

PREDATOR 130

When Sunseeker moved into larger boats it entered a crowded market, but the company proved it wasn't to be underestimated. With this new, sleek contender, can it continue to build on its superyacht foundations?

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YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE SUNSEEKER, YOU REALLY DO. Whether you're a fan of its boats or not, the sheer determination and drive of this company is impressive. From very modest beginnings making sub-20ft runabouts near Poole, U.K., Sunseeker has grown into a major player in the global marine industry.

To give you an idea of just how far Sunseeker has come, it arrived at this year's Southampton International Boat Show with one of its earliest boats—a 1960s Hostess 17—in the tender garage of its most recent offering, the Predator 130. Even 10 years ago it seemed inconceivable that Sunseeker would become anything other than a successful builder of sub-80ft production boats, and yet here we are looking at a 131ft boat, and waiting expectantly for a new 151-footer yacht from the yard.

And all this at a time when the marine industry is facing its leanest years in living memory. As the global economy slides into recession and boatbuilders around the world cut back production (or go bust), Sunseeker continues to maintain a high profile, with new launches coming thick and fast, including five new models unveiled at Southampton.

At a time when other builders are facing an uncertain future, Sunseeker's continuing success can be viewed as a result of inspired leadership, sheer good fortune, or a mixture of the two. Certainly the bottom has dropped out of the mid-range production cruiser market, with sales of 40 to 60ft boats almost at a standstill. Five years ago, Sunseeker's pursuit of big money from big boats appeared almost unseemly. "They've abandoned their traditional market," decried industry analysts. "They'll never compete with the 'proper' yards," opined the experts. Now, the move toward bigger boats looks inspired, but it seemed like a big gamble a few years back.

Of course, not even Robert Braithwaite, Sunseeker's founder, could have predicted the global banking crisis of »



THE PREDATOR 130 CAPITALIZES ON A CLEVER BLEND OF STYLING NOTES FROM THE LARGE-YACHT RANGE AND THE BIGGER PREDATORS, ACHIEVING A LOOK THAT IS DISTINCTIVELY “SUNSEEKER.”



Our sea trials confirmed the solid performance of the 130, with a comfortable cruising speed matched by good seakeeping in choppy seas.

2008, but his decision to move up to the superyacht market, just before the bottom fell out of the production boat market, was a good one. Even so, the success is by no means guaranteed, and the 100 to 150ft market is a crowded and competitive one. Any regular visitor to the Cannes or Genoa boat shows will know that there are numerous European yards offering some stand-out crafts at this length. If Sunseeker was to succeed in this market, it needed to get things right, straight away, and with no errors.

But Sunseeker did get it right, both with the 37 Meter Yacht (121ft) and the 34 Meter Yacht (112ft). The styling was right for its market, the build quality was good, the equipment and systems were well thought through. Sunseeker confounded its critics and produced

the goods, and it is testament to the success of the design that in last August alone several orders were taken for 121-footers.

And so we come to its latest offering—the Predator 130. Built on the successes of the smaller Predators in the range, and the know-how gained from building the 112 and 121 series, the new 130 is up against boats from Baglietto, Tecnomar, Admiral, Pershing, and others. That’s some heavyweight competition, but Sunseeker has been refining the Predator range over the last decade to produce some stunning boats, albeit on a smaller scale.

At first glance, this market might also appear to be one to avoid, but despite the state of the economy, Robert Braithwaite is optimistic: “There has been an impact on the business due to the global economic downturn, and we »



Clients are offered several options for layout customization, including the potential for fold-out balconies in the salon and master suite.



have attempted to reduce the effect as much as possible,” he explains. “We have seen a reduction in the sales of smaller models but orders for the larger models have remained steady. The success of the 121 and 112 series has encouraged sales for the larger models from new markets such as the Far East and Middle East, and we have a very healthy order book.”

The experience gained from building the 112 and 121ft yachts has been key to the Predator 130. A 130ft boat needs different systems to smaller production boats, a different design philosophy, and a level of attention to detail that you rarely find on a production boat. Although much of the design philosophy and language may be the same as in the smaller Predators, the fact is that a Predator 130 is a very different animal from the Predator 84 or 108. In fact, it’s much more closely related to the 121-footer than any of the Predators.

This is a good thing, because not only is everything bigger on a 130, you also need proper “big boat” components, with built-in backups. Everything, from stabilizers to generators, needs to be state-of-the-art equipment and tested

at the highest level. Many of these systems on the 130 have now been extensively tested in the 121 and 112 series, so Sunseeker already knows what works and what doesn’t, and how best to install and maintain it.

The similarities with the 121 don’t end with the use of key components, either—the hull of the 130 is basically a stretched 121, with a different superstructure and sleeker styling. In terms of design, the Predator 130 achieves a clever blend of styling notes from the large-yacht range and the bigger Predators, achieving a look that is distinctively “Sunseeker.”

The layout of the 130 follows the established industry standard for this type of boat, with a vast full-width master suite forward on the main deck, four large guest cabins (two doubles and two twins) on the lower deck, a raised pilothouse, and a substantial flybridge. Separate crew quarters can be found forward on the lower deck, allowing for a crew of up to seven. This has proved to be the optimal layout for sub-130ft sportcruisers, and it works particularly well on the Predator 130.

On this first boat, there are a number of variations



from “standard” in that one of the guest twin cabins on the accommodations deck has been given over to a gym, and the layout of the flybridge accommodating a large transverse wet-bar is up to owner preference.

There are also differences to the 121 necessitated by the Predator’s distinctive and lower lines. The captain’s cabin, which on the 121 was adjacent to the pilothouse, is now found with the rest of the crew quarters, and the height of the pilothouse is lower to allow for a sleeker external outline.

But perhaps the most significant difference is the appearance of optional fold-out balconies for the salon and master suite. On this particular boat, they are only found on the port side of the master suite and both sides of the salon, but there is the option to have up to four of them. Stefan Whitmarsh, project manager on the 130, confesses that “they were a real challenge, but Besenzoni [who built the master-suite balcony] and Sunseeker did a great job building them.” Whether you like fold-down balconies on boats or not, there’s no denying that they certainly give the big Predator a significant “wow” factor.

With regard to the interior of the 130, the design and materials (as specified by the owner) are safe rather than exceptional. The pale oak cabinetry and floors give the communal areas a sunny, bright feel that makes a change from the black walnut and wengé we’ve become accustomed to, and while somewhat understated it does show that Sunseeker is capable of accommodating any style of interior finish.

The exterior styling, though, is uniquely and unashamedly Sunseeker, giving the boat a lean, sleek look not >

The full-width owner’s suite is located forward on the main deck. Future 130s will feature redesigned balcony mechanisms that will reduce the intrusion into the bedroom space.



The lower deck comprises two large double guest cabins and two twins that can convert to doubles. There is also the option to customize cabin use, as on the first 130, which features a gym in place of a twin.



Built heavier and stronger than her smaller predecessors, the 130 still achieves a 27-knot max speed.

unlike a squashed 121-footer. It doesn't look as mean and purposeful as some of the smaller Predators, but it is distinctively different from the bigger yachts in Sunseeker's range while still being very obviously a Sunseeker.

The exterior styling is not the only thing slightly un-Predator-like about the 130. The performance is pretty modest, too. With a pair of MTU M93L diesels giving a total of 6,920hp, the top speed of this 130 is around 27 knots. That's not bad for a 130ft boat, but the 108 Predator will touch 42 knots. Of course, the reason is

power and weight—the 130 weighs tons, while the 108 weighs 83 tons. The fact is, the 130 has made the step from semi-production boat to proper superyacht, and has been built commensurately heavier and stronger. It is possible to get the 130 to go faster, but it would take a lot more horsepower and money to do it, and not many customers want to be messing with gas-turbine engines and the like.

On a run from Poole to Southampton aboard the 130, we found the performance more than adequate, cruising comfortably at 22 or 23 knots, and feeling calm and unruffled at 28 knots flat-out. The 130's seakeeping abilities impressed, even in some quite choppy conditions. Even without the stabilizers, there was little rolling in evidence. Down on the accommodations deck, the hard work Sunseeker has put into noise and vibration reduction is apparent when under way. Indeed, the practical nature of the 130 is apparent all over the boat, from the machinery space next to the galley, which houses the electrical switches and entertainment systems, to the storage of seat cushions. This is a well-thought-out boat, both from an owner and guest perspective, and also from a crew perspective.

The Predator 130 represents the next step in Sunseeker's move upmarket. The company hasn't, and probably never will, abandon its smaller production boats, but at a time when production boat sales are struggling, the step up to superyachts makes perfect sense. ☐

LOA: 126ft 8in (38.62m)
LWL: 101ft 6in (30.93m)
BEAM: 24ft 4in (7.42m)
DRAFT: 8ft 9in (2.66m)
DISPLACEMENT: 196 tons
ENGINES: 2 x MTU 12V 4000 M93L 3,460hp

READER'S RESOURCE

Sunseeker International
 27-31 West Quay Rd
 Poole, Dorset, UK
 Tel: +44 (0) 1202 381111
 Fax: +44 (0) 1202 382222
 E-mail: info@sunseeker.com
 www.sunseeker.com

SPEED (MAX/CRUISE):
 27/20 knots
RANGE: 4,000nm @ 20 knots

FUEL CAPACITY:
 7,347 U.S. gallons
THRUSTERS: ARCTURUS

MARINE TRAC 370
 Digital Fin
STABILIZERS: ARCTURUS

MARINE TRAC-STAR at-anchor
GENERATORS:
 2 x Kohler 70kW
FRESHWATER CAPACITY:
 1,382 U.S. gallons
GREY/BLACK WATER CAPACITY:
 379 U.S. gallons/
 392 U.S. gallons
OWNER AND GUESTS: 12
CREW: 8
TENDERS: Client specified; typically 16ft diesel RIB
CONSTRUCTION: FRP composite, single skin bottom, cored topsides
NAVAL ARCHITECT:
 Sunseeker International
EXTERIOR STYLING:
 Sunseeker International
INTERIOR DESIGN:
 Design Unlimited/
 Sunseeker International
BUILDER:
 Sunseeker International

