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A Seaworthy Express Cruiser
Tested by Capt. Vincent Daniello

I love being on the water. Whether it's a calm, sunny, picture-perfect day, or gray, blustery and cold, I revere the beauty and power of the ocean. Call it Mother Nature, King Neptune, the Lure of the Sea, or the sciences of Meteorology and Oceanography; there is some force greater than ourselves living in the ocean, which inexplicably draws some of us.

On the other hand, as a professional captain I've been stuck at the helm in wet, nasty weather enough to appreciate an enclosed bridge and a hot cup of coffee when Poseidon flexes his muscles. This is a large part of why I've always preferred express boats, which typically feature a full windshield and some sort of enclosure. Sabreline's new 42 Express takes this concept one step further with a hard, cabin-like enclosure, large opening windows, and even an optional climate control system to allow the captain and crew to experience all of the beauty of Mother Nature, while being insulated from the unpleasant side of her personality.

The Advantage of Express Cruisers

Besides a dry ride for the skipper, express boats offer several advantages. For a given size boat, the area around the helm is larger and offers more seating, which helps keep the captain involved in the activities. Whether for a quick snack on a nighttime passage or lunch underway, the galley is just a few steps away from the helm (as is the head.) Without the weight of a flying bridge, the lower center of gravity increases stability; and a warm, dry enclosed bridge extends the boating season.

The Trade Off

There are a few trade-offs. Visibility is generally better from a flying bridge, especially for fishing or running reefs in the Islands, and express-style boats don't have the large saloon and galley-up configuration seen on many sedan cruisers. But Sabreline's hard enclosure, with large opening windows, three-hundred-and-sixty-degree visibility, and air conditioning offers the comfort of a saloon but with a much stronger connection to the outside environment. Whether underway or at the dock, those who enjoy being on the water will love the feel of the 42's enclosed bridgedeck.

Cruising Speed and Range

The 42 Express, and all of Sabreline's current production feature at least a 25 knot cruising speed, which is another important element in my boating philosophy. It seems many people who prefer a traditionally-styled boat like the Sabreline believe that slow boats are much more economical. This is somewhat true when analyzing hard cost per mile traveled, but for those of us who are not retired, or have other responsibilities and commitments, a slow boat is often a false economy.

At twelve knots, an 80 nautical mile trip, such as West Palm Beach to Lucaya, Grand Bahama, will take most of the day. At 26 knots, the 42 Sabreline will make the same

trip in about three hours and burn about 60 gallons more diesel. For an extra hundred bucks each way, a three day trip to the Bahamas becomes much more practical. Also, fast boats can often outrun nasty weather, or get to help more quickly in a medical emergency.

Functional Layout

In addition to the hard enclosure, the 42 Express has many crew-friendly features. The steps leading from the cockpit, wide side decks, and numerous stout handrails make the walk to the bow safe and comfortable. The bow is configured for two anchors, important for Bahamas cruising, and includes three separate compartments. Port and starboard hatches in the deck reveal deep storage lockers for anchor rodes, dock lines, and even fenders. The center compartment keeps the main anchor rode away from the storage lockers where it can't be tangled in loose gear. This center locker is accessible through a hatch just inside the starboard deck locker. The foredeck also includes numerous opening hatches and portlights.

On Deck

The cockpit is quite large with high gunnels for safety and two aft-facing bench seats. Sabreline includes a grab rail on the swim platform to help when climbing out of the water, and hardware to automatically latch the transom door open; both extremely helpful features that are often overlooked by manufacturers. The lazarette is accessed through three huge hatches with pneumatic lifts for easy opening. The rudder posts, tiller arms, and tie bar are enclosed in a fiberglass box so that stored equipment can't foul the steering gear. Storage lockers beneath the cockpit seats and bridgedeck settee feature weather-tight lids and smooth gelcoat interiors.

On the bridgedeck, the sliding windows and overhead hatches let in lots of light and fresh air, but I found the center hinged windshield a bit too heavy to open without help. I also found the bi-fold door to the cabin difficult to open unless the port helm chair was facing exactly forward, although with the enclosed bridgedeck, this door can be left open most of the time.

The Engine Room

The engine room is easily accessed through a large hatch next to the helm, with a well designed ladder and plenty of room to work on everything. Sea strainers and fuel filters are easily accessed, but for boats that intend to cruise the Bahamas or other locations where an occasional dose of dirty fuel is anticipated, an additional fuel shut off valve near each Racor filter would be helpful. On our test boat, the shut off valves were in the cockpit, which is fine for normal maintenance but somewhat inconvenient for changing filters while underway.

Below Deck

Below deck, the teak and holly cabin sole and hand-rubbed, varnished cherry interior feel traditionally nautical; yet the clean lines, open spaces, and birdseye maple table keep it contemporary. Sabreline offers plenty of storage, and includes an oversized refrigerator and separate freezer for extended cruises. I really liked the head, which features a stall shower with a clear plexiglas door and clear bulkhead for an added sense of space while showering. Considering that this boat was designed for comfort while underway, I would have preferred to see some handrails in the cabin. On our test boat, the trip to the head provides only two hand-holds, the saloon table and flat panel television. The table moved when I pulled on it, and my wallet got in the way of thoroughly testing the television's sturdiness.

Performance and Seaworthiness

Unfortunately the seas were calm on our test day; but being just after the Miami

Boat Show, there were plenty of large boat wakes, which the 42 Express cut through nicely. Sabrelines flattened the stern sections slightly from a traditional "Deep -V", with a sixteen-degree deadrise at the transom. This should offer a good balance of rough-water capability to speed and fuel economy, slightly favoring performance in a sea.

The boat was equipped with "Exalto" windshield wipers. Made in New England by Imtra, these sturdy wipers feature an adjustable intermittent setting plus two speeds, with individual controls for each wiper and a push-button washer system that runs the wipers automatically for about five seconds after the washer stops, just like automobile wipers. This should prove to be a valuable feature, since the windshield on an express boat is fairly low to the water and bound to catch some spray, even on fairly calm days.

If you're like me, inexplicably drawn to the sea without regard to the weather, consider this advice from a seasoned pro with saltwater in his veins: Listen for the Song of the Sirens, watch closely for the Green Flash, respect Mother Ocean, and above all, when the going gets rough, close the windows and turn on the air conditioner.