

# Sea Ray 265 Sundancer

The Americans are plotting a course across the Atlantic. Can Sea Ray turn on the style? REPORT BY NICK BURNHAM

"Quality is important  
– Europeans want  
luxury not utility"



## The brief...



Sea Ray is taking Europe seriously. So seriously, in fact, that not only is the brand new 265 Sundancer designed with European tastes in mind (something it

first did with the 410 Sundancer last year), the yard is actually building it over here too – in Poland, to be exact. We fly to Amsterdam to give this new model a traditionally European blustery weather welcome, to discover whether it really is as Eurocentric as we've been told. **Nick**

**LOA:** 27ft 5in (8.39m)  
**PRICE:** from £95,457 incl. VAT  
**TOP SPEED:** 36 knots  
**BUILDERS:** Sea Ray Boats  
**ENQUIRIES** [www.searay.com](http://www.searay.com)

**A**merica and the UK, as George Bernard Shaw once observed, are two countries divided by a common language. We have very different views about boating too. Over here, any new boat is without doubt a luxury, as revered and treasured as a new Bentley or a Rolex watch. In the States, it is merely a toy to have fun with; like a customised pickup truck or barbecue. Over there, it's not what you've got, but what you do with it. The attitude, that the boat is just a means to an end, is reflected in the way they are built. While the Americans are perfectly capable of creating luxury boats, their mainstream products tend to be centred more on functionality than luxury.

## Design & build

Which is why when Sea Ray wanted more global reach, especially into the European markets, it turned to its Netherlands-based business development manager, Marcel Rijnbeek, to design the new 265 Sundancer. "Europeanising the 265 wasn't too involved," Marcel tells me. "The footprint of the hull is the same as the 260 Sundancer, itself a very capable boat. We wanted sunbathing areas so the rear seat folds flat and there's the option of another one on the cabin roof. There's also the option of a radar arch, and we fitted a proper fridge in the cockpit where most American boats have a carry on cooler – while you can

buy bags of ice anywhere in the States, it's a little harder over here. In response to demand from European dealers, we also introduced a 'galley-up' layout whereby the boat comes as standard with the galley in the cockpit – although as a cost option, it can be fitted down below." Ironically, 80% of boats ordered by European dealers so far are for a galley-down layout. Therefore it seems that not liking change is something we all, at least, have in common.

The other big difference, Marcel tells me, is in the quality of finish. Europeans want luxury not utility, so the 265 gets, among other things, triple-tone upholstery in the cockpit with double stitching and a Corian galley worktop. It's a good looking boat – high of freeboard

but featuring the trademark Sea Ray sheerline sweeping elegantly down to the bathing platform, with a choice of hull colours. Our test boat is finished in a fetching mid-blue, but Brunswick has also brought along a second boat in a rather unattractive brown, to demonstrate the smaller engine option and the standard galley-up layout. Somebody somewhere must have thought it was a good idea. Dark red, black, or white are the other hull options.

On board, both boats feature a comfortable dinette, comprising of two bench seats facing each other around a smart teak table. The aft seat's backrest folds flat, which combined with a lowered table and infill cushions,

creates a generous sunpad. Further forward, both boats have a slightly cramped double helm to starboard. The standard layout has a large galley unit in the forward port corner of the cockpit, swapped, in the optional galley-down layout, for a useful longitudinal bench.

Down below, headroom (courtesy of those high topsides), is good. The layout is entirely conventional with a double berth back under the cockpit, a U-shaped converting dinette forward, a toilet compartment to starboard, and either a galley or a lower (but with the same surface area) storage unit opposite. So while you don't gain anything in terms of floor space, you do get some badly needed locker space.







GALLEY UP

## On deck

Useful galley-up option, but will anyone take it?

Lacking even vestigial side decks, the only way forward is through the opening windscreen. Fortunately, Sea Ray has incorporated big chunky steps into the **sliding companionway door** and the windscreen is sturdily braced to provide something to lean on. The standard galley-up layout proves perfect for al fresco catering, but inevitably **limits cockpit space** in what is already a compact area. It's a nice option and likely to be popular with the Scandinavians, but given that the lower accommodation merely places a shorter (but otherwise similarly sized) unit where the galley would be, the loss of cockpit seating yields little gain inside. Unless you're planning to use it a lot, I'd be inclined toward the galley-down arrangement.



GALLEY DOWN



## Interiors

Lovely detailing but limited stowage

Featuring **large hull windows** and over 6ft of headroom at the galley, although space inevitably tails off the further forward you go, the 265's interior is a very pleasant place to be. Everywhere is fully lined, concealing all hints of bare GRP, with neat detailing extending to **flush concealed stereo speakers**. The only let-down is storage space. Lockers under the seats are beautifully lined, but tiny. The overhead ones are too slim to be of any practical use, and galley storage in the galley-down layout is limited to a single tiny locker. In the mid-cabin there's a generous 7ft berth to sleep on but no stowage at all.



## From the helm

Legroom issue needs to be resolved

The two test boats are early development prototypes and we've been promised that changes are afoot in certain key areas – the main one being the helm. As it stands, the **wheel is too close**, a cup holder jams against your leg and knee room is limited. Sea Ray plan to rectify this by moving the seat back, the steering wheel forward and losing the cup holder, all of which should release vital inches. Beyond that, **visibility is very good in all directions**, at all speeds. Sort out the space issue and it will work well.



"The heel is spectacular on tight corners"

## Performance & handling

Our test boat has the tried and trusted 350 Magnum engine: a 5.7lt V8 producing a healthy 300hp. As you'd expect, performance is brisk. The 265 rises easily onto the plane, cruises effortlessly in the high 20s and tops out at a very respectable 36 knots – even with five crew on board and full of fuel. The seakeeping is good too, trimming nicely and keeping the bow planted, cleaving the waves to give a soft, if occasionally wet, ride. Blame the brisk Force 5 for the spray, but it does throw up another issue. The combination of the deep vee nature of the hull (it has a 21° deadrise) with high topsides and strong winds creates a boat that's very



susceptible to lateral trim. You almost need to drive with one hand on the tabs, as every directional shift of the boat needs a tweak to keep it level. I'm quite prepared to believe that on

a calmer day it is less of a problem, but on our squally test day, it requires constant adjustment. The other upshot of high freeboard and that deep vee hull is the capability to induce spectacular levels of heel during very tight cornering – something to bear in mind if your crew is of a nervous disposition. The (brown-hulled) 5.0lt boat proves a little slower to plane and is about three knots down on the top end, but has enough oomph for anyone not needing to pull a skier. However, if you are serious about fuel saving, there is always the option of a 3.0lt TDI diesel engine, which would eke out the range, which is sub-100 miles with the 350 Magnum.



## Specification & value

The standard specification reflects the luxury-end of the spectrum at which Sea Ray, not without some justification, sees itself.

However, there is no getting away from the fact that this is a £100,000 boat with the 350 Magnum engine (£5000 less with the 5.0lt V8). The coloured hulls are a no cost option, as are trim tabs (thankfully), stereo system, a bimini top and a transom shower.

That said, you will still need to dip into your pocket for a cockpit enclosure, bow thruster, and radar arch. The slightly larger (albeit with the same beam and layout) and just as luxurious Regal 28 Express, starting at £20,000 less, indicates Sea Ray is going to have a fight on its hands if it wants to reclaim the starter-cruiser crown.

## Technical data

### KEY DIMENSIONS

BUILD	GRP
RCD	C
LENGTH OVERALL	27ft 5in (8.39m)
BEAM	8ft 6in (2.59m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 4in (1.02m)
DISPLACEMENT	2520kg
FUEL CAPACITY	57.5gal (261lt)
WATER CAPACITY	17.6 gal (80lt)
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 2in (1.88m)
FORECABIN BERTH	5ft 6in x 5ft 0in (1.68 x 1.53m)
MID CABIN BERTH	7ft x 4ft 1in (2.13m x 1.24m)

### PERFORMANCE

Engines	MerCruiser 350 Magnum
Configuration	8cyl 5.7 litre, 300hp
conditions	Force 5, sea slight to moderate
Load	fuel 100%, water 0%, crew 5

RPM	KNOTS	LPH	GPH	MPG	RANGE	NOISE
2000	8	17	3.7	2.2	101	73
2500	9	30	6.6	1.4	64	78
3000	14	40	8.8	1.6	74	79
3500	20	48	10.5	1.9	87	83
4000	25	67	14.7	1.7	78	84
4500	31	83	18.3	1.7	78	87
4950	36	95	20.9	1.7	78	87

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. Noise readings in dB(A) were taken in the saloon.

### PRICES

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with MerCruiser 350 Magnum	£95,457
BOW THRUSTER	£2276
CAMPER CANVAS PACKAGE	£1833
ELECTRIC WINDLASS	£1987
FOREDECK SUNPAD	£1110
TEAK DECKING	£2215
FIBREGLASS RADAR ARCH	£4435

**BOAT AS TESTED £109,313\***

\*Boat as tested price may include alternative options



## Enginebay

Smaller boats often have a large engine hatch, requiring the removal of cockpit furniture, or a small hatch that fits within it. The 265 has the best compromise: a large hatch and cockpit furniture that simply rises with it, aided by powerful gas struts. Flat sections of the floor make it easy to stand either side of the engine and there is plenty of space around it to get to the ancillaries.

## THE VERDICT

So, Eurostar or Euroseptic? Sea Ray has done a great job of Europeanising this small sportscruiser giving it the sea-keeping we require together with the quality of finish we crave. Sea Ray US certainly believe it's a good boat. It is pinching the designs and creating its own version to be built in America for its home buyers.

## Meet the family



**BIGGER**

**280 Sundancer £123,097**

LOA: 28ft 8in (8.74m)

Classy looking cruiser, but hard to justify the extra cost over the 265.



**SMALLER**

**240 Sundancer from £76,150**

LOA: 24ft 10in (7.57m)

Similar layout but smaller in size and beginning to look a little dated.

## The rivals



**Regal 28 Express from £76,492**

LOA: 28ft 8in (8.7m)

Nicely finished boat and spectacular value for money.



**Larson 857 Cabrio from £76,067**

LOA: 28ft 1in (8.57m)

Lacks the quality of the Sea Ray but a big boat that handles well.