the various service points, as well as to all the auxiliaries. The V-drives' shaft logs can be got at from a full central walkway between the engines, while the raw-water filters, the huge doubled-up Racor primary fuel filters and the battery boxes are well to hand.

The exhaust runs are especially noteworthy, with the water and exhaust being discharged separately once the latter has been cooled in an attempt to reduce noise levels. For the most part, the compartment is reasonably well insulated.

To the rear is the encapsulated generator, and the steering gear is behind this, making it a little awkward to get at. On the whole, though, none of the mechanicals are too inaccessible considering the number of pieces of gear down here. The layout and general standard of fit-out appear very sound.

The majority of the electrics are up on the forward bulkhead, with twin holding tanks and macerator below and the fuel tanks outboard.

As on all their larger craft, Sea Ray fit a dual bilge-pumping system, whereby one submersible unit sits right in the bilge while a second is located about 1ft (30cm) above it to cut in should a real emergency occur.

Performance and handling

Although they take their name from the Spanish port 50km (30 miles) along the coast from Malaga, where they have one of their largest operational bases, Marina Marbella operate several European marinas and dealerships, including in Portugal, Morocco and Sweden, as well as being Sea Ray agents in the UK. As such, they are one of the biggest suppliers of the marque in Europe.

When we rolled up at their yard on the Costa del

Sol, we were taken aback to find the boat we had come to inspect still on hard-standing. But we need not have worried because the yard specialises in dry-sailing, with some 500 boats up to 80 tons racked up. They can be dropped into the water and ready to go within minutes, and after a brief scout around the facilities we were straight out to sea.

The Mediterranean was quite perfect, with just the barest of sea breezes, which was expected to fill in, and a falling swell from the previous few days' Force 5s and 6s.

The dual-lever Hynautique controls have a great feel, both for the nip and tuck of slow-speed manoeuvring with their gentle shift in and out of gear, and equally when easing the throttles open to give the boat its head. Indeed, given the diminutive size of its rudders, the 450 was extremely well mannered when manoeuvring under engines alone, albeit helped by the lack of wind. And at speed they allowed confident handling as well as surprisingly tight flat-out turns for a tunnel-hulled boat. Sea Ray's prototype test programme obviously pays dividends.

We blasted through our performance tests to get them in the bag before the expected afternoon breeze, on what is an exposed stretch of coast, made collecting accurate measurements tricky.

Flat-out we achieved a shade under 29 knots, and the boat's response to the throttles was well on target, powering from standstill to 20 knots in 11 sec, with the climb through the hump being a gentle progression to a comfortable running trim. A 2400rpm setting, meanwhile, gave us just over 25 knots on our radar gun and unobtrusive decibel levels on our sound meter, with fuel consumption (extrapolated from the manufacturers' graphs) estimated at 1.15mpg for an estimated range of over 300 miles.

Alas, having planned ahead in this way, we were let down by the weather refusing to deteriorate and allow us to test the 450's handling in rougher conditions. Suffice to say that it gave a smooth, well balanced ride, with the tabs altering longitudinal trim by a couple of degrees if you have to undertake any head-sea work.

To aid the skipper we gather that, since our visit, a Glendenning engine synchroniser system is now being fitted as standard, automatically adjusting the throttles to run the engines at the same revs.

The helm position is excellent, with plenty of room to sit or stand, good protection, a clear view seaward and quickly assimilated information from the instruments, although the small engine gauges are a fair distance away. And the skipper's very own armchair? Most comfortable, thank you.

Conclusions

Purists will find fault with a number of design features on the 450, and with some of these we would have to agree. The smooth roll-top galley worksurface, for instance, would be unwelcome if you were trying to prepare a snack while out at sea.

But in the same breath we would consider the boat ideal for its role as a top-end-of-the-market sportscruiser, well conceived and with plenty of practical touches. It has a great cockpit, a spacious and versatile interior layout with every domestic consideration, and appears to be substantially engineered.

On the whole, it is just a joy to blast around in, living up to its Sundancer name. ☐

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