

SEA RAY 450 SUNDANCER REVIEW: AMERICA'S BOAT

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Sea Ray knows what you want and delivers it in the new 450 Sundancer.

Let's try something. On a clean sheet of paper, write down the 10 qualities *you* want most in your ideal express cruiser. Skip the vague ones like "good-looking" and "easy to handle." Concentrate on tangible creature comforts, quality, and function. Things like no-sweat engine access. An uncluttered, durable interior with a layout that provides room to move around, lots of luxury, and roomy, private sleeping accommodations. Enough stowage space for your stuff *and* the kids'. Rugged, offshore-ready construction. Nothing to trip on. Things like that. Then check out the new Sea Ray 450 Sundancer. If you've been honest, you'll find your list and this boat have a lot in common.

Well suited for a full array of electronics, the 450's helm features a jet-fighter-style captain's chair.

America's thirst for the easy-to-handle, easy-to-maintain midcabin express cruiser is tremendous. And a quick count of boatbuilders now making them numbers at least 14. Sea Ray has the Sundancer series, which happens to be the most popular line of recreational boats over 24 feet ever built. From a humble beginning with its first Sundancer 20 years ago, the company today builds 10 different Sundancers from 23 to 63 feet. And like most successful companies, Sea Ray never stands still. It's constantly reengineering - sometimes from the keel up - its designs and construction techniques to keep the Sundancers out in front. This time, Sea Ray has put its best foot forward with the 450.

An entirely new boat that replaces the 440 Sundancer, the 450 is designed to quench the thirsts of both American and European boaters who want to do extended cruising at speed while giving up nothing in accommodations. It combines a rakish profile with a curving cockpit and interior design, plus enough built-in safety features to meet strict construction standards both here and abroad.

As I toured Sea Ray's Sikes Creek, Florida, plant with design engineer Mark Hotary, we discussed the fine points of the 450's hull. It's 16 inches longer than the 440 yet has the same beam (13'11"). According to Hotary, this extra length yields even greater pitch stability than the 440. The entry is sharper, too, and chines lead all the way forward for a drier ride at any running angle. The result is an even better ride than that of her predecessor.

PMY TESTED: SEA RAY 450 SUNDANCER

Boat type: express cruiser
Base price: N/A
Standard power: 2/315-hp Cummins 315 Diamond Edition diesel inboards w/V-drives
Optional power: Caterpillar: 2/292- or 340-hp 3116TA, 2/375- or 435-hp 3208TA, 2/415-hp 3126TA diesel inboards; Cummins 2/420-hp 420 Diamond Edition diesel inboards
Notable standard equipment: Good Free Drop windlass; Clarion AM/FM stereo digital cassette w/4 speakers; gas-assist engine room hatch; acrylic chart holder; transom stowage locker; 8-kW Westerbeke genset
Notable optional equipment: windshield defogger/heater; Nutone galley package w/can opener and blender; combination washer/dryer; 6-disc CD changer; 2 color TVs and VCRs; Glendinning synchronizer; 9-kW Kohler genset
Hull type: modified-V with prop pockets
Designer: Sea Ray design team
Construction: hand-laid fiberglass with cored hull sides and bottom

| SPECIFICATIONS | | DRIVE TRAIN | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| LOA: 48'1" (incl. pulpit) | 11'11" to masthead light | Test engines: 2/375-hp Caterpillar 3208 TA diesel inboards | Nibral 4-blade full cup |
| Beam: 13'11" | Maximum saloon headroom: 6'8" | Transmission: Twin Disc V-drive | Steering: Teleflex |
| Draft: 3'7" | Fuel capacity: 400 gal. | Reduction ratio: 1.53:1 | Controls: Morse |
| Approx. displacement: 22,500 lbs. dry | Water capacity: 100 gal. | Propellers: 22x26 | Trim tabs: Bennett |
| Bridge clearance: | Sleeping capacity: 6 | | |

TEST RESULTS: Conditions: temperature: 80°; humidity: 78%; wind: 5-10 knots; seas: light chop; load: ½ fuel, ¼ water, 3 persons, minimum gear.

| Indicated rpm | mph (knots) | Total gph | mpg (mpg) | Range (miles) | Decibels at helm |
|---------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1000 | 9.5(8.2) | 4.6 | 2.05(1.79) | 740 | 72 |
| 1250 | 11.2(9.7) | 10.0 | 1.12(0.97) | 403 | 74 |
| 1500 | 11.5(10.0) | 16.2 | 0.71(0.61) | 254 | 76 |
| 1750 | 26.7(23.2) | 48.4 | 0.55(0.48) | 198 | 81 |
| 2000 | 29.6(25.7) | 50.0 | 0.59(0.51) | 213 | 82 |
| 2250 | 32.9(28.6) | 51.9 | 0.63(0.55) | 228 | 83 |
| 2500 | 35.0(30.4) | 52.6 | 0.67(0.58) | 239 | 83 |
| 2750 | 37.3(32.4) | 53.4 | 0.70(0.61) | 251 | 84 |
| 2900 | 37.9(33.0) | 55.8 | 0.68(0.59) | 244 | 84 |

Speeds are two-way averages, measured with Decatur digital radar gun. Fuel flow measured by DZL digital meter. Usable range is 90% of total advertised capacity. Decibels measured on A scale using GenRad GR1565-B acoustical meter (60 dB is level of normal conversation).

The cockpit boasts a full

wraparound lounge for entertaining.

Two significant hull features are designed to enhance performance. First, the chines have a tighter radius and slight reverse angle, which Hotary says "keep water from being glued to the hull [at speed]" and result in a higher speed-to-propeller rpm ratio. Second, the hull strikes end farther forward and farther away from the props, allowing an unimpeded water flow into the 450's prop pocket. When combined with shallow-angle V-drives, as they are here, prop pockets help produce more direct thrust since they permit a lower, more horizontal shaft angle.

Even here, Sea Ray was not content with the traditional semicircular pocket design. On the 450, these "modules" are rectangular, which increases the distance between the prop tips and the hull. Hotary says this design results in less vibration and better prop bite.

Finally, the 450 has a cored bottom and hull sides for lighter weight and increased strength overall. By decreasing the amount of resin used in the boat (30 percent less than in the 440), Sea Ray reduced the boat's weight by 1.5 pounds per square foot while decreasing the amount of VOCs (volatile organic compounds) released during construction. And that's good news for everyone.

CURVED COUNTERTOPS, LOUNGES, AND WALKWAYS VIRTUALLY ELIMINATE EVERY RIGHT ANGLE IN THE INTERIOR. EVEN THE SINK IS CURVED!

So how well did all that designing and engineering perform on the water? With a pair of 3208 Cats, our 450 DA averaged a top end just shy of 40 mph, impressive for an express cruiser of this size. While a bit reserved at the get-go (taking about 9.3 seconds to plane) and providing a seated helmsman briefly obstructed visibility during planing, the 450 hits a distinct point in the rpm curve where the turbos kick in and she's off. Her turning radius at speed is relatively large, yet at slow speeds she'd nimble and responsive. The weather on the test day was fair, so I can't comment on her rough-water performance.

Access to the 450's foredeck is superb with wide side decks and an in-cockpit step.

So much for tech talk. As for other features of the 450 DA, Sea Ray's interior designers have been as busy as the hull guys, combining styling with function and innovation. For example, consider engine-room access. On many boats of this size and type, you'll break a sweat (and maybe more) removing heavy fiberglass cockpit sole panels. The best case is usually an electro-hydraulic ram that lifts the entire cockpit sole, but often you still have to remove or stow benchseats and twist yourself like a pretzel just to get below. Not so here.



In a unique design, the supports for a portion of the aft lounge are bolted to a hinged, gas-assisted day hatch in the sole. So when you raise the day hatch, the seating conveniently lifts up with it. Once you're below, the engine room's efficient design is immediately apparent. Thanks to reverse-mounted Cats coupled to Twin Disc V-drives, there's plenty of room aft, inboard, and outboard. The 450 also has a dual-direction exhaust system that send 90 percent of the exhaust under water through the bottom and the remaining 10 percent through waterline ports in the hull sides. This eliminates the station-wagon effect and the need for separate mufflers while keeping the transom clean. As a result there's more room in the engine room. While all systems and equipment - rudder posts, Racors, 50-amp battery charger, 9-kW Kohler genset, oil-cooled stuffing boxes, *three* bilge pumps, spare props - are easily accessible, labels would be a welcome addition.

Topside, you'll probably find the 450 DA has just about every item on your list. The standard cockpit layout features an aft-facing, U-shaped lounge area, yet you can turn it into a full C-shape with optional aft seating. You can remove these extra seats in five minutes for fishing (there are four inwale rod holders). A port-side refreshment center with wetbar and bottle stowage is standard here, while a filler sunpad cushion, cocktail table, and icemaker are options.

Inside, the forward owner's stateroom is plush with voluminous stowage space in drawers and lockers.

I particularly liked the fact that the cockpit design allows you to walk from the port-side transom door, past the helm station, and right to the companionway in a straight, no-stepping, no-tripping line; it's great when loading up gear and provisions for the next cruise. Grabrails abound in the cockpit for safety while moving about underway.

Forward, the helm station is one of the best I've seen in any express cruiser. Featuring a fighter-pilot-style captain's chair that adjusts both vertically and horizontally, the helm reflects European styling in its dual-level, lexan and bird's-eye maple veneer instrument panel. The top level has all Teleflex engine instruments along with an LED ship's systems status indicator. On our boat the lower level, closer to the eye, was outfitted with a full range of B&G Network nav/com electronics. Between them is a hinged Plexiglas plate large enough to safely cover an entire BBA ChartKit. The wraparound design also has space to flush-mount the requisite radar display, a Raytheon R41XX in this case, and it's angled in for easy access and viewing from the helmseat.

THE HELM CONSOLE IS SURROUNDED BY A RAISED RIM TO CHANNEL WATER AWAY.

Sea Ray paid particular attention to water protection here. The helm console is surrounded by a raised rim to channel water away, as is the area around the companionway. This is key when hosing down the area underneath the rugged, stainless steel-rimmed windshield with its electric centerline vent and standard windshield defroster. A double-wide benchseat, three drinkholders, and a flush-mounted Clarion stereo - with handheld remote control - round out the package.

The straight walk in the cockpit layout vanishes below. Here, curved countertops, lounges, and walkways virtually eliminate every right angle in the interior. Even the sink is curved!

In a decidedly European touch, the refrigerator and freezer are undercounter, even though this galley is big enough to support the full stand-up variety. While it contains the usuals - three-burner electric stove, microwave oven, and plenty of stowage - it also has a hideaway coffee maker and round breakfast bar with stowage below and two stools for snack time. Full meals are served to starboard at the curved sofa in the saloon, which converts to a double berth.

With twin Caterpillar 3208TAs, the 450 Sundancer hit nearly 38 mph at WOT.

There's a full 6'7" of headroom in the saloon, and our test boat had the optional entertainment center with hidden, big-screen Panasonic TV and VCR and Harmon Kardon stereo and CD system. Voluminous stowage is found along the inwales, in separate cabinets, and even in the saloon sole, all finished with either formica, gelcoat, or carpet inside. You simply won't run out of room to store a week's worth of provisions and cruising equipment in this boat.

Finally, here's the part where Sea Ray really puts the "cruiser" in express cruiser. There are two private staterooms and two full heads on the 450 DA, the forward head with a separate shower stall. The forward owner's stateroom boasts 6'3" of headroom at the entrance, a raised-platform, queen-sized berth with stowage below, and a built-in vanity and hanging locker. All closets are cedar-lined, and light oak trim surrounds all mirrors and lockers throughout the boat. Aft, the midcabin (which can be fully enclosed with foam-cored doors for privacy) lends a sunken living room feel, yet it's in no way claustrophobic. With its oak-trimmed, drop-down table that converts the U-shaped lounge to a double berth, it's the perfect place for a late-night card game. Furthermore, guests will appreciate the fact that when the cabin doors are closed, access to the head is private.

As you can see, Sea Ray knows a lot about your list of desirable features. And while each boater's list is unique in some ways, by and large your list is America's list. And that list is what you'll see on America's boat.

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