

Rich pickings

The Sea Ray 260 oozes quality and speed. Oh, and did we mention you'd love to own it? REPORT BY NICK BURNHAM

The brief...



Sea Ray pretty much invented the mid cabin sportscruiser back in the 1970s. Can its latest 26ft model offer something new to rejuvenate the entry-level market? **Nick**

LOA: 26ft 7ins (8.10m)
PRICE: from £84,250
TOP SPEED: 36 knots
BUILDER: Sea Ray Boats
ENQUIRIES: www.marinamarbella.net

Sea Ray are a true Goliath of the marine industry. Based in Knoxville, USA, and part of the mammoth Brunswick Corporation that also own Bayliner and Sealine, they've spent the last fifty years building up to their current huge range of over forty models from a 17ft speedboat through to palatial 60ft motoryacht.

But their absolute "stock in trade" are their Sundancer models, mid sized mid cabin sports cruisers. Sea Ray brought out their first, the SRV 240 Sundancer, in 1975 and today the Sundancer range spans 24 to 45 feet. Latest to hit the water is the 260 Sundancer, our test boat being the very first one imported by UK main dealer Marina Marbella for the Southampton Boatshow.

This is heartland stuff for Sea Ray, so it needs to be spot on, and indeed even more so given that at eighty five thousand pounds, she is a little dearer than its close rivals such as the soon to be replaced Regal 2565 and the Four Winns V265.

With budget models such as Larson's 777 coming on stream at a projected sixty thousand pounds, Sea Ray need to have this boat's position as a quality product absolutely nailed.

Just looking at the boat sat in the marina augurs well. The profile avoids the bulky top heavy appearance that afflicts some boats in this class, caused by function overtaking form as builders strive for greater and greater accommodation within a set hull length. The sheer line sweeps down to the bathing platform, lending the boat a powerful stern planted stance, and the wrap around windscreen flows neatly into the side coamings. The styling is modern, fresh, yet avoids the 'set square' angularity that is becoming increasingly popular. It's not a shape that will date quickly.

The cockpit is full beam, with not even a pretence made at side decks, access forward being strictly through screen to the gently

sloping foredeck. The layout here is split evenly, both cockpit and cabin receiving a family friendly equal billing.

Conventionally laid out down below with a converting dinette forward, galley to port, heads starboard and crawl in mid cabin aft under the helm, it's just like every other similarly sized Sundancer for what feels like a thousand years, but with a neat contemporary twist. Seating is sharply squared off, the galley is simple and chunky with radiused edges, and upholstery and linings are light muted shaded of cream which set off the dark cherry woodwork perfectly. The galley is basic but functional, microwave, sink, and an unusual drawer type fridge as standard, a butane hob is an option. The mid cabin is a curtained off crawl-in affair, typical of this size of boat.

The quality is excellent (even the wood is a real cherry veneer) and it looks great, minimalist and modern with almost Art Deco undertones, creating an inviting area in which to spend time.





Interior

Functional, neat with quality furnishings

Storage lockers under the dinette seats are accessed via open cave lockers rather than the usual top accessed 'bin' lockers. We like the

way that this lends the cabin a more open feel and saves lifting the seat cushions for access. They might look a little cluttered when full though, not to mention the possibility of an over enthusiastic helmsman leaving their contents strewn across the cabin floor.

Neat touches abound, the dinette table and leg has its own dedicated stowage, the centre cushion at the head of the dinette reverses to

reveal a small occasional table with drinks holders, and below the small hanging rail a lift up flap allows longer garments to be hung full length.

With the mid cabin berth just under 6ft, a lankier crew member might prefer the converted dinette where length is a more generous 6ft 6ins on the starboard side (the galley unit reducing this to 5ft 6ins to port).



From the helm

Flexible, sensible and spacious

An adjustable double helm seat and tilt adjustable wheel allow a degree of flexibility. With the seat right back, there's plenty of room

to stand and drive, facing the flat dashboard and clear MerCruiser SmartCraft instrumentation. Although rather lacking space for sunglasses and phones beyond a single cup holder, Sea Ray have very sensibly designed the dash to allow fitment of a chartplotter. The helm seat lifts to a bolster, which is all very good, but a very thorough test of the handling revealed that extra handholds for the crew might be useful!



On deck

Social seating dominates up here

Social seating is the theme of the full beam cockpit, a removable in-fill extends the aft bench seat forward almost all the full length of the port side, and features a lift-up end piece to form a long comfortable sun lounger. The double helm seat backrest reverses, allowing the seat to face aft and swivels 45° to join the party.

On the starboard side, a large square pedestal allows the option of a cockpit sink with a fridge beneath. Our test boat lacked this, but featured

a large cockpit locker in its place, which would be very useful had Sea Ray not fitted a huge manual bilge pump with wandering lead to the base of it. We applaud such a useful safety back up, but it could be located elsewhere and it's understood Marina Marbella are considering moving it.

We particularly liked the completely flat cockpit floor, most boats of this size feature a step up to accommodate the mid cabin but placing the priority on cockpit usability makes more sense to us.

A little over £4,000 buys a forward-raked GRP radar arch with more lighting. It looks very smart, but it's hard to be convinced that it's anywhere near essential kit.





"Leaves plenty in reserve to hurl itself into the horizon"

Performance & handling

The 350 Magnum fitted to our test boat is an upgrade to the standard 5.0MPI. MBM's advice? Spec it. The balance of power to weight is perfect, the boat responding to the throttle instantly, bouncing eagerly onto the plane,

cruising serenely at mid revs, and leaving plenty in reserve to hurl itself into the horizon at full chat. Handling lives up to the performance, thundering through the harsh wind blown chop confidently, quality of build evident in the total absence of rattles or bangs.

As you'd expect from a comparatively short

and high-sided single-engined boat, plenty of trim tab was required to avoid leaning into the brisk force five crosswind we tested her in. Once set up she remained quite stable. Given the full bodied cruising nature of the design brief, it's a very impressive performance.

A diesel is also offered in the form of a six cylinder Yanmar 6BY-260Z for an extra £18,000. Interestingly, Sea Ray quote fuel consumption at cruising speeds to be almost identical to the 350 Magnum petrol. So even given that diesel is cheaper to buy it's going to take many many years to recoup that kind of difference. We say unless fuel supply is an issue, take the petrol.

Specification & value

At around eighty five thousand pounds before options, this is not a cheap boat. However Sea Ray have never positioned themselves as a budget option, their price reflecting their position in the marketplace as a quality brand. In addition, importers Marina Marbella are keen to stress that the price buys more than just a boat. It buys you that boat sat in any mainland UK port of your choice, fully commissioned, antifouled, launched, fuelled, and ready to go, right down to the warps and fenders securing it to the dock and the name on the transom. It even includes training to an ICC standard relevant to the size of the boat, not just for you but for the crew member of your choice too. Quite a package.

Technical data

KEY DIMENSIONS

BUILD	GRP
RCD	C
LENGTH OVERALL	26ft 7in (8.10m)
BEAM	8ft 6ins (2.59m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 5in (1.04m)
AIR DRAUGHT (To top of screen)	6ft 7in (2m)
DISPLACEMENT	2.1 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	62gal (284lt)
WATER CAPACITY	16.7gal (76lt)
HEADROOM IN CABIN	6ft 0in (1.83m)
MASTER CABIN BERTH	5ft 11in x 4ft 7in (1.8m x 1.4m)

PERFORMANCE

ENGINE	MerCruiser 350 Magnum MPI Bravo III
CONFIGURATION	V8 5.7 litre 300hp @ 5,000rpm
CONDITIONS	Force five, short chop
LOAD	0% water 45% fuel 2 crew

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	LPH	MPG	RANGE
3500	24	8.0	36	3.0	150
4000	26	10.2	46	2.5	127
4500	32	13.6	62	2.3	118
5000	36	17.0	77	2.1	106

Range figures quoted above are in miles based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. GPH & MPG refer to imperial gallons. These figures may vary due to weather conditions, air, water, engine temperature, crew numbers, hull fouling, fuel quality and other issues.

PRICES

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
260hp MerCruiser 5.0MPI	£84,250
300hp MerCruiser 350 Magnum	£85,428
260hp Yanmar 6BY-260Z	£102,750

BOAT AS TESTED £95,077

Base price includes shipping to UK and is calculated at an exchange rate of \$1.50 to the pound.



Enginebay

The huge engine hatch lifts easily on two powerful gas struts to reveal fantastic access to the 350 Magnum engine fitted to our test boat. It's a marine engineer's dream, and from the owner's perspective makes it a doddle to perform basic checks and keep this area clean. The quality is typical Sea Ray, the area nicely lined and all wiring and pipework all neatly installed.

THE VERDICT

Reassuringly expensive, as the saying has it. Certainly in this case we feel that the 260 Sundancer lives up to its premium price, and the 'total package' offered by Marina Marbella sweetens the deal still further.



Meet the family



BIGGER

255 Sundancer from £85,600

LOA 26ft (8.15M)

In theory, only slightly smaller than the 260 tested; in practice a much smaller boat with a swim platform that narrows the LOA gap.



SMALLER

280 Sundancer from £115,500

LOA 28ft 8ins (8.74M)

A useful step up, both in length and volume, but at a price. Extra length aids sleeker profile, longer cockpit and improved interior space.

The rivals



Regal 2565 from £77,000

LOA 27ft 6ins (8.4M)

Unusual appearance trades frumpy looks for class leading light and space in the cabin. Neat cockpit seating arrangement works well.



Four Winns V265 from £75,000

LOA 26ft (7.92M)

Conventional looking sports cruiser neither excites nor disappoints. Everything where you'd expect it, but short on surprise and delight.



Scan the QR code above to see footage of the Sea Ray 260 on the water