

THIRTY SOMETHING

WITH TWIN OUTBOARD POWER, SKATER'S NEW 30 PLEASURE IS A HEART-THUMPING HEAD-TURNER.

THERE WAS A TIME—AND IT WASN'T ALL THAT long ago—when two-stroke outboard power ruled the 24- to 32-foot, high-performance catamaran world. And given the reliability, performance, fuel-efficiency and low-emissions of today's most technologically advanced two-stroke outboards, they still make great sense in smaller-cat applications.

The newest model in the Skater family is a 30-footer. Introduced in 2005, we ran the first one, which was dressed with twin Sterling engines and Arneson drives. The boat could not be mistaken for anything other than a Skater. Its design could only have come from the fertile mind of Peter Hledin, who must see perfect lines in his sleep.

While the last Skater 30 we saw had a custom-crafted flat deck, the model we tested most recently—dubbed the 30 Pleasure—had a deck straight from the mold. And rather than stern-drive power, it had a pair of Mercury Racing OptiMax 300XS outboards on its transom.

PERFORMANCE

As any outboard-powered catamaran owner will gladly tell you, the sensation of flight in a cat with outboards is pronounced. Trimmed for top speed at the most efficient setting, outboard cats feel as if they are flying—connected at the prop no doubt, but definitely soaring above the water.

The Skater 30 Pleasure produced precisely that sensation. Plus, for the power, the catamaran was fast. On sticky, glassy water, the kind that's less conducive to running fast in a cat, the boat reached 104 mph on GPS. In better conditions in the Northeast, the 30-footer reportedly hit 108 mph. We believe it.

At first glance, we thought the 30 Pleasure offered no protection from the wind. Not so—with the push of two switches, power windscreens raised from the dash ahead of the driver and co-pilot. They did a great job knocking down the wind. Worth

noting, however, is that when raised the windscreens scrubbed 1 mph off the boat's top speed.

Accelerating to the top-end, both of our test drivers found the Skater 30 Pleasure developed a very mild porpoise in the mid-speed range. That vanished as the boat passed through the midrange and speeds increased. At the top-end, the cat was completely settled.

Time to plane was 5.5 seconds, and the cat hit 77 mph in 20 seconds from a standing start. In terms of acceleration, the twin direct-injected outboards did their best work in the midrange, as the boat ran from 30 to 50 mph in 5 seconds, 40 to 60 mph in 5.6 seconds and 40 to 70 mph in 8.1 seconds.

The engines proved fuel efficient. At wide-open throttle, they burned less than 50 gallons per hour, which translated to 2 mpg.

When it came to handling, the Skater 30 Pleasure, which rode on stepped-sponsons and didn't have a center pod, was an absolute gas.

Like Bob Teague, test driver John Tomlinson whipped the boat into one hard turn after the next, and it carved deep, sweet lines. It also delivered an uncommonly soft ride offshore.

"It's dandy outside," Teague said. "There aren't many 30-foot V-bottoms that can handle rough water so well."

WORKMANSHIP

Douglas Marine has been building exceptional composite catamarans for more than 25 years, so it's safe to say the company has the process dialed in. Like all Skater cats, the 30 Pleasure was constructed using vacuum-bagged epoxy resin, S-glass and balsa coring. The boat's custom-painted graphics were handled in-house at the Douglas, Mich., facility. Ocean Outboard in Brick, N.J., hung the outboards and rigged the boat.

Tooling of the hull and deck were up to Skater quality, meaning incomparable, and for dockside protection the builder installed a tra-

ditional—at least for Skater—aluminum rubrail.

"The mold work on this boat is just superb," Teague said.

Ocean Outboard maintains equally high standards. All the rigging for the outboards, which were mounted on ZMC power lifts, was neat and simple.

To match the boat's patriotic color scheme, the builder mounted all the hardware in red and blue anodized bezels. Deck hardware was limited to fuel fills and six Accon Pop-Up cleats—nothing else was needed.

INTERIOR


Knowing that the 30 Pleasure is, first and foremost, a hot rod, Douglas Marine didn't mess around with "family oriented" seating. Rather, the company included five high-back bucket seats, put grab handles in all the right places and called it good. Between the driver and co-pilot buckets was a console with substantial

throttles and shifters from Latham Marine.

Mercury SmartCraft gauges, standard fare for OptiMax outboards, were mounted at the helm on the starboard side of the boat. Mechanical trim indicators were installed in the center of the dash. Ahead of the observer's bucket to port, there was a grab handle.

In keeping with the boat's utilitarian speed machine layout, the builder used snap-in carpet to cover the sole. Up front, stowage space was limited to small map pockets near the driver and co-pilot's legs. Extra stowage was found in cutouts in the gunwales and in the engine compartment since the boat had outboards.

OVERALL

The cost for a combined 600-hp worth of outboard engines on the test boat was roughly \$34,000. If you've looked at comparable new stern-drive power prices lately, you'll recognize that as a major bargain. On Skater's delightful 30 Pleasure, the power package comes alive. 



TEST RESULTS: SKATER 30 PLEASURE

TEST CONDITIONS

Temperature/humidity	93 degrees/47 percent
Wind speed/water conditions	2 mph/flat

HULL INFORMATION

Deadrise at transom	18 degrees
Centerline/beam	30/9'4"
Hull weight	3,000 pounds

PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail	\$221,251
Price as tested	\$255,551

ENGINE & PROPELLER

Engine	(2) Mercury Racing OptiMax 300XS
Cylinder type	V-6
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	193/300
Lower-unit gear ratio	1.62:1
Propeller	Mercury Cleaver three-blade 14 1/2" x 32"

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to Mercury Racing OptiMax 300XS engines (\$34,300).

ACCELERATION

5 seconds	28 mph
10 seconds	45 mph
15 seconds	62 mph
20 seconds	77 mph

MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	.5 seconds
40-60 mph	.56 seconds
40-70 mph	.81 seconds

RPM VS. MPH

1000	.5 mph
1500	.7 mph
2000	.9 mph
2500	28 mph
3000	38 mph
3500	47 mph
4000	60 mph
4500	70 mph
5000	82 mph
5500	91 mph
6000	98 mph

TOP SPEED AT RPM

Radar	101.5 mph at 6,200
GPS	104 mph

PLANING

Time to plane	.55 seconds
Minimum planing speed	18 mph

FUEL ECONOMY

At 30 mph	2.5 mpg
At 40 mph	2.2 mpg
At 50 mph	2.5 mpg
At 60 mph	2.6 mpg
At WOT	.2 mpg

FUEL CAPACITY

180 gallons

TEST CONDUCTED AT (ELEVATION)

Sarasota, Fla. (Sea level)

MANUFACTURER

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WHAT WE LOVED: Twin 300XS outboards were an inspired choice for this 30-footer.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: We wouldn't want to clutter the cockpit, but more map pockets for stowage wouldn't hurt.



[07 PERFORMANCE TRIALS PART II]

Clockwise from top left: Standard fare for Mercury Racing OptiMax 300XS outboards, Skater installed SmartCraft gauges in red bezels. Mounted in a center-console were the Latham Marine throttles and shifters. Power wind-screens raised from the dash to protect the driver and co-pilot. The cockpit included five high-back bucket seats.

