

BOAT REPORT **SUNSEEKER** **52 CARIBBEAN**

This British boatbuilder's first heavyweight entry into the flybridge market marks the start of a new Superyacht range to challenge Italian manufacturers.



SUNSEEKER have made their reputation by building fast, open-cockpit sports-cruisers from 20ft to 60ft (6m-18m). Until a year ago, with the exception of the short-lived Jamaica 35, they had not produced a flybridge boat.

This changed with the 52 Caribbean. It was introduced in response to demand from UK customers for a craft suitable for extended cruising in less clement conditions than the Mediterranean. It was also seen as a part of a process of diversification from the company's dependence on the sports-cruiser market, and

as a challenge to the Italians, the traditional builders of fast luxury flybridge cruisers.

The 52 had to provide extra accommodation, greater protection from the weather and more home comforts, while retaining the performance and rough-weather capabilities expected of a Sunseeker. At the same time, its exterior styling and interior finish had to respect the family reputation for fashionable taste coupled with strength of construction and quality control.

A final goal was to achieve all this at a much lower price than those of the 52's Italian rivals.



The 52's three cabins include the master forward (left) with an en-suite toilet compartment to starboard, similar to that of the guest compartment to port (bottom left). The galley (below) lies along the port side of the saloon, down four steps. Access can be gained to the crew/utility cabin from here.

Design

As with all Sunseekers, design is by Don Shead. Experience gained from his successful offshore powerboat designs has given the rest of the range high performance with exemplary seakeeping, but it should not be forgotten that Shead is also an accomplished superyacht designer in his own right, best known for *Fortuna*, the King of Spain's 100ft (33m) 45-knot royal yacht. This background has enabled him to produce a well-proportioned flybridge boat

which combines good accommodation with a stylish profile.

The 52 has a medium-to-deep-vee hull, with a substantially constant deadrise of 20°. Two sprayrails each side run parallel to the keel, the outer one full-length and the inner one 60% long. To these are added broad full-length chine flats, plus a half-height knuckle in the topsides. The larger-than-usual beam is carried well forward, to give maximum internal volume.

Engines are mounted under the cockpit, running through vee-drives. The propellers run in





tunnels and the rudders are transom-hung, enabling the shafts to be kept well aft yet still at a reasonable thrust angle.

Exterior

The integral bathing platform is a good size, and provides a useful landing point from a tender. Recessed teak decking and a hatch over the folded boarding ladder improve the platform's appearance and convenience.

A hatch in the transom opens to reveal stowage for the fenders. The shore-supply electrical socket is in a closed recess to starboard, with a shower in an open recess to port. A walk-through transom door to port leads into the cockpit.

Here there is all-round seating on a moulded GRP base, which provides good storage space, and the cushions are thick and comfortable. Removable swivelling davits neatly take care of the tender.

Steps port and starboard lead up to the side decks, which are 12in (300mm) wide, with a moulded gunwale lip. However, the guardrails are only 18-22in (450-550mm) high, with no lower rail or wire. Four cleats are provided on each side, but at 10in (250mm) they are not large enough for a boat of this size and weight, and would quickly be overwhelmed. On the foredeck, a large locker takes ropes and the anchor chain, with a bulkhead separating the two.

A stainless steel and teak ladder leads up from the forward port corner of the cockpit, through a double-hinged hatch on a gas strut, to the large flybridge, whose substantial overhang gives the cockpit protection from sun and rain.

A three-person helm seat faces a fully-equipped dash, with engine controls on both

sides of the wheel and instruments flush-mounted in a walnut console. Well sited hatches port and starboard allow conversation with people in the saloon, or the handing up of food and drinks. Behind the helm seat are two rear-facing seats, either side of an ice-chest. Aft again is a two-person sunlounger.

Interior

The layout provides three double cabins, two of them with bathrooms en-suite, plus an optional crew cabin or utility room.

A central stainless steel door slides to port to give access from the cockpit to the saloon. The top half of the window alongside this hinges up to open out the two areas for entertaining.

Immediately on your left as you enter is a fore-and-aft serving pier which makes a useful worktop area, with a substantial fiddle keeping items in place. Underneath is an icemaker, four drawers and a locker for mixers, cans and so on.

The galley is outboard to port of the serving pier, down four steps. It is well laid-out and equipped, with a double halogen hob, a convection microwave oven, a good-sized stainless steel sink and a selection of lockers. A large three-quarter-height Norcold fridge/freezer, set into the forward bulkhead, provides excellent capacity but is not attractive, out of context with the rest of the decor.

A door forward from the galley gives access to the crew cabin or utility room; the former option has a single berth, the latter a washing machine and dryer. In both cases, a small en-suite toilet is located outboard to port, with a porthole providing the only natural light in this compartment.

Back up in the saloon, to starboard, is a

Forward at the business end of the saloon, the interior helm position is matched by a raised dinette to port.

Sunseeker 52 Caribbean

Engines: twin MAN D2848 LX diesels, 680hp at 2300rpm, 8cyl, 14.62lt.

Conditions: wind W Force 4, sea moderate. **Load:** fuel 30%, water 25%, crew 2.

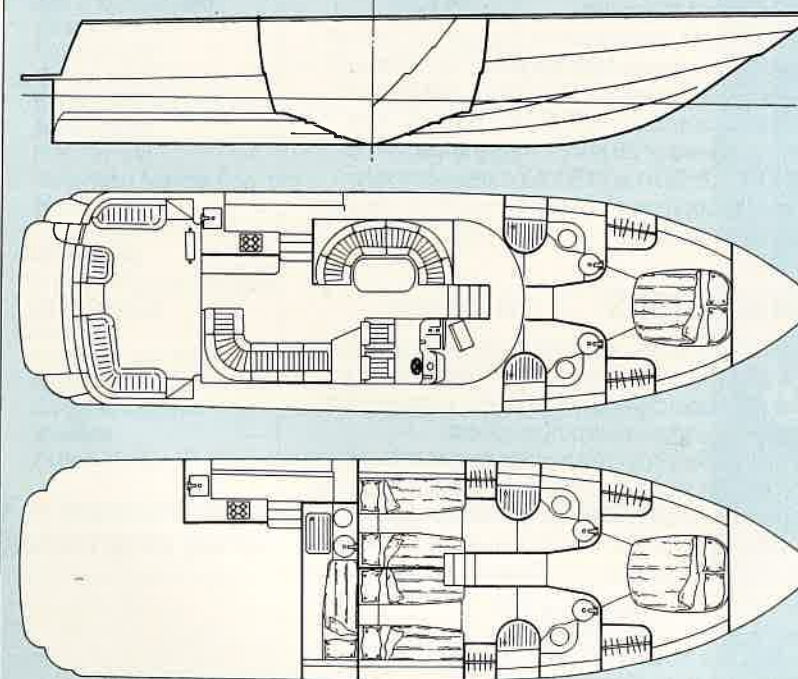
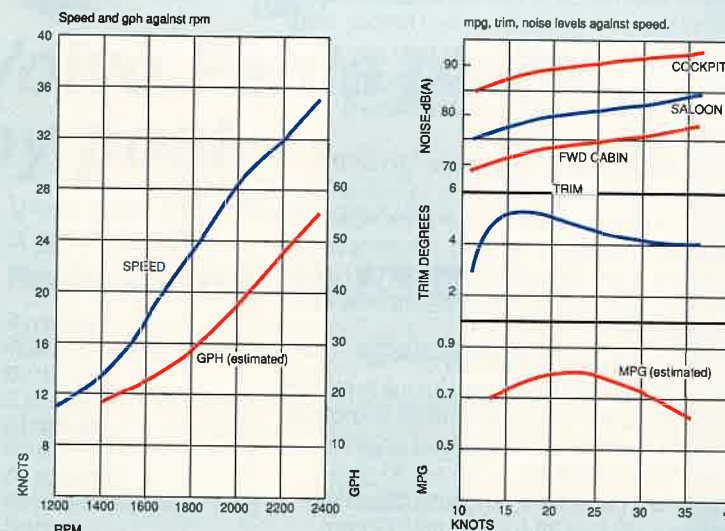
rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	trim	sound levels dB(A)			
							saloon	fwdcab	ckpt	flybg
1200	10.8	—	—	—	—	3.0	75	69	85	76
1400	13.3	19	85	0.70	370	5.5	76	71	87	77
1600	18.2	23	104	0.79	418	5.0	77	72	89	78
1800	23.6	29	130	0.81	430	5.0	79	73	89	80
2000	28.5	38	173	0.75	396	4.0	80	76	90	82
2200	32.0	48	220	0.67	352	4.0	81	76	91	83
2350	35.3	56	256	0.63	333	4.0	83	78	92	84

Acceleration: 0-20 knots, 11.5sec.

Loa	52ft 0in (15.86m)	Displacement	17.5 tonnes
Hull length	41ft 0in (12.50m)	Fuel capacity	530gal (2400lt)
Beam	15ft 0in (4.60m)	Water capacity	175gal (800lt)
Draught	3ft 9in (1.15m)		

Price: £344,400 with 680hp MANs (a price increase was expected as we closed for press).

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



four-person L-shaped settee, which can be supplied converting into a double berth. The back of the rear seat pulls forward to reveal the stowage for the cockpit table, and at the forward end of the settee is the cocktail cabinet, set into a sideboard which also contains the entertainments centre, plus the main electrical panel behind a smoked perspex door.

Two steps lead up to the forward saloon, where you find the helm position to starboard and a raised dinette to port.

The dinette is large enough for six people, with a good view out of the windows. An angled hatch overhead allows communication with guests on the flybridge. There is no stowage under the seat, this space being taken up by the cabin below.

The helm seat is really only large enough for one person, facing a wood-rimmed wheel which is flanked by Hynatic twin-lever controls. A good panel of ready-use switches is by the driver's right hand. Ahead, engine instruments and electronics are flush-mounted in a walnut-veneered console. A small chart area is located to the left of the console top, with the compass ahead of the wheel.

The driving position is not particularly comfortable, with the wheel set low and sharp console corners close to your knees. The shape of the side window means it cannot be made to slide, which prevents you talking to crew on deck. Underneath the helm seat is a good-sized cave locker.

Five steps lead down forward to the cabins. To port and starboard are guest cabins, each with either two single berths or a double. The one to port has its own access door to the guest bathroom forward.

Both cabins have 6ft 6in (1.98m) headroom forward and 5ft 6in (1.68m) aft, with two steps

down as you walk aft between the berths. Stowage is provided by a full-height hanging locker in each, with a stack of shelves in it, plus lockers under the berths. These have neat hatches, with plastic finger holes, but the insides are just unlined painted wood, in places straight down onto the hull. In the case of the inboard berth, this means right down into the keel — not a satisfactory arrangement.

The attractive guest bathroom is accessed from the port cabin or from the lobby. Inside there is 6ft 3in (1.90m) headroom, and a separate cylindrical shower stall with smoked perspex door. The good-sized basin, a lid over the WC and good lockers all makes this a practical compartment. The WC itself is a Vacuflush unit, silent but effective in operation.

Forward in the bow is the master cabin, which has 6ft 5in (1.95m) headroom at its aft end. There is a central double berth, with partial walk-round floor space.

A half-height hanging locker is located to starboard, and a matching shelved unit to port. Two small lockers are placed at the head of the bed, and two medium-sized drawers under the foot, but otherwise there is not a great deal of storage space. The en-suite bathroom to starboard is similar in layout to that for guests.

Visible interior joinery throughout the boat is finished in lacquered or veneered wood, all to a high standard. The edges of the carpet are not bound, already allowing them to start to fray on our test boat where they were rolled back for access below.

Engines

There are a variety of power options, from twin 425hp Caterpillars, through 550hp GMs, 665hp MTUs and 680hp MANs, to 735hp GMs. Our test boat was fitted with the 2 x 680hp installation, the highest-priced specification.

The vee-drives arrangement is unusual in the UK but common in Europe and the USA. It allows the engines to be mounted under the cockpit, which frees space under the saloon, reduces noise levels inside the boat and allows you to get at the motors without walking through the accommodation. In this case, access is via a hatch in the cockpit sole, with a ladder allowing you to climb down between the engines.

Space in the compartment is restricted. Access to the inlet strainers and steering gear at the after end is good, but beyond this you have difficulty moving about. The gap between the engines and the transom is little more than 8in (200mm), which makes it difficult to reach the outboard side, while there is only 8in-12in (200mm-300mm) above. At the forward end are the generator, fuel filters and battery boxes, and to reach these you have to go back up into the cockpit and down a small hatch at the aft end of the saloon.

The general standard of engineering is good, with wiring and piping neatly arranged and clipped out of the way but still easy to reach. Bilge-pumping is catered for by three electric units, Jabsco 3000s or 1750s plus a manual back-up. There are two 2kg automatic fire-extinguishers over the engines. The generator is a 10kW G&M model, included as standard. Thermostatically-controlled exhaust fans are fitted.

Handling and performance

We took the 52 Caribbean out on three occasions, which gave us a fair spread of conditions to test it in.

The first time was in the Solent. It was very windy, Force 6-8, but the waves had not had time to build up above 3ft (1m).

In these conditions the 52 excelled. It could be driven into the seas at 20-25 knots, with little or no slamming and only occasional spray over the flybridge when the wind gusted. Beam-on, it ran straight and level, easily under control.

Downwind, the throttles could be opened right up, to around 30 knots, and the hull coped with the waves, whether from astern or on the quarter.

Steering in these conditions was not so good. To pull round hard, particularly when the wind came on the beam, you had to drop the revs on the inside engine, and there were occasions, even when running downwind, when you had to employ this technique for sudden evasive action.

Trip number two was in slightly less wind, Force 5-6, but it was in the open sea, out from Poole. In confused seas off Old Harry, driving into the waves, we had to work the throttles, sometimes pulling back to avoid slamming. This was partly in deference to the television, video and other electronic gadgetry down below, and we could probably have run faster had we needed to. Even so, we were still averaging 18-20 knots, never dropping off the plane or below 15 knots.

Speed is deceptive on big boats. Up on the flybridge, you are insulated from engines and wave noise, and your distance from the water reduces the impression of speed. It is only when you look at the wake streaming behind you, or down at the speed log, that you realise how fast you are travelling.

On our third trip we had slightly calmer conditions, and were able to run our full tests. The maximum speed we recorded was 35.3 knots at 2350rpm, at which we estimated the engines were using 56gph (256lph). This would give 0.63mpg, and a maximum range of 333 miles. Reducing to a still fast 28.5 knots at 2000rpm improved these figures to 38gph (173lph), 0.75mpg and 396 miles.

Noise levels were good in the saloon, helped by the remoteness of the engines. At maximum speed we recorded 83dB(A) here, 84dB(A) on the flybridge and 92dB(A) in the cockpit. At a cruising speed of 28 knots, these improved to 80dB(A), 82dB(A) and 90dB(A) respectively.

Acceleration, at 11.5sec from 0-20 knots, was good for a big boat.

Conclusions

Sunseeker always produce stylish and well-built craft, and the 52 Caribbean is no exception. Its looks are distinctive, performance is more than adequate, and seakeeping is good.

The interior provides a good balance between entertaining and living areas, and there is plenty of open-air space. The visible finish is good, though some hidden details could be improved.

Generally the boat more than achieves its goal of providing a Sunseeker owner with room to get out of the rain. It is the forerunner of larger models to come in a Superyacht range; expect to see a 70-footer in the not too distant future. □