

BOAT REPORT**SUNSEEKER 37**

**POWER
PLAY**



Sunseeker's 37 Tomahawk is one of the hottest numbers in their performance range. Volvo's 330hp DuoProp V8s are the most powerful petrol engines they have produced. Together they make one of the most exciting packages we have tested for a long time.

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Previous page: the helm position is well laid out. Left: hit the throttles and go — DuoProp take-off. Above left: the cabin provides berths for four. Above: the compact galley to port, and equally compact toilet opposite.

upwards the Swedes have to go across the big pond to collect US-built V6s and V8s for marinisation. There just isn't the European unit to match these big lazy American engines for solid, reliable, cheap power, and the 5-litre and 7-litre blocks from Detroit, either Ford or GM, form the basis of Mercruiser, OMC, Volvo, and now Yamaha, ranges. Until recently, 5.7 litres, producing typically 260hp or perhaps 290 has been the biggest standard unit, with the 7-litre block used for performance engines. Now, with the Motown men bringing out a 7.4-litre, 454 cubic inch, 'Big-block' V8, all the marinisers have access to an easy 330hp for standard production engines.

The Mercruiser and OMC derivatives have been around for a couple of years now, but Volvo have been more cautious in their development. The new engine, officially called the 740, still has not got a quoted power output, but it is not going to be a million miles from the 330hp of its rivals. The big difference is that the Volvo is mated to the DuoProp outdrive whose twin contra-rotating props are claimed to give greater acceleration and top speed. To take the extra torque and thrust of the new engine, the DuoProps are supplied

ABSOLUTELY marvellous! There are no other words to describe it. We test dozens of boats during the course of a year, and just every so often we come across a combination of boat and engine that re-kindles the enthusiasm, sets the adrenalin running, and reminds us just why we are in this business. Sunseeker's 37, with the new Volvo DuoProp 330s is one such combination.

The boat forms the spearhead of this prolific company's performance range. Not that there is a Sunseeker afloat that hasn't got performance, but the current range is divided into boats where engine, cockpit and top speed take priority, and those which have a greater emphasis on accommodation down below. The Tomahawk is firmly in the former camp. Described by Sunseeker's MD, Bob Braithwaite as the 'bread-and-butter model' of their range, the success of the design can be judged by the fact that 18 months after its introduction, the boat we were testing was number 96 off the line. That's some bread-and-butter!

And the engines? Well, whilst the smaller units in the Volvo petrol range are based on their own four-cylinder car blocks, from 200hp

only in stainless steel for this model. To find out how the new engine worked in practice, you will have to wait till you reach the Handling and Performance section but we can tell you now, the results are exciting.

Design

As with the rest of their range, Sunseeker have gone to Don Shead for the design of the Tomahawk. This partnership of builder and designer must be one of the most successful there is, with Shead's reputation for producing race-winning hulls a key element in the desirability of these boats. At the same time, the chic of the Sunseeker name carries Shead's monogram to all the most stylish locations of the Med.

Hull-form is deep-vee, with a deadrise of 25° amidships, only reducing slightly to 23° at the transom. Two spray-rails each side have the characteristic Shead form, running in a straight line fore-and-aft, rather than following the line of the chine. The outer rail runs full length, the inner fades away at amidships, giving a clean flow of water into the props. The two rails are augmented by a broad flat at the chine, giving planing lift, and increasing the



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stability of the hull at speed. A half-height knuckle gives strength to the topsides, and improves the appearance, running into the line of the bathing platform.

Exterior

With any Sunseeker, the obvious place to look at first is the cockpit. This is designed to allow the maximum number of people to enjoy the air and sun. At its aft end you have a full-width four-person seat, facing a lift-up bench in the back of the helm seat. Between them is a space for a removable table that stows in the locker below. This locker is a good size, and would also take a rolled-up inflatable plus its outboard. The locker also contains the dirty water sump tank for shower and sink, and it was good to see all the piping to these in reinforced 'green cane' hose, with double jubilee clips at all connections.

Lifting the aft seat cushion reveals a plastic hatch giving access to the fuel cut-off valves. Removing this hatch required a substantial tool such as a screw-driver, and we would have preferred an easier access.

At the forward end of the cockpit the helm position is to starboard. As befits its intended use, the Tomahawk comes with stand-up racing type seats, with drop-down squabs, one for the driver, and one opposite for the navigator. The driver faces an excellent display of instruments and gauges, correctly angled for easy viewing, with the extra optional luxury touch of a walnut-veneered dash to remind you that Sunseeker lead the field in style as well as performance. The driving position is excellent, with the click-stop racing-type Morse controls well-sited by your right hand, and ahead of them the trim switches, gauges and flap controls. Our only criticism in this area is that the cockpit coaming just where you rest your right elbow has a painfully sharp corner to it. If you are going to drive this boat to its full potential, close attention to the throttles in rough conditions would require padding here.

The all-round view is superb. Standing up you look over the screen, while sitting down you can look through it and get out of the wind. The screen itself has a continuous wrap-round frame, that is as good a piece of stainless steel work as we have seen, and the equal of anything the Italians, the acknowledged masters, can produce.

Aft of the cockpit is a full-width, full-length sun-lounger over the engine compartment, while aft again is the water sports area, with its integral moulded bathing platform with teak grating, stainless steel ladder with comfortable plastic-covered treads, fresh-water shower, and even a ski-hook for the adventurous.

Moving forward, you have good-width side-decks that have an effective moulded non-slip, and a raised moulded toe-rail outboard. Stainless steel rails can either be low and inboard mounted, or as an option for crews



Top: handling and ride were superb. Above: 660hp fits snugly under the sun-lounger, with access still good.

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Sunseeker Tomahawk 37

Engines: Twin Volvo 740DP, 330bhp at 4400rpm, V8, 7400cc.

Conditions: Wind N'y force 3/4, sea moderate.

Load: Fuel 60%, water 75%, crew 5.

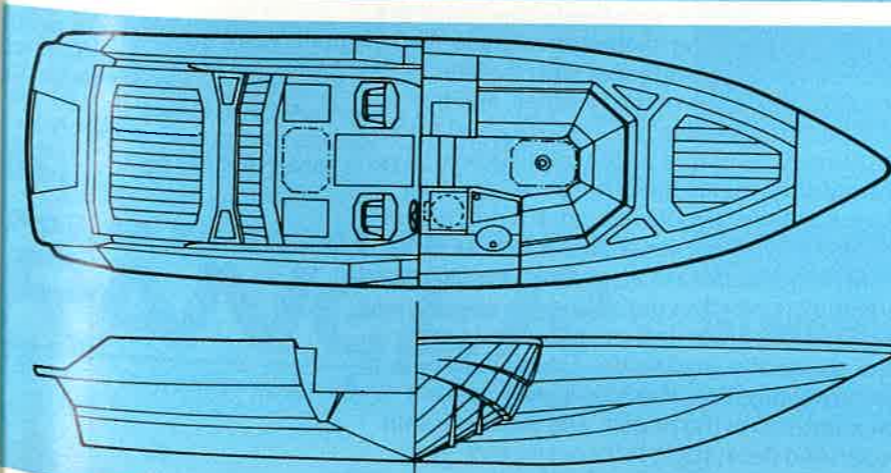
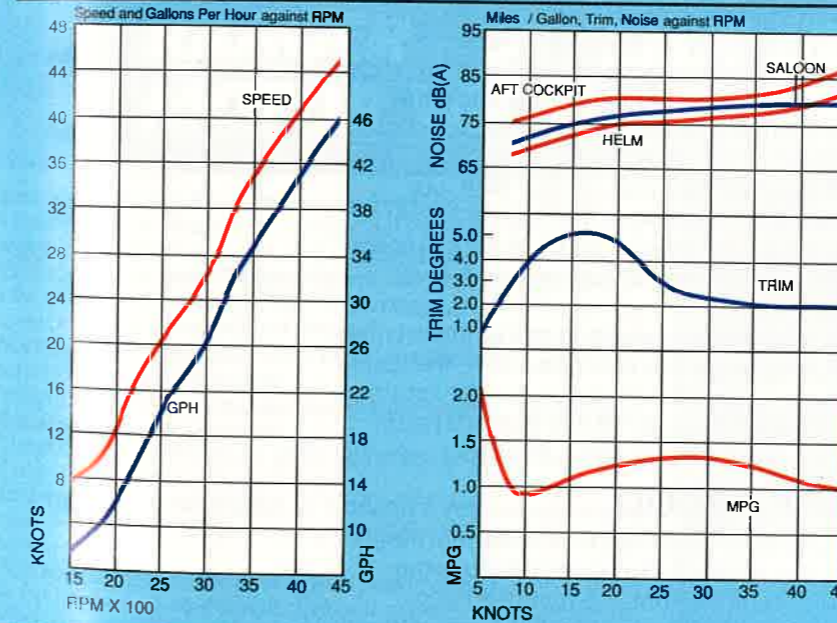
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	trim	Sound levels dB(A)		
							helm	aft ckpt	saloon
1000	6.0	3.7	16.8	1.62	278	—	—	—	—
1500	8.1	8.0	36.4	1.01	174	3.0	69	75	71
2000	12.9	12.2	55.6	1.06	182	5.0	72	77	73
2500	20.8	16.9	77.2	1.23	212	5.0	75	81	76
3000	26.4	18.9	90.4	1.33	229	3.0	77	80	78
3500	35.3	28.2	128.4	1.25	215	2.5	78	82	80
4000	41.0	41.8	190.0	0.98	169	2.0	80	85	80
4400	45.0	35.9	208.8	0.98	168	2.0	83	89	81

Acceleration: 0-20 knots 5.1 secs, 0-30 knots 8.8 secs, 0-40 knots 14.2 secs.

LOA	36ft 8in (11.20m)	Fuel capacity	172gal (780lt)
LWL	29ft 6in (9.00m)	Water	30gal (136lt)
Beam	10ft 6in (3.22m)	Price ex VAT	
Draught	3ft 7in (1.09m)	with Volvo 740DP	£73,712
Displacement	5½ tons		

Builder:

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



with small children, mid-height and mounted outboard on the gunwale. The moulded non-slip continues over the cabin top for extra security.

Mooring is dealt with by attractive yet effective stainless steel bollards, 11in (275mm) forward and aft, and 9in (225mm) amidships for springs. The anchor stows in a good stainless steel bow roller, and is handled by an electric winch. The chain stows in a deck locker, that has room for small fenders and warps.

Accommodation

Down below, the accommodation is simple but effective. A semi-circular settee converts to a large double by dropping down the table, while ahead of this a raised double berth in the bow is screened by a curtain. Headroom is 5ft 6in (1.67m) at the aft end, decreasing forward. To port is a compact galley, with a single combined spirit/electric burner, a stainless steel sink, and a fridge and locker below. A crockery locker is located outboard. Alongside this is Sunseeker's typically good electrical panel, with circuit breakers, meter, and a remote VHF handset.

To starboard is a small toilet compartment, with shower, sink and WC. A hinged hatch gives good access to the back of the instrument panel, while an opening port gives light and ventilation. Forward of the toilet compartment is a small hanging locker, but apart from this, stowage down below is limited to small lockers under the settees and a couple of shelves and lockers outboard of the forward berth. Not a boat for the grand tour.

Engines

An electrically-operated hatch lifts the sun-lounger, and gives excellent access to the engines. Climbing in is further assisted by a large full-width glassfibre box set at the forward end of the compartment, with strategically-placed non-slip strips on its upper flange. The box provides good stowage space for cover, fenders and warps.

Either side are a pair of double fuel filters, an important feature on a boat drinking as much of the vital fluid as this one does, readily accessible for checking or replacing. The fuel system itself consists of reinforced rubber hose, well clipped out of harm's way. The same applies to the wiring, which is mainly run in plastic trays, and looms where it comes out of these. The whole aspect of the compartment is one of well thought out engineering, designed for ease of maintenance and a high-speed life. Access to most of the engine service points is good, though the space between the headers would be just about big enough to slide the owner's manual through, and getting at each unit's steering is rendered virtually impossible by the silencer boxes. These are patented rubber mufflers, designed to reduce the crackle from the through-transom exhausts,

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yet still retain the unmistakable V8 roar, itself one of the selling features on a boat like this.

Soundproofing consists of foam rubber on the forward bulkhead and the hatch. Bilge pumps include a Rule electric unit under the engines, and a manual back up pump. A 2kg automatic fire extinguisher is mounted over the engines. Two pairs of batteries are mounted in boxes port and starboard, for engine start and domestics.

Handling and performance

So how did the package perform. Well, the facts are in the tables and graphs below, but summarising them, top speed was 45.0 knots. Fuel consumption was a wallet-grabbing 104.4 litres per hour per engine, 23.0 gallons per hour for those of us still on the Imperial wavelength, or 46gph total. Acceleration more than made up for this, being quite frankly remarkable. We were warned to hang on when the throttles were opened — we didn't, and ended up in a heap of stop-watches and radar gun on the aft seat. When we collected ourselves, we measured 5.1 seconds for 0-20 knots, 8.8 seconds 0-30, and 14.2 seconds 0-40.

But it was not just the sheer acceleration that impressed, but the ease with which the DuoProps delivered it. We normally trim the legs right in for our acceleration tests, out to a neutral position for most of the rest of the runs, then right out for the top speed. So, initially in this case we set the gauges at -5° for acceleration, $+1^\circ$ for the rest of the figures, and $+6^\circ$ for the top speed run. Then just out of interest, we came back down to rest with the legs still at $+1^\circ$, and tried the acceleration again.

To our amazement the figures were scarcely unchanged, with 0-30 knots taking just a tenth of a second more at 8.9 seconds. With a single prop outdrive, full-throttle acceleration with the legs in the driving position would just produce a spinning prop and screaming revs, but with the DuoProps, nothing we could do would make them break free. Now, of course you may be saying so what — who spends their life doing standing start take-offs — but the importance is how this benefit translates into the high speed driving situation. To put this to the test and to really give the hull a work out we took the Tomahawk for a 10-mile dash down the coast to look for some waves.

We did not have far to go, because a couple of days of north-easterlies had left some good seas running past Durlleston Head. Down-wind the 37 revelled in the conditions. In deference to a pair of new engines, with no rev-limiters fitted we found a comfortable running speed around 3750rpm, but even this was still pushing us along at 38 knots. Easily outstripping the waves, sometimes we were airborne, but the hull soaked it up without

complaint. The significant point though was that every now and then we saw a really big one coming, and had to back off. With single-prop outdrives, running as we were with the legs trimmed out to keep the bow up, we would have had to trim back in before we could feed in the power to get back on the plane. With the DuoProps we just cracked open the throttles and away we went. In fact on the whole downwind leg we didn't touch the trim switches once.

Regretfully we had to curb the temptation to just keep on going, even though France would only have been an hour and a half away, and we turned round for home.

'It's going to be wet and bumpy on the way back' said the Editor to his passengers, then settled down for a hard slog into the waves. Trim the nose down, back off the throttles, and prepare to duck the wet ones. Gradually though we realised that once again one of Shead's hulls had caught us out. There was no need to go slow. We could increase speed and still not make the boat slam. Looking down at the gauges after a couple of minutes we realised that we had clicked the throttles into the same position as on the downwind leg, and we were running back at the same 38 knots. Sure it was windy — 40mph of it we were making ourselves, but nothing wet hit us in the face, provided we kept our nerve and didn't slow down. All in all, a perfect match of engine and boat.

Oh yes, and the noise levels? Well, our figures show 83dB(A) at the helm, 92dB(A) on the sunlounger. We are told that the silencers comply with the new European noise-level requirements of a maximum 82dB(A) taken at a point 15 metres away from the boat as it runs past. Whichever way you measure it, the sound was bearable inside the boat, but still retained that straight-through V8 roar that after all is half the fun of having a boat like this.

Conclusion

Well, we've already said it all. A perfect match of engine and hull. No need to discuss the popularity of the boat — a hundred happy owners can't be wrong. Whether many of them actually use the full race-bred potential of the hull does not matter — they have the confidence of knowing they will never be caught out, whatever the weather. And the engines? Well, Volvo's 330hp are always going to be much the same as the opposition's. It is the outdrive that is the difference. However hard we tried we could not catch it out, and at the end of the day, simple reliable boating is what most people are after. The unanswerable question is whether the added complication of the DuoProp lower unit will stand up to the use and abuse of everyday life. Taking the power of these big engines, the occasional close encounter with the beach, and the inevitable ropes and debris that litter our waters. That question only time and use will answer. ■