

FORMULA 280

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(an option) hidden behind a rubber stopper in the transom step.

After diving, we easily stowed all the gear in the many on-deck storage compartments—including the aforementioned “tank locker;” another roomy seat-base bin in the U-shaped lounge, and the long ski locker in the sole. The optional Bimini provided excellent shade for the entire cockpit. Lunchtime entertainment was provided by a shark who successfully evaded the curious snorkelers chasing it to get a better look.

As the weather stayed good, there was no reason to make use of the 280's cabin. A tour below convinced me, however, that despite its billing as a day boat, this would make a perfectly comfortable overnighter. The dinette and its high-low table convert to a double berth. There's a long hanging locker and a private head. A Kenwood stereo with cassette player is standard; a CD player is an option, as is a Panasonic microwave. As on all Formulas, the interior fit-and-finish is a thing of beauty. That holds true for the cockpit, too, where it's easy to take for granted such Formula hallmarks as grabrails and drinkholders right where you need them, and hatch covers hinged to fold out of the way.

Touching base

The boat's overall construction is high quality as well. On the 280, the cockpit and deck are built as a single piece. “At the end of the day, after you've had all your fun, this is a very easy boat to clean up,” Braun says. “You don't have to watch where you blast your hose.”

A lot of these boater-friendly details come from customer feedback, which the company gathers through surveys and by touching base with owners during the annual Formula Great Lakes and southern rendezvous. “We learn a lot when we're along,” Scott Porter says.

“It's nice to have the family involved. They're so interested. We're not used to that,” says owner Phil Caswell of Beca Raton, Fla. He and his wife Connie were attending the “Keys Kruiise” rendezvous on their brand-new 31 PC. “I've called with questions, not problems—and they've called back.”

For many of the owners, Key West was the highlight of the voyage. Sunset is celebrated nightly there, and we got back from Sand Key just in time to join the festivities. A large crowd gathered along the seawall in Mallory Square to watch the big lemon sun slowly sink into the water. Afterward, the funky nightlife on Duval Street beckoned, but we couldn't stay out too late—we had an early call the next day. Organized by rendezvous director John Earl of Formula, first the cruisers, then the performance boats were to set off for Hawk's Cay in Marathon, the first stop on their way back north.

Safety in numbers

The owners all appreciated the fact that there's safety in numbers. “Every one of these rendezvous trips is something you wouldn't do by yourself,” said Rick Miller of Columbia, S.C., who was on his third Formula outing with his red '86 311 SRL. “These guys make you appreciate what you bought.”

In the morning, a strong breeze was kicking up a good chop outside the marina. The cruiser fleet lined up in its assigned order, all listening to channel 69 in case of a problem, then headed up the Keys via the “inside” route. Braun and I, on board the 280, set out with them, but in these conditions the 280 could have just as easily run with the late-rising high performance crowd.

Our 50-mile jaunt to Marathon made me appreciate the 280's comfortable nature, both in its ride and its conveniences, all the more. The boat was obviously designed by Formula's John Adams for self-sufficiency during a long and highly pleasurable day afloat. ♪

Formula 280 Sun Sport

LOA.....	28'
Beam.....	9'2"
Draft.....	3'
Weight.....	6,300 lbs.
Water.....	20 gals.
Fuel.....	120 gals.
Power.....	(2) 250-hp EFI Mercs
Cruise.....	31 mph/3000 rpm
Max.....	59.5 mph/4800 rpm
Price.....	\$77,705

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HEART RACER

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tions—more than enough to set your heart racing.

Andretti first took the wheel of his new boat on the day after he drove in the Detroit Indy Race on waterside Belle Isle racetrack. Despite the long, hot, difficult race, he showed up for an early photo call the next morning looking relaxed and rested, taking to the water with the same energy, the same boundless enthusiasm he has always brought to his driving.

Luxury performance

The weather was much less cooperative. Clouds scudded across the sky, threatening rain, and the waves were kicking up on Lake St. Clair. No worries. “When it gets snotty and everyone gets off the lake, then these boats come into their own,” Kiekhaefer says.

Andretti, wearing a *Heart Racer* T-shirt with the signature graphic that combines a heart, an EKG line and a checkered flag, settled into the driver's bolster seat and grabbed the sports car-style Momo wheel. Flanked by Stephenson and Kiekhaefer, he wrung the boat out for the camera, and returned to the dock wreathed in smiles.

“I love it,” Andretti said. “You're so much inside the envelope—you feel so safe no matter what you do. I think the gals are going to love it,” he added, thinking of his wife Dee Ann and their close-knit family.

Stephenson is also pleased with the boat's rough-water performance. “Three-to-five-footers on the marine forecast used to scare me. Now I'm sitting there waiting for them,” he says.

“Right away you can feel it, that stability,” Andretti agrees.

Inevitably, he is asked to compare the Apache with a race car. “This is not a race car. It's more like a sports car. You want it to be comfortable, to smell nice,” he says. “Luxury performance is lasting. You want to get the best of both worlds—with as little compromise as possible.”

A peek at *Heart Racer's* interior confirms the boat's luxury lining. The upholstery is white, sleekly done in a leather-textured fabric that almost smells like the real thing—but is far