

SHOCKWAVE

29 Magnitude

Little has changed with this exceptionally versatile family sport boat, still one of the best-priced, most value-giving boats you'll find.

Sometimes at our performance evaluations we have the opportunity to test brand-new model boats. And usually, those are our most anticipated tests, anxious to see what new technologies and designs are going to be leading the industry in the coming year.

Then there are the tests where we scrutinize models that have become familiar faces because they've earned a level of popularity among boaters for a myriad of reasons. Our evaluation of the 29 Magnitude by Shockwave is one such test.

Introduced in the 1998 model year, the 29 Magnitude is one model that has benefited thanks to better, more efficient propellers and improved engine/propulsion options. When it debuted almost nine years ago, the 29 Magnitude was an undeniably handsome hull, a marina attention-grabber thanks to its well-proportioned exterior contours and substantial mass, especially noted in the freeboard area that translates into lots of headroom in the below-deck cabin. The Magnitude was a big, generously sized 29-footer back then, and it still is now.

The question, however, was what power to pack under the engine hatch of the Magnitude in '98. Was a 29-footer a sin-

gle-engine-style boat, or perhaps better suited for a pair of V-8s? Potential customers were split on the question. Some opted for the solo-engine route, while others wanted to be sure that they weren't lacking for horsepower and chose twins. In the end, both options worked well, but there was never a clear-cut winner.

In fact, in January 2004 we reported on another single-engine-powered 29 Magnitude. This one was a cuddly/bowrider with a rather potent 775-horsepower Whipple supercharged engine under the hatch. Yes, it was fast, 89 miles an hour on the top end to be precise with still more to go with the on-board rev limiter cutting in. Overall, it was impressive in all categories, a great crossover from family sport boat to serious lake rocket.

Today, the engine debate is probably a little less puzzling. Thanks to recent advancements in propeller design and technology, a stock single stern drive has no problem handling the propulsion needs of a 5,200-pound sport boat like the 29 Magnitude. Sure, twins are still available for those with inflated performance needs and a liberal boating budget to match, but today, singles are where the market is for a 29-footer and no apologies need be made.

The View From On Board

The power of choice for our test candidate closed-deck Shockwave Magnitude was MerCruiser's top-of-the-line production offering, the popular 496 Mag HO, a surprisingly responsive stock package that seems to us to be conservatively rated at 425 horsepower. Although it's not one of the hand-built Mercury Racing 525HPs which are many thousands of dollars more in cost to the consumer, the HO version of the 496





is no slacker when it comes to delivering your money's worth with performance.

It was also encouraging to note that Shockwave also included a set of Dana Products trim tabs with the package since a boat like this is likely to see a wide variety of boating locales, some possibly requiring the extra ride control of a good set of adjustable tabs. Since our test ride was taking place on the relatively calm waters of Lake Havasu, we really didn't find a situation where we benefitted by lowering the tabs. No sense in scrubbing off speed just for the sake of running down the tabs.

Our only additional note here is to recommend adding a trim-tab indicator gauge on the dash to give the driver a visual point of reference of exactly where the tabs are positioned. If they're always going to be in the full-up position, no problem. But as soon as you encounter water conditions or an on-board load factor that calls for the tabs to come into play, knowing where each tab is actually positioned definitely makes driving

a whole lot easier and more enjoyable.

I think we've made our point that the 29 Magnitude is physically one of the largest 29-foot vee-bottom sport cruisers on the market. Just take a look at the dimensions—a full 29-feet of hull down the center (no extra bonus for a Euro-style swim platform) and a wide 102-inch beam that Shockwave seems to understand how to put to optimum use.

The main cockpit is anything but cramped. The two stand-up bolsters (with drop-out seat cushions) are thickly upholstered and very comfortable in either the sit-down or erect position. Just as important, the walk-through space between the two bolsters is a full 19 inches. No turning sideways to fit through this frequently used passageway. The aft bench seat is also just as spacious, easily accommodating four adults. Since the 29 Magnitude is such a deep boat, even a couple of passengers in the back have the option of riding in an upright position thanks to the fact that

Shockwave has installed sturdy grabrails to the backside of the bolsters and adjacent port and starboard gunnels for support.

A lot of boat buyers don't seem to pay a lot of attention to the transom area of their boat. Big mistake. If you want to enjoy swimming, wakeboarding, skiing, and a host of other water-toy fun, the necessity of having a stern that's configured so it's functional for convenient boarding and debarking is an absolute must. And here's how Shockwave has addressed this issue with a high freeboard-style boat like the Magnitude. Just behind the engine hatch is a recessed mini-swim-step area outfitted with a piece of billet hardware that offers a place to attach a ski rope, more grabhandles on both sides of the deck, plus a three-loop handle right in the center of the upper transom. The mini swim-step isn't wide enough to stand-on and comfortably put on a wakeboard, but more than adequate in size for stepping up onto the padded engine hatch, or stepping down to access the very large near water-level swim platform below.

This big swim platform is a fiberglass bolt-on, but who cares? It works exactly as intended. It affords plenty of space at water-level and it also acts as a protective human shield, keeping swimmer/skier and drive unit/propeller with plenty of prudent separation.

In general, most performance sport boats don't have much to brag about when it comes to their forward cabin. The majority are short on headroom and the entry-way access is routinely undersized. The 29 Magnitude suffers from none of these common problems. Floor-to-deck height is a generous 60 inches. And when seated in the facing couches, seat cushion to the top of the cabin ceiling is an ample 46 inches, plenty for a six-footer to relax without twisting his neck. And if you happen to decide to do a little overnighting, the forward vee-berth is actually adult-sized.

Quality and workmanship is always something that needs to be scrutinized carefully, especially when it comes to making a near \$100,000 purchase. Shock-wave doesn't disappoint in this area either—deck hardware is through-bolted, behind the instrument panel electrical wiring is neat and correctly color-coded, upholstery is stitched with surgeon-like care, and mold and gelcoat art has been applied with flawless precision. Although you can't see it, the 29 Magnitude is impressively constructed. The hull and deck are hand laid using 48-oz. Quad and 1708 bi-directional material with balsa core and core matt reinforcement. Running length-wise down the hull are four full-length encapsulated stringers. No wonder this hull feels so sturdy and rigid, practically oblivious to water conditions regardless of how horrendous.





Behind the Throttle

Maybe the average reader of this test report isn't going to be too impressed with a boat having a top speed of 63.3 miles an hour. Considering that slightly more than half the boats (28 in total) we tested for our 2007 performance reports cracked the 80-mph mark, that's not difficult to understand. In fact, only one boat at our tests was slower on the top end than the Magnitude. But that really doesn't tell the story.

Although it had the highest power-to-weight ratio (1 horsepower for every 12.23 pounds of payload), amazingly, the Shockwave finished in the upper one-half of all our test boats in acceleration time with 8.53 seconds on the 0-30 mph test. Very quick reaction and fast planing for a boat weighing more than 2.5 tons.

Looking at the bottom design, the 29 Magnitude is pretty straightforward. Its

deadrise is an aggressive 24 degrees qualifying it as a true offshore-style hull. The bottom consists of four continuous parallel lifting strakes with two one-inch deep steps, the first at mid-ship and the second about six feet from the transom. What's most evident is the effect this configuration has on the ride quality of the boat. It's easily one of the softest entry 29-foot sport boats that you'll find on the market. Instead of an anticipated sharp jolt or an abrupt spine-jarring crack, the Magnitude slices wakes and flattens rough water with magic-carpet ease. This is something that needs to be factored into every buying decision, especially when it's family boating first on the line.

If anyone is concerned about the degree of driving difficulty, the 29 Magnitude ranks at the very bottom of this scale. All you need to remember is trim the drive

Speeds & Specs

Overall Length: 29' 0"
 Beam: 102"
 Drivetrain: MerCruiser 496 Mag HO
 Horsepower: 425
 Propeller: 23 pitch Mercury Revolution (four-blade, stainless steel)
 Base price: N/A
 Standard features: MerCruiser 496 Mag, billet hardware, Zero Effort controls, drop-out bolster seats, compass, tilt steering helm, depth finder, CD stereo with four speakers, cabin cabinets with freshwater sink, anchor storage, fiberglass swim platform, thru-bolted hardware, 4" exhaust tips, IMCO electric fuel valve switchover, dual batteries with switch, electric power hatch, ski/wakeboard storage, fans and lights in cuddy cabin, 40-oz. marine carpet, gelcoat graphics to match interior, S/S prop, S/S railings, S/S bimini top, storage cover.
 Options on test boat:
 MerCruiser 496 Mag HO: N/A
 Stereo transom control: N/A
 Price as tested: N/A
 Top speed, tested: 63.3 mph
 0-30 mph: 8.53 seconds
 0-40 mph: 12.09 seconds
 0-50 mph: 18.33 seconds
 0-60 mph: 34.52 seconds
 30-60 mph: 25.99 seconds
 Speed @ 3,000 rpm: 36.6mph
 Speed @ 4,000 rpm: 49.7 mph

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all the way in when getting on plane and you can see the result in the impressive acceleration numbers. Very minimal bowrise to contend with and absolutely no propeller ventilation. At moderate planing speeds, the 29 likes the trim just slightly out passed the neutral position. If you forget to do that, it's not a problem. The boat is very trim forgiving. As you work your way up the speed spectrum, more positive trim is a good thing as the bow lifts slightly. At rpm above the 4,000 level, don't expect a lot of throttle response. Instead, be a little patient, let the engine wind out to a maximum of 4,900 and keep adjusting the trim in small increments. You'll know when you reach the "sweet-spot" which netted us our best wide-open-throttle run of the day, 63.3 mph.

When we test drove the "hot rod" version of the 29 Magnitude nearly three years ago, we liked virtually every facet it had to offer. In retrospect, not much has changed, and that's a good thing for this exceptionally versatile family sport boat. It's still one of the best-priced, most value-giving boats you'll find. If you're the kind of boater who appreciates substance, comfort and quality, and aren't infatuated with triple-digital top end, you've probably found a match. ■