

Sunseeker Predator 68

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SPECS

Year 2004	Standard Power
LOA 66'9"	2/1,300-hp MAN D2842 LE 404 diesel inboards
Beam 17'1"	Optional Power
Draft 4'8"	2/1,500-hp MAN D2842 LE 409 diesel inboards
Fuel Capacity (In Gallons) 1030	Controls ZF Mathers electronic
	Weight 66140 pounds
	Steering
	Teleflex SeaStar hydraulic, power-assisted

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A cold front had swept in overnight and taken out the mild, calm weather most of South Florida had been experiencing. I looked east to the Gulf Stream and noticed what appeared to be distinct ripples on the horizon—like those fake waves you see being moved by hand at your child's third grade production of *The Little Mermaid*. I hit WX on the VHF and got the following mechanically staccato message: "...with the Gulf Stream experiencing seas of 10 to 12 feet..." Oh well, no lunch at Old Bahama Bay today. It's one thing getting caught unaware in weather and quite another to go looking for it.

Nevertheless, I had the Predator 68 running quite smoothly considering the conditions we were in and noticed little or no wallowing or pounding as the sleek hull moved through the choppy water. Sure, I was working the wheel hard, but that was to be expected. So far this boat and I were getting along just fine. However, I was on a mostly southerly course, and once I turned the 68 around to see what she could do with the seas on the bow, the situation would probably be a very different one.

It was. From the almost predictable rhythm of that aft quartering sea, I was greeted by liquid turmoil. Now at 31 mph there was a fair amount of pounding, especially when the four-footers became sixes. I did manage, on several occasions, to send copious amounts of ocean across my starboard bow. It washed across the foredeck—a foredeck that with its sloping configuration looked like an Olympic ski jump from where I sat—and up onto the three wide forward windows. As the wind then sent it up and over the hardtop, I was glad I'd decided to keep the sunroof shut. (At the push of a button, a large section of the hardtop slides aft.)

Throttling down to 1500 rpm, I had her running at about 25 mph (22 knots), much more comfortable. Here there was no pounding, and when one of the waves decided to stand up a little taller, the 68 put her shoulder to it and pushed right on through. Even with these seas, I noticed her quick, precise handling when I brought her about on several maneuvers.

Working the throttles and guiding the 68 through the water resulted in an exciting ride. She was putting on a good show, even in this sea. And that's just what Sunseeker had in mind with the Predator series: boats that are fast, even in less-than-ideal conditions. Afterwards, on protected waters, I posted an average WOT speed of almost 44 mph (38 knots) at 2300 rpm, a fast-cruise speed of more than 41 mph (36 knots) at 2250 rpm, and a slow-cruise speed of more than 31 mph (27 knots) at 1750 rpm.

While I was having quite the time running the 68 up and down the Pompano Beach coastline, it was time to get her back to the dock. We had three bridges to clear, and hoped to make Sunseeker Florida's facility in Pompano Beach in about 45 minutes.

The wind was still up as we approached the tightly packed marina—I had only seen boats moored this close at boat shows—and there was a fair amount of current running. However, the 68 answered the helm as quickly astern as she did forward, and with only a few nudges from the bow thruster, Casler had her in with barely a ripple to the boats to either side. Showing her stuff once again, this time in an unpredictable docking situation, the 68 was making a good first impression.

One should never underestimate the importance of a good first impression, and few builders are better at making an impression than Sunseeker. The 68 is one of four performance motoryachts offered by the Poole, England-based builder; her sister Predators include a 56, 61, and 75. (The 108 and 95/100-foot Predators are considered to be part of the Yacht series.) While each comes with different amenities and features, all share the same superb fit and finish and attention to detail. You only have to take a look around the 68 to see proof of that.

It all starts at the helm. There are two seats to starboard, with the outboard one being for the driver; a matching pair of seats to port is for guests, and all have stowage beneath. While I found the driver's seat comfortable, I was glad it converted to a bolster. I had difficulty seeing over the two-tiered helm—gauges on the upper level, flush-mounted electronics and rocker switches on the lower—and Ritchie compass in the middle of my sightline. I'm 5'9", and usually on this type of express boat I can get a good view ahead when seated if it has an adjustable seat. And even though I like to stand for a spell, on long trips a comfortable seat is my preference. However, once I flipped the bolster up, I was right there, even with the aforementioned trouble I was having seeing over the two-tiered helm design. "You get used to driving these bigger, long-nosed boats by looking up and way ahead," Casler said. He was right. Once I did, it was "lean back and enjoy the ride" time.

To make that ride even more enjoyable, there is a large entertainment space just aft of the helm including a Gaggenau electric grill, sink, stowage cabinet, cool box, integrated ice bucket, Raritan ice maker, and a cutting board with a pair of built-in drink holders. (Additional drink holders can be found at the helm and adjacent seating areas.) Find that secluded gunkhole, and with all these convenient features at the ready, a late-afternoon respite can become something special.

Behind the passenger seats to port is a four-seat banquette with stowage compartments beneath the cushions and, across the transom, another seating area with Besenzeni hi-lo table. The decks are all teak, including the steps and the swim platform. The platform hydraulically "sinks" about three feet, handy should you decide to carry your tender here instead of in the cavernous garage.

From my observations so far, it was obvious that Sunseeker had equipped the 68 with amenities for fun on the water. But what about the living accommodations? I found a three-stateroom, three-head configuration designed around the saloon and galley—sort of a "great room" concept. The forepeak and the master, which is aft and amidships of the saloon, both have en suite heads, while the twin-berth stateroom, whose entrance door is aft and to starboard of the saloon, utilizes the day head there. I found ample stowage areas in all the quarters for those long trips. For example, the forepeak's double berth has stowage beneath as well as a drawer in the island base and three cabinets on each side, and there's a closet to boot. The guest cabin has under-berth stowage and a closet. The master also has stowage beneath the double berth as well as a pair of closets.

The interior finish is of beautifully crafted cherry. The saloon's generous seating area, featuring a sweeping leather couch and hinged-leaf table—closed it's an intimate dinner for four; open, a banquet for eight—is to starboard. The galley, with long granite countertop, separate undercounter Sub-Zero refrigerator and freezer, four-burner Bosch electric stovetop, and Miele dishwasher, is to port. There are lots of cabinets and drawer space here, plus a Whirlpool microwave and built-in Black & Decker coffee maker.

While paying attention to creature comforts and practical design elements on the outside and inside, Sunseeker didn't forget about the hands-on skipper or owner. Access to the engine room is via a large hatch in the helm area, and once down there, I found plenty of room for such maintenance items as fluid checks and filter access. However, the fully stand-up area does slope down as you go aft; this is to accommodate the garage, so some bending is required there. Should the difficulties be far aft, such as problems with the steering quadrant, or if more headroom is required, removing the garage's two-piece sole gives complete access to the engine room. It's a job best done at the dock and will most likely involve two people.

Besides having to bolster up at the helm, the other drawback I noted is the crew quarters. Access is via a starboard transom hatch and down a vertical ladder that was a tight fit for me. Once there, I found a coffin-like berth and minimal stowage space. While such arrangements are common on boats destined for Europe, if this 68 were mine, I'd opt for using this entire area for stowage.

The combination of performance and luxury works well aboard the Predator 68. She's exciting to drive, and I can easily see how with all her amenities, this Sunseeker could take her owners and guests around in grand style with real flair. Part of that is courtesy of her racy good looks, and part is the notable woodwork and fine fit and finish found throughout her interior. As far as performance is concerned, the 68 definitely puts on a good show.

The Boat

Standard Equipment

Lewmar V4 windlass forward and 2/C3 warping winches aft; hydraulic swim platform; electrically operated transom garage; Superwinch X1 winch in garage for tender; Raritan 85 ice maker, Coolmatic ice chest, and AEG electric griddle in cockpit; Furuno M1762 radar; Simrad AP20 autopilot; IS12 electronic speed and depth indicators; Shipmate RS 8400 VHF; VDO analog engine instruments, rudder indicator, and freshwater and fuel gauges; Ritchie HF73 compass; Kohler 20-kW genset; Separ SWK 2000 fuel/water separators; Seafire automatic fire extinguishers; Newmar 95-amp battery charger for 24-volt circuits and 20-amp battery charger for 12-volt circuits

Optional Equipment

Furuno Navnet 1943C color LCD radar/plotter w/GP310B GPS antenna; Simrad RS87 VHF; freshwater washdown w/forward and aft outlets; Gaggenau lava rock cockpit grill; 37" Panasonic plasma TV in saloon; 20" Sharp LCD TV in master; 3/vertical port lights on each side in master; Combo-Matic 6100 washer/dryer; foredeck sunpad; granite countertops and soles in heads; Sunbrella canvas package

The Test

Test Boat Specifications

- **Test Engine:** 2/1,300-hp MAN D2842 LE 404 diesel inboards

- **Transmission/Ratio:** ZF190V/2.03:1

- **Props:** 32.5x46.5 5-blade

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