BOAT SHOW BUYER'S BLOWOUT

SEA RAY 250: BETTER THAN GREAT

50th ANNIVERSARY YEAR

BOATING

WORLD'S LARGEST POWERBOAT MAGAZINE | March 2006

12 NEW BOATS

CHRIS-CRAFT
FORMULA
PURSUIT
BAYLINER
CABO
More!

WORLD EXCLUSIVE
RINKER 390

BEST-BUY CRUISER

SHOPPING FOR A FISHBOAT?
NOT BEFORE YOU READ THIS!
PAGE 98

26 QUICK TIPS
ABCs OF NO-SWEAT SEAMANSHIP
PAGE 136

$147 A MONTH!

SEA-DOO GTi
GRIP IT AND RIP IT!
PAGE 68

03927 03
0 27342 1 7
Boatingmag.com
U.S. $4.99
Canada $5.99/U.K. £2.95

Rinker 390 Express Cruiser

JUDGMENT DAY

The revenge of the stern drive. BY KEVIN FALVEY

Those who think big boats must be powered by inboards should test ride Rinker's 390 Express Cruiser. This 41-footer has seakeeping that's comparable to a boat with V-drives, more accommodation space than one with straight shafts, and better performance than either traditional variation of inboard power. You'd have to compare it to Regal's Commodore 3860 ($424,892 with twin 370-bhp Volvo Penta IPS 500 diesels) or Formula's 40 PC ($525,480 also with twin 370-bhp Volvo Penta IPS 500s) to equal the quick-footed acceleration and handling. Draft? Trimmable





THIS STERN DRIVE–POWERED CRUISER MAKES INBOARD COUNTERPARTS EAT WAKE. TOP END: 45.6 MPH.

stern drives allow the 390 Express Cruiser into water that's more shallow than any inboard choices. Corrosion resistance? This was once a major stern drive drawback, particularly for coastal boaters who wet store their boats. But now both Volvo Penta's Ocean Series and MerCruiser's Sea Core packages should greatly alleviate corrosion concerns. This boat begs the question: Is it the perfect cruiser?

TO THE CORE. The very first pair of 375-hp MerCruiser 496 MAG Bravo Three Sea Core stern drives purred beneath the hatch of the 390 Express Cruiser I tested. Sea Core designates a standard Bravo Three that has had its drive, trim cylinders, and transom plate anodized. Anodization creates a diamond-hard surface of aluminum oxide. It's not a coating or plate; rather, it's molecularly integral to the aluminum itself, which reduces the aluminum's ability to conduct electricity and thus hinders its ability to corrode. Galvanic action, erroneously referred to as electrolysis, occurs when electricity flows between two dissimilar metals, taking bits of metal along with the electrons in the current. It's a primary killer of plain aluminum stern drives used in saltwater. Mercury's metallurgical approach to corrosion resistance differs from Volvo Penta's, whose Ocean Series drives are made from a nonferrous composite plastic.

What's more, MerCruiser Sea Core stern drives use more stainless-steel engine parts—the engine mounts and steering shaft are biggies—and offer closed cooling as standard. An engine-mounted flushing port is also standard and MerCruiser's time-proven Mercathode impressed-current system still works to nullify galvanic action. Plus, the drives are painted in a multistep process, and the exhaust risers are aluminum and coated to thwart corrosion from within.

DIDDLY NO SQUAT. None of this means much if the boat doesn't perform well. Take the controls, tuck the drives under, and throttle up. The 390 Express Cruiser rockets onto plane without digging a big hole and incurring lots of bowrise as an inboard might. It planes quickly because drive thrust is directed down. Then as the boat starts to plane, you trim out to achieve a flat shaft angle, the most efficient there is. It doesn't matter how fast you cruise, how you're loaded, or how much tab you use because the trimmable drives offer you virtually infinite shaft angles. Inboards have one shaft angle—the one designed to get them out of the hole. Once on plane, an inboard's thrust remains directed down, which is less efficient. And there's the drag created by an inboard's struts, rudders, and shafts. What this means is that the 390 Express Cruiser, in addition to providing shallower draft and better visibility, also offers better range than a comparably powered, comparably sized inboard cruiser. Show me another 13'-wide, 20,000-pound, gas-powered boat that nets 1 mpg at 35 mph. Good luck finding one.

Now put the boat through some maneuvers. Turns occur

PHOTO RIGHT FOREST JOHNSON


390
EXPRESS CRUISER

BOATING

Certified Test Results

Rinker 390

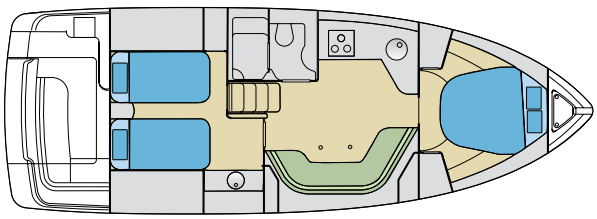


THE HIGHS Class-beating performance, range, and draft. Gas power makes it much less expensive than anything that comes close to its speed and economy. Beautifully appointed cabin.

THE LOWS Do I look like a Olympic gymnast to you? My feet need more than an inch-wide purchase when stepping into an engine room. When ABYC says *recommend*, we think *required* is the more appropriate response.

SPEED			EFFICIENCY					OPERATION	
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	run angle	sound level
1000	4.9	5.6	3.4	1.4	1.6	386	445	1	69
1500	7.4	8.5	6.6	1.1	1.3	302	348	1	76
2000	9.0	10.3	12.2	0.7	0.8	198	228	3	76
2500	13.6	15.7	19.2	0.7	0.8	192	221	3	78
3000	19.6	22.5	26.0	0.8	0.9	203	234	3	82
3500	26.7	30.7	33.4	0.8	0.9	216	248	4	83
4000	30.8	35.5	35.8	0.9	1.0	233	268	4	83
4500	35.3	40.6	41.2	0.9	1.0	231	266	3	85
4870	39.6	45.6	49.6	0.8	0.9	216	248	2	87

Advertised fuel capacity 300 gallons. Range based on 90 percent of that figure. Performance measured with two persons aboard, half fuel, no water. Sound levels taken at helm, in dB-A.



Monthly Payment $1,929

(6.25% interest with 20% down on test boat power, tax not included; 20-year loan to qualified buyers estimated by Excel Credit)

LOA	41'6"
Beam	13'0"
Draft (max.)	3'2"
Displacement (lbs., approx.)	19,680
Transom deadrise	18°
Bridge clearance	13'6"
Max. cabin headroom	6'10"
Fuel capacity (gal.)	300
Water capacity (gal.)	69
Price (w/standard power)	$328,892
Price (w/test power)	$329,912

STANDARD POWER Twin 375-hp Volvo Penta 8.1Gi V-8 gasoline DuoProp stern drives.

OPTIONAL POWER Twin MerCuiser or Volvo Penta gasoline stern drives to 850 hp total.

TEST BOAT POWER Twin 375-hp MerCruiser 496 MAG V-8 gasoline Bravo Three stern drives with 496 cid, swinging 22"-pitch ss propsets through 2.0:1 reductions.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT (*major items*) Central vac; AM/FM/6-disc CD stereo w/6 speakers and remote; microwave; 2-burner stove; refrigerator/freezer; 3 flat-screen TV/DVD players; vacuum-flush commode; shower stall; water heater; dual-zone a/c; dual-location shorepower system; 40a battery charger; 7.3kW genset; camper canvas; windlass; radar arch; radar; chartplotter; GPS; VHF radio; 2 windshield wipers; cockpit icemaker; cockpit refrigerator/freezer; hot/cold transom shower.

CONTACT Rinker Boat Co., Dept. B, 300 W. Chicago St., Syracuse, IN, 46567, 574/457-5731, www.rinkerboats.com.

simultaneously with your input at the wheel because the thrust is directional, unlike an inboard's. Lock it hardover at high speed and there's no cavitation because twin-prop propsets have lower blade-tip loading than conventional propellers. Such enhanced handling is practical, especially when a log suddenly "appears" in your course. But more important, this boat is fun to drive. And isn't that why you buy a boat?

INSIDE JOB. Maintenance freaks like me will appreciate the 390 Express Cruiser's engine hatch, which opens without having to remove a seat or pull up a carpet, and without blocking the way out to the platform to grab that clamp or wrench inevitably forgotten on the dock. Stepping into the compartment is another matter. Instead of a ladder or step, the supplied footfall is a nonslip-taped, 1"-diameter bar. C'mon! The Formula 40 PC's aft-opening hatch obviates any kind of step/ladder dilemma.

Inside, I found a robust engine installation with through-bolted mounts and excellent rigging of accessories, electronics, and plumbing. Unfortunately, I noted that the ground bus was wired with black cable instead of the yellow recommended by ABYC. I could place my hand on all service points, and even the genset was easy to service. Stern drives mean there are no transmissions or shafts to crawl over, nor any rudder shaft seals, which are usually tough to reach.

You'll give more thanks to the stern drive gods when you tour the cabin. The aft berth is a true stateroom, a largesse made possible in this LOA only by engines mounted well aft. You walk in through a door, standing up, and are met by twin berths, each of which boasts plenty of sitting headroom. A vanity with sink and mirror is another benefit of the available space.

The forward stateroom is also private, behind a door, with a queen-size slab berth. But the hanging locker, arranged in a corner, caught my eye. The actual hanging locker is mounted low, with two widely separated doors above it providing access to a massive stowage compartment. Two doors mean you won't have to empty this cabinet to get at something stowed behind other gear. There's also a flat-screen TV/DVD player.

A couple of gripes: The light fixture in the head is too utilitarian and there's no vent fan, despite Rinker having ducted the area for heat and air. These negatives seem so contradictory in a boat so stylishly appointed.

The Lexan shower stall incorporates cubby holes. The companionway steps are solid teak, as is the salon table. The cabin sole is teak and holly. Faux granite is used for trim, as well for tops, in the head and galley. Bulkhead treatments range from crisp parchment in the salon to faux burlap in the staterooms. Lighting is dramatic and functional, with indirect illumination played to its best advantage—check out the through-hull lamp that illuminates the water for swimming while establishing ambience. Comfort and luxury, performance and range, serviceability and shallower draft: The light you need most is the one representing the idea that the time of the large, stern drive–powered cruiser may be at hand. ⚓

EXTRA POINT

Although headroom, knee room, and legroom rate best in class, Rinker took additional pains to ensure shorter boaters wouldn't be left wanting. The helm bench's wide range of adjustability is one example.