



— Boat Report —

SEA RAY

215 EC

This sporty new 21-footer from the USA is keenly priced. Is it a practical weekender?

American boatbuilding conglomerate Sea Ray include the 215 in their sportsboat line-up, but with all the necessary accoutrements for overnighting we feel it just about qualifies as a sportscruiser.

A new model for 1996, this pretty 21-footer is designed and built with a view to keeping its price very keen. However that is not to imply any reduction in build quality: it is more a case of labour-saving during manufacture — for instance by using a monocoque cockpit moulding — than actually cutting the overall specification.

Builders tend to shy away from overtly referring to cost-cutting, but surely if the customer benefits then it is worth acknowledging?

Design and fit-out

The hull is a top-end medium-vee, with a deadrise of 18°, featuring a clean bow with no beak. A low, flowing set of topside lines give no hint to the existence of a comfortable cabin below, with generous sitting headroom throughout.

The cabin has a vee-dinette which converts to a double berth of around 5ft 6in (1.67m) long by 5ft 0in (1.52m) wide, with painted-out lockers under the seats. An opening foredeck hatch provides light and ventilation, but there are no side ports.

A curtained-off chemical toilet area lies to starboard, usefully equipped with a mini hanging rod

for less crease-prone clothes stowage.

The galley unit opposite has a pressurised cold-water faucet and, in its standard form, a coolbox which is rather too dinky to be much use. Given that there is a good-sized removable Igloo box already available in the cockpit, it may be more useful to take up the UK agents' suggestion and have a hob fitted here instead.

Dry victuals can be stored in a large locker in the side of the unit, and there is a handy rubbish bin tucked beneath the adjacent step.

Access between the cabin and the cockpit is via a wide sliding moulded door, itself fashioned with a couple of wide treads to facilitate safe access through the split screen to the foredeck.

The screen is well braced and well finished; the bugbear of many opening screens is that they have sharp corners and edges, but none are discernible in this case. There was, however, no evidence of a wiper on our test boat or on the options list, and it is hard to see how one could be fitted to this windscreen due to the lack of a flat area of glass.

The top of the hatch and the coachroof are covered in a pepping of non-slip finish which appears somewhat light but nevertheless seems to do the job, while a set of low guardrails are within grabbing distance if required. A useful-sized foredeck locker will take care of anchor, chain and warp, although no roller is fitted as standard. At the bow and stern are pairs of 8in (20cm) cleats; if you want to turn up a spring it may be necessary to use the bow rail.

Back in the cockpit, the transom bench over the enginebox is wide enough to use as a sunlounger, the port-side infill pulling out to give a small walkthrough route to the integral bathing platform with its swim ladder, showerhead and ski-eye.

The two fixed forward seats are wide enough to allow one person to sit and another to perch, and are just the right height for driving from either position, but can in no way be construed as doubles.



The helm and throttle are comfortably sited, and the instrumentation is laid out clearly. The dash is moulded with a can-holder, and there is room for a navigation head or two in addition to the compass already fitted.

Handholds are worked into the seat-backs as part of their stainless steel framework, and the area beneath them left open for the coolbox; all well and good, but could one of the bases not have been fitted in to provide an enclosed locker?

More usefully, the voids within the side coamings have been fashioned into really large cave lockers, a full fender-diameter deep. Notable practical details are the treadplates fixed to the lower edges of these bins, which make it easier to climb between the cockpit and the pontoon with no need to scuff the seat cushions, and the straps which give those sitting on the transom bench something to hang onto.

A loose-fitted double hatch in the centre of the

Sea Ray call the 215 a sportsboat, but its convertible vee-dinette arrangement, complete with a galley unit and curtained off toilet area, makes it viable for overnighting. Underway, it offers 37-knot performance with tidy turns and no skittishness.





Left: the helm position is comfortably laid out, whether you prefer to sit or stand, although the twin seats are wide singles rather than genuine doubles. Below: the engineroom is neatly arranged, but the transom bench which covers the access would be easier to lift if attached with hinges.

cockpit sole gives access to a useful storage bin, which in turn can be removed to allow you to get at the water and fuel tanks, along with the pressure pump (the water system can be upgraded to include hot water if required).

Engines and performance

The foam-lined enginebox under the transom bench, also loose-fitted, has to be lifted clear rather than simply hinging forward as you might expect. This makes inspecting the machinery awkward if there is not a second pair of hands available to help.

The installation on our test boat was a V8 Mercruiser petrol engine rated at 240hp. This falls in the middle of a range which extends from a 210hp V6 to an electronic-injection 280hp unit, there being no diesels listed as options.

The enginebay is tidily fitted out, with all service

items easy to get at. It has an automatic bilge pump and fire-extinguisher, and the battery switch is tucked away safely to port beneath the cockpit coaming. True to form for an American boat, there is no fuel shut-off.

Underway, the 215 was out of the hole cleanly and up to 20 knots within five seconds from standing, and clocked 37 knots flat-out. There was no skittishness from the hull as we bowled over the minimal chop we found on the leeward side of Southampton Water.

Backing off to 3600rpm allowed us to hammer comfortably at 28 knots over more of a chop in the Solent, and easing back to 3200rpm gave a sedate 22.5 knots.

Through the turns, the 215 sits tightly and squarely on the water. The hull makes no fuss: you simply drive it where you will, although with a single-prop leg it needs tucking back in before you really wind on the helm. Trim tabs are listed as a £300 option, and unless you are planning to embark on lengthy passages it is doubtful whether you really need to consider them.

Noise levels were reasonable, hovering around 80-82dB(A) over the cruising rev-range. If you are relatively heavyhanded on the throttle you can expect to consume around 11gph (50lph) at 3600rpm, but if you are happy jogging along at around 22 knots you should save a third of that.

Conclusions

The 215 caught our eye at the Southampton Boat Show because it very neatly promised sporty trailboating with the option of spending the night aboard. In practice it lives up to that intention, with plenty of easily-controlled performance and enough room to be practical both inside and outside, especially as the standard price includes a canopy.

Despite the price-conscious nature of the 215, Sea Ray's reputation for well-built and tidy boats does not appear to have slipped, except perhaps in that they should have shelled out on some hinges for the enginebox.



Sea Ray 215 EC

Loa 21ft 6in (6.55m).
Beam 8ft 6in (2.59m).
Draught 2ft 9in (0.84m) with the leg down.
Displacement 1.7 tons.
Fuel capacity 42gal (189lt).
Water capacity 7gal (30lt).
Engine single 240hp Mercruiser 5.7L petrol.
Price £18,719 ex VAT as standard with 205hp Mercruiser 4.3LX; £19,364 as tested.
Builders Sea Ray Boats Inc, 2600 Sea Ray Boulevard, Knoxville, Tennessee 37914, USA. Tel: (1) 800 755 2890.
Suppliers Marina Marbella (UK) Ltd, Firefly Road, Hamble Point Marina, Hamble, Hampshire SO31 4JD. Tel: 01703 453005.