



**STORMING ALONG:** The big Black Thunder XT430 Sport Cruiser hits a top speed of 70 mph.

## Rolling Thunder

**I**N THE MIDST of Mark Twain country is fast-boat company Black Thunder. "Don Jenkins, the owner, has been building boats since the early '60s," says Sales Manager Terry Sobo. Some of Jenkins' earlier products included work boats and runabouts. Since he formed Black Thunder in 1987, the focus has been on high performance boats. The company is currently marketing its 43-foot XT430, offered in both the Performance Series (flat-deck) and Sport Cruiser (raised-deck) configurations.

The hull incorporates a long 37½-foot pad, a step, and a notched transom for better lift and improved performance. With twin MerCruiser Hi-Performance 500s, based on 502 blocks, and Bravo drives, this translates to a top end of 70 mph for the Sport Cruiser, and 75 mph for the Performance Series model, according to Sobo. Other recommended engine options range from twin 7.4-liter Mercs to

Merc HP600SCs, and include triples. "We'll put virtually any engines available in the boats," Sobo says.

### Handling agility

I drove the raceboat-style Performance Series XT430 powered by the twin Merc HP500s in calm conditions and found its acceleration to be satisfyingly quick. The ride was dry and smooth, as the boat's healthy length and beam made mincemeat of the big wakes we encountered. The Mayfair steering was responsive, providing handling agility. I appreciated the Kiekhaefer instrumentation—especially the rocker that trims the drives in tandem. Noise levels were fairly low under way, with the exhaust vented out beneath the swim step, but a bit loud at idle.

The cockpit is identical on both XT430 models. It features McLeod race bolsters that stand three abreast and still allow for a good-sized passage

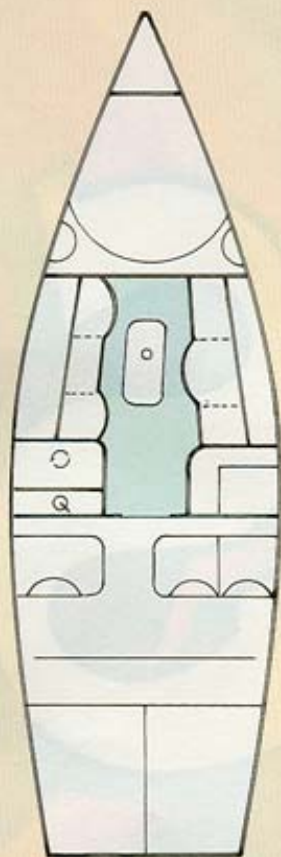
to the companionway. There's a separate Pioneer stereo system on deck, so you can listen to different music simultaneously in cockpit and cabin.

Aft, the hatch to the engine compartment opens gull-wing style, revealing a large work space with a diamond-plate walkway forward of the engines. Mirrors on the gunwales allow you to see both sides.

### Custom options

Where the Sport Cruiser varies from its flat-deck sibling is in offering more accommodations below. The raised deck allows for 6'6" headroom in the big salon area. An enclosed head and galley are standard. The color and fabric of the upholstery are up to the buyer. According to Sobo, Black Thunder's motto is "Production prices, but custom options." Black Thunder Powerboats, Dept. MB&S, 28 Paris Hills, Louisiana, MO 63353. (314) 939-2999.

—LOUISA RUDEEN



### BLACK THUNDER 43 SPORT CRUISER

**LOA:** 43'  
**Beam:** 9'6"  
**Draft:** 2'6"  
**Weight:** 11,500 lbs.  
**Water:** 25 gals.  
**Fuel:** 240 gals.  
**Power:** (2) 500-hp Mercs  
**Cruise:** 45 mph/3500 rpm  
**Top end:** 70 mph/5000 rpm  
**Price:** \$243,500

#### Standard items include:

- Kiekhaefer Zero Effort controls
- McLeod electric race bolsters
- Lowrance depthfinder
- TV/VCR
- Microwave
- Custom graphics