

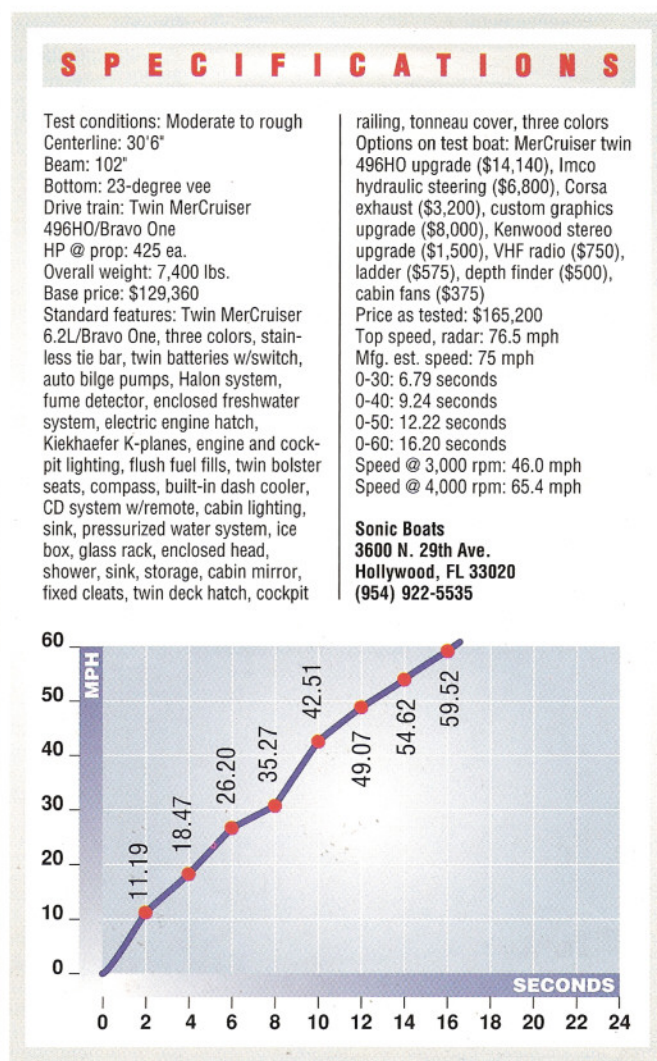
ance of our boat's exterior trim and hardware. Our boat's rigging eschewed the standard array of pop-up cleats, but included a rear swim ladder (\$575) that extended off the stern's molded, nonskid platform. Stainless railing ran from the windshield to the transom.

ONBOARD

Front passengers can sit and cruise comfortably, but after a few minutes, the natural tendency is to pull the key pins from the manual, drop-through bolsters, grab a fistful of the wheel and work the dedicated, Kiekhaefer throttle handles into a rhythm with the water. A retractable aluminum footrest enhanced front passenger comfort, and stainless railing on the bolster backs invited active rear passenger participation as we guided our responsive host through the swells. The integrated liner interior's big, comfortable, densely padded rear bench offers an attractive alternative for at least three, four snugly when required. The execution is classic, traditional, well done and, like the hull itself, solid. Snap-in carpeting dressed the cockpit, with another piece glued in below.

Stainless rail support lines the cockpit's interior perimeter, and it's backed with a padded, upholstered panel that provides great elbow and arm protection. Drink cups are built into the sides, and adjustable, acrylic wind deflectors were effective in updrafting headwind. The steering wheel is plotted down low, around midsection, a little lower than we're used to, but inconspicuously so.

A large, flat, rectangular dash surface angled three rows of Faria dials in a highly legible layout, within a large, powder-coated panel that also presented a row of engraved, identified rocker functions. The plane also displayed mechanical tab indicators (standard) and a depth finder (\$500). A VHF radio (\$700) was added, along with a Clarion CD, ten-speaker system upgrade (\$1,500). A deep, convenient



glove box is also standard.

The separate throttle sticks, with a single synchro trim button, and shifter sticks were positioned within a fiberglass panel, integrated into the deck mold. Our drivers liked the relative positioning of the seat, gauges and controls.

The cabin's flip-up doorway offers a hospitable reprieve from the elements and plenty of appointments in a clean, contemporary design that showed off more of Sonic's outstanding fiberglass craftsmanship. Our boat's optional cabin fans (\$375) assisted the dual deck hatches in ventilation of a very comfortable environment. Paneled sofa seating offered good head- and legroom, and lighting is built into the bulkheads. A counter-top with a molded-in sink and pressurized water system is standard, and there is storage

built into the forward berth base and along the sides.

PERFORMANCE

We found the twin-496 Sonic to be very well balanced, well behaved and a hell of a lot of fun to drive. It is certainly a product of its southern Florida roots and took some of the roughest of our test days in complete stride, passing on a controlled ride that made us appreciative of the tight workmanship. Though it would be at home on the lake, preferably one with long stretches of open water, it was bred for offshore use, and it passes muster there.

Its ability to plane without hesitation and its strong throttle surge off the line were key to the Sonic's outstanding performance in our acceleration trials, which began with a hard kick from 0 to 40 in 9.24 seconds. We were all over the cruising

range, 30 to 55 mph, without any hint of porpoise or rock. The boat trims in nicely in rough water, knifing through it with a sharp, straked entry, and airs out on command. It showed poise in all sorts of water and didn't require a great deal of driver input to adapt to changing conditions. Driving the Sonic doesn't require a lot of effort, and the boat is very reactive to control signals. It's a relatively easy boat to drive to full potential.

Bury the throttle and mix in the trim, and the Sonic shows the same strong response all the way through its power range. We peaked at 4,800, a little shy of the 496's 5K summit, and stormed to 60 in a very respectable 16.2 seconds. At just 3,000, we ran 46 miles an hour, testimony to the efficiency of this nearly four-ton package.

The ride at speed was controlled and exhilarating, with the bottom securely hooked up, instantly translating driver command to motion. We unfurled a rapid succession of 75-plus-mile-an-hour passes, executed with the same smooth control and drivability that pervades the Sonic experience. In short, this is a very well-rounded machine.

DRIVER'S HUDDLE

"Feels very sturdy and strong.... Nice fiberglass inner-liner and great glasswork belowdecks.... Very passenger-friendly, with exit/entry steps eliminating need to step on the upholstery; flat, nonskid outside gunnel area; and large swim platform.... Swim-ladder installation rattled a bit at certain rpm.... Steering was very controlled for a big, twin-vee.... Nice, deep-vee entry up front, squashed the rough water.... Dropping the seat to standing position is easier, but retrieving the seated slot is a little less so on the move.... Nice positioning of the fiberglass throttle/shifter control panel.... Throttle the boat as hard as you want off the line, and responds—rare in this size class.... Felt lighter than its true weight at cruise and above.... Good top speed and an efficient cruiser...."