

Sea Ray

280 Sundancer



This American sportscruiser puts the emphasis on below-decks accommodation, for a bigger-boat feel. Where does that leave performance?

Buyers trading up to a 28ft sportscruiser from a smaller boat will be used to rapid performance and responsive handling, and a cockpit that lends itself to use when the sun shines.

Those trading down from a larger craft, for reduced running and berthing costs, will not want to compromise on the comfort and usability they are used to.

At around £10,000 per metre of hull length, a boat of this size is a

serious investment, so purchasers with different priorities have a right expect it to meet all their diverse needs. Let us look at how the well put-together Sea Ray 280 Sundancer sets about doing this.

Design & layout

Getting the 280 off to a good start is its strong pedigree. Sea Rays are always solidly built, with a good specification. All the mouldings and fittings have a

substantial feel, and the styling is always up to date, but never overstated.

The builders have applied the styling of their larger craft to the 280 Sundancer, and a forward-reaching radar arch emphasises the big-boat feel, although some angles it looks a little too large. In general the lines are clean and uncluttered, modern if not at the cutting edge, although we might have expected the bathing

platform to be integral.

The layout's emphasis is on below-decks space, as the boat strives to match the cabins of larger craft, and generally succeeds. Inevitably that means cockpit space is less than some buyers might be looking for, especially aft, where the fold-down sunpad is not full-length. And you get only a single helm seat, even though it does offer very good support.

Our test boat had the most

Decks



The cabin door doubles as the steps taking you up to and through the centre opening section of the windscreen, for access to the bow.

The flat non-slip foredeck gives a sure footing, and the chain locker has a hatch opening on a gas strut. The Lofrans windlass fitted on the test boat has foot switches.

Bathing platform



Though not integral to the hull, the bathing platform offers a generous area for boarding, whether from a dock or from the water.

There is a swing-down boarding ladder under a hinged cover to port, and a handy locker for warps (courtesy of hanging straps) and fenders which also provides the services for a shorepower connection.

A shower is set into the recess beside the transom door.

Cockpit



Opposite the helm is a wraparound seat which, with an angled aft-facing back, also doubles as a lounger. The rear section of this is also the back for another seat, which can slide rearwards (not quite far enough to reach the aft bench) to form a three-quarter-length sunbed.

The aft bench can be hinged flat against the transom, allowing the whole of the aft cockpit floor to be raised on twin gas struts, revealing open stowage as well as the engineroom. A locker in the transom walk-through supplements this, although one of the cockpit's weaknesses is the provision of ready-access storage space.

A wet-bar located just behind the helm provides refreshments. The standard removable coolbox is mounted in the base, and there is a built-in cooler tray set in the worktop next to the sink, which has a pull out sprayer to dispense water.

A locker aft to port provides the location for the battery switches, the electrics panel and the two engine ignition key points (there are just start/stop buttons at the helm).

The cockpit table can be stowed on the forward bulkhead in the enginebay.



Cabin

The cabin gives an immediate impression of spaciousness, the keys to which are plenty of headroom and a generous provision of lighting for after sunset. The fit-out and furnishings make the most of this, and have a quality feel.

The forward vee offers a spacious seating area, and



when converted into a good-sized double berth at night can be curtained off for privacy. A tidy blind can also be rolled out to cover the deck hatch.

Hanging lockers flank the approach to this forward area. Open lockers for small items sit above the seat-backs on both sides, and there is more space in the bases. An example of well thought-out design is the way that hatches give access to these lockers, so you do not have to lift out cushions.

Opposite the galley is a dinette with seating for four, either side of a good-sized table. This can be dropped to convert the seating into another double berth, albeit a

more compact one than the forward and midships sleeping areas.

A nest of lockers sits above the dinette, while the seat bases offer yet more stowage.



Helm



Sea Ray's modular dashboard layouts continue to impress. Set against a wood-effect backing, the two banks of instruments display their information well, though quite what is indicating what on the multifunction gauges does take some to get used to.

The rubberised push-button electrical switches on the two modules that flank the steering wheel are a great piece of design, and it is good to see that the builders have adopted

logical trim tab controls in the left bank of these.

There is plenty of adjustment in the bucket helm seat so, with a tilt-adjustable steering wheel and a footrest, drivers of all sizes should be able to get comfortable. The forward section of the seat cushion hinges up, so a lean-back driving position can be adopted, and there is plenty of room for standing while manoeuvring at close quarters. Whatever position you prefer, the helm remains well sheltered.

The twin throttles are well located, with the trim buttons set in the left-hand one for easy control.

As you would expect, a compass is included in the standard specification, and sits atop the dashboard. A bow-thruster was fitted to our test boat, but we felt it was not needed with a twin engine installation.

There is 'bits' stowage around the helm, but no formal chart holder.



Galley

The galley is compact, with lift-out sections of the worksurface hiding the sink, with its mixer tap, and the single-burner stove.

For faster cooking, a

microwave oven is set above the worktop.

There is a cupboard aft, and another good-sized cupboard in the base unit next to the fridge.

A sliding door conceals stowage for smaller items, and also electrical points.



Toilet

The toilet compartment offers full standing headroom, and is fully lined so that you can use the pull-out mixer tap as a showerhead, in conjunction with the shower curtain which can be pulled across the mirrored back of the door.

The toilet-roll holder is mounted on the inside of the cupboard door under the sink. There is more stowage, behind push-release doors, above the vacuum-flush toilet.



powerful twin engine option, 210hp Mercruiser 4.3L EFI petrols on Bravo I legs; without electronic injection, twin 190hp 4.3Ls are a slightly cheaper alternative. The only single petrol installation offered is the 310hp Mercruiser 7.4L MPI, with a Bravo III leg.

There are currently two single diesel options: a 270hp Mercruiser D7.3L D-Tronic on a Bravo III leg or a 240hp Volvo Penta KAD44. However, we understand that twin 157hp Volvo Penta KAD32s are soon to be added to the list.

Performance & handling

There is no hesitation from the twin 4.3L EFIs when you push the throttles forward, and the 280 Sundancer is rapidly up onto the plane. And it makes quick progress to its maximum recorded speed of 35 knots at 4600rpm, thanks to some good mid-range pull that is also at the heart of the boat's excellent handling.

Also notable are the low noise levels while all this is achieved. We recorded 83dB(A) at a fast cruising speed of 31 knots (4000rpm), 80dB(A) at 27 knots (3600rpm) and 78dB(A) at a



relaxed 20 knots (3000rpm).

The handling is excellent, with every adjustment of the steering wheel producing an immediate response from the hull, so this is a fun boat to drive. We undertook a series of tight turns, powering hard through them, and at no time felt any indication that either the propellers or the hull were losing their grip on the water.

The hull is also well balanced, and tracks straight and true.

In a stiff wind, the Sundancer dismissed the short chop and typical rollers from large vessels on Southampton Water with ease, and also kept all on board dry from wind-blown spray.

Although we would have liked rougher water to verify its seakeeping abilities, the indications are that they are more than a match for the performance and handling.

Conclusions

The 280 Sundancer achieves comfortable sportscruiser accommodation with sportsboat performance, at least if you opt for the twin petrol engine set-up of the test boat.

Running these engines will cost you at the pumps, though, as you will not be getting much change from £350 if you fill up the tanks. Those who want to make regular use of the hull's excellent handling characteristics might opt for the cheaper fuel costs that come with the extra initial investment in diesel power.

You can buy more hull length for what this will cost, but it is a well equipped, solidly built and competent boat.

Sea Ray 280 Sundancer

BUILD

glass-reinforced plastic

RECREATIONAL CRAFT DIRECTIVE

Design Category B: Offshore (offshore voyages in wind up to Force 8)

DIMENSIONS

LOA

28ft 6in (8.69m)

BEAM

9ft 5in (2.87m)

DRAUGHT

1ft 11in (0.58m) with drives up

DISPLACEMENT

3.63 tonnes

FUEL CAPACITY

83gal (378.5lt)

ENGINES

twin Mercruiser 4.3EFI petrols

PRICE

£89,003 inc VAT as tested

SUPPLIERS

Marina Marbella UK, Firefly Road, Hamble Point Marina, Hamble, Hampshire SO31 4JD. Tel: 023 8045 3005.

BUILDERS

Sea Ray Boats Inc, 2600 Sea Ray Boulevard, Knoxville, Tennessee TN 37914, USA.



Midships cabin

The midships cabin offers a very generous double berth, with both a hanging locker and a cupboard set behind a mirror. The window into the cockpit adds light and ventilation.

The cupboard at the entrance to the cabin houses a stereo CD-player with a multichanger, and copious racks for CD cases.

Engineroom

The space under the cockpit sole is a pretty tight fit for a twin engine installation. There is some space forward, but any room alongside the engines is taken up with support service equipment.

However, day to day checks can be carried out easily, and all the wiring and pipework is clipped, with logical wiring runs.

