



SHOCKWAVE

21' STEP SKIER

MERCUISER

7.4MPI/BRAVO 1



Superior rigging, cosmetics and interior workmanship, and lots of room throughout. Classy and comfortable, with stable, responsive manners.

"A nicely done family bowrider with great handling and acceleration.

Overall, a nice job all around."

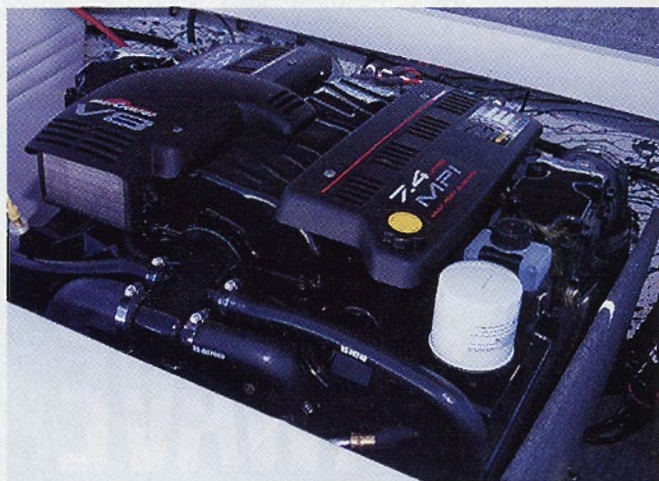
—BOB BROWN

To the boater looking to park a family bowrider in his garage this year, more power to you: The performance boating universe is clearly your oyster. During the last decade, the open-bow performance boat has become an industry staple, emerging as the best-selling configuration in the history of performance powerboating. Just because everybody has one, however, does not mean that they are all the same. Once you get by the basics—U-shaped seating area in front, V-8 in back—there are vast differences in what lies in between.

One builder brings its own, unique perspective to the open-bow building party. Before kicking off Shockwave Boats three years ago, the company's principals played key, freelance roles in the layup, rigging, and gelcoating of custom boats for some of the industry's most highly-regarded builders—at least one of which was rewarded with our Boat of the Year honors. Now empowered with

a complete set of viable molds of their own and the seasoned talent to put them to full advantage, Shockwave continues to gather momentum in the production of their polished line of family performance fare.

The 21-foot Step Skier is the latest to emerge from Shockwave's expanding line. This roomy family bowrider integrates Shockwave's fine detail work with a newly tooled step bottom, a union that was engineered to provide every expected convenience of the genre while extracting an extra performance kick from the available power. The company's hands-on history was fully utilized during the development of the Skier, which involved building a floating, running plug and making appropriate adjustments as the project took shape on the local waters of Lake Elsinore. "This was not about running a bottom up on some computer program and calling it the 'next big thing,'" said Danny Mancini, who along with veteran rigger Bob Anderson founded Shockwave. "We



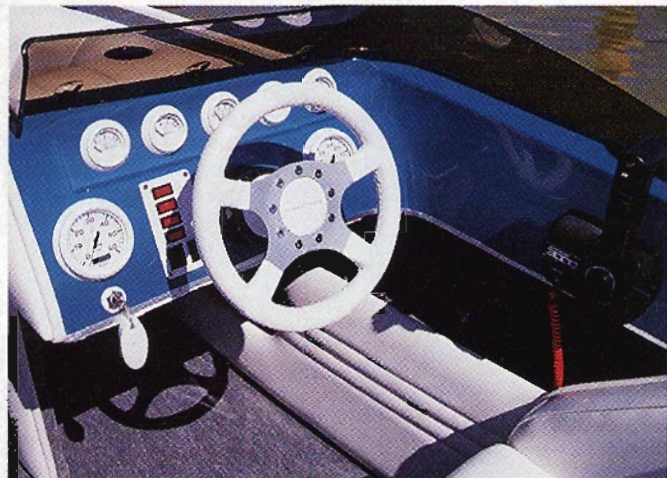
ran the prototype plug several months before we made our step mold."

THE PACKAGE

Shockwave focused its interior design and layout on creating as much secure, usable space as possible in the main passenger area, where rich, dense, back-to-back buckets and a nicely angled

rear bench seat are planted deeply into the cockpit. The large, deeply-padded front buckets are rooted well away from the helm, giving front passengers more than abundant leg room. Ditto for those in the rear jumper seats, as well as those seated in the comfortable bench. Front and rear arm rests are nicely padded and house integrated drink holders. Seat frames are built using fabric-





backed, resin-coated wood.

There is a more than average freeboard built into the Skier, giving it more gunnel depth than some of its peers—a feature most appreciated by the family boater with small children. The bow section is also fairly deep, nicely done and very comfortable; it houses an anchor storage cubbyhole as well as two drink holders. The Skier could conceivably haul ten

people in relative comfort. Interior fit and finish are excellent all the way around, and it becomes apparent from the moment you board that its builders know their way around the custom bowrider. The upholstery was beautifully stitched, and used a pattern of large horizontal and vertical pleats throughout that very effectively accented its all-white design. Among the Shockwave's stan-

dard interior features: in-floor ski locker (large enough for a wakeboard or two) and oversized, gel-coated ice chest, both of which utilized Velcro (not heat-seeking hinges) to secure their lids.

There were no rear grab handles placed in the boat, an omission that is not necessarily an issue in a setup that runs in the mid-60s, but certainly should be addressed with the 454 Magnum upgrade, which Shockwave says propels the step-bottom into the mid-70s.

The engine hatch, which opens electrically (at \$475, one of the boat's few options), doubles as a nicely padded sunning area. Further aft, deep-water boarding is made easier with a split-step, fiberglass swim platform and grab handles that are recessed into a small rear step. All of the hull's edges and human contact points have been softly rounded in the interests of passenger comfort, and our test team noted this area in awarding high marks overall to Shockwave's tooling efforts.

Our evaluation team encountered any number of indicators of

the builder's obsession with detail. For one, even the bottoms of the swim steps were gelcoated; also, the underdeck storage area was finished off with a tidy headliner. A snap-on dash cover came standard. There were no corners cut in this installation. To the contrary: Shockwave obviously devotes a top-heavy ratio of man-hours for every boat they produce.

A sturdy, acrylic two-piece wind deflector crowned the gelcoated dash area, and was somewhat effective in diverting flow. A stylish, engraved switch panel (by Eddie Marine) housed a full array of rockers, all of which were easily accessible while underway. A cluster of white-faced Faria dials were framed with matching flat, powder-coated Eddie Marine bezels and were grouped on the driver's dash area. Most were at least partially obscured by the steering wheel. One of our evaluators also questioned the placement of the standard MerCruiser Quicksilver controls, which were somewhat awkward in their positioning. However, none of our performance driving team mentioned this.

Storage is plentiful, and Shockwave's designers created more of it at every opportunity. Gear was securely stashed in the segmented engine compartment, in the framework of the front, rear, and bow seats and beneath the front dash areas.

Our tester was powered by MerCruiser's base, 310-horse fuel-injected big block (7.4L mpi), which pounded out more than enough muscle to respectably motivate this substantial, 3,300-pound package. The Bravo I drive ran 1.5:1 gearing, and a 23-foot three-blade Mercury Mirage prop Exhaust ran through the transom.

The Skier's rigging showcased its builders' considerable talents, as well as a beautiful contingent of powder-coated Eddie Marine billet hardware. Four cleats fit flush into tooled recesses, as did the trick, billet fuel fills. Low-profile, powder-coated stainless railing snugly lined the perimeter of the bow, and all hardware was through-bolted—down to the low-impact, bimini attachments.

Mancini used his well-known gelcoating talent to full advantage in spraying our test boat, using four colors (with subtle fades) and an apparently flawless execution in creating a suitably rich scheme to compliment the white interior work and overall whiteout appearance. The results were striking, to say the least.



PERFORMANCE

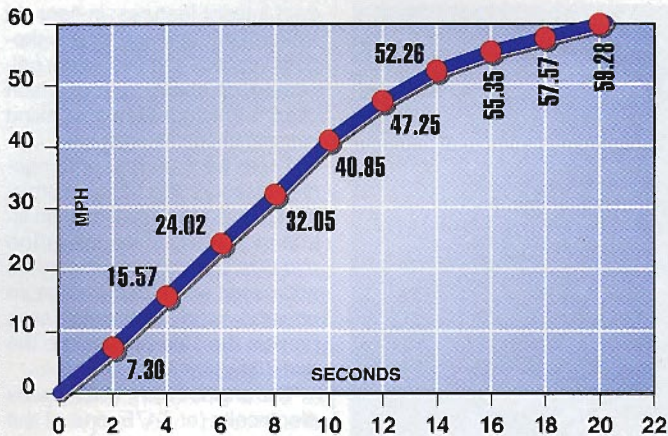
Some step-bottoms we've driven have given us fits with their wayward, low-rpm control and inherent wander—weaknesses that failed to show here as we put the Skier through our low-speed regimen of maneuvers. It eased nimbly through our cone course and responded immediately to throttle, trimming up immediately and rolling nicely onto plane. Only three stock stern-drive packages we tested hit the 30 and 40 mph marks more quickly, and there was no hesitation as the Shockwave found its set and hugged it.

Throughout its power curve, this boat was delightfully sensitive to drive trim, making it easy to tune its ride to changing water conditions and passenger load. It took a determined, bow-strong crouch as we trimmed it into choppy water, and it floated nicely up front without losing visibility or its secure feel as we aired it out during high-speed passes.

This heightened sensitivity was a by-product of the Skier's bottom design, which used two small pads—one on the front step, one flattening the keel—to minimize speed-sapping drag. A sharply cut 24-degree entry tapered to 20 degrees deadrise at the design's notched transom.

It also naturally followed that it was more reactive to cross-chop and changing surface than the average conventional bottom, and required trim-tuning when they were encountered. The Skier proved completely predictable and drew top marks for its easy, comfortable driveability.

Run in a midrange cruise mode, the Skier found a flat, sta-



ble attitude and held it. We cruised easily at 4,000 rpm (54.3 mph), and found the basic, 310-horse big block a great match for all-around family use. The Skier pulled impressively all the way up the ladder, and hit a 50

mph clip in a respectable 13.01 seconds. On its way to our radar-checked 64.7 mph top end, our drivers noted the Shockwave's rock-solid, rattle-free feel—not surprising given its makers' extensive production experience.



As we powered the Skier into a series of progressively faster, tighter sweeper turns, we were taken with its steady, positive response. It showed no sign of blowout and carved equally well in both directions. Increasing the speed and reducing the radius produced more of the same tight, controlled response.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Step Skier combines flawless workmanship and gorgeous interior execution with a stable, responsive bottom that made great use of our allotted 310 horsepower. At \$33,625 as tested, it offers inherent value, great styling, and performance that's sure to satisfy the needs of the upscale, performance-oriented family. Shockwave continues to impress. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

Centerline length: 21'
 Beam: 94"
 Hull design: Stepped 20-degree vee
 Engine/drive: MerCruiser 7.4L MPI
 Horsepower @ prop: 310
 Drive ratio: 1.5:1
 Prop: 23' Mercury 3-blade
 Base retail price, incl. trailer: \$31,900
 Standard features: Unlimited gel-coat, billet Eddie Marine hardware, stainless bowrails, fiberglass swim steps, ice chest, anchor locker, electric fuel switch, ski locker, drink holders, dash snap cover.
 Options on test boat: Through-hull stainless exhaust (\$450), power hatch (\$475), white-out kit (\$175), stainless bimini top (\$625)
 Price as tested: \$33,625
 Performance
 Top speed, radar: 64.7 mph
 Maximum rpm: 5,000
 0-30: 7.46 seconds
 0-40: 9.76 seconds
 0-50: 13.01 seconds
 0-60: 20.62 seconds
 Speed at 3,000 rpm: 38.9 mph
 Speed at 4,000 rpm: 54.3 mph

