

Sea Ray 290 SunDeck

Made with families in mind.

BY HEATHER FRECKMANN

Even a gray day in the South is a good day to go boating—particularly when you're a Great Lakes resident who has just hauled out her own boat in a razor-blade autumn northeaster. Eager to take advantage of western Tennessee's prolonged season, I joined Sea Ray's marketing specialist Greg Garland at Fort Loudon Lake to take a spin on the Knoxville-based boat-builder's new deckboat.

Sea Ray's designers shattered expectations with this one. To start, the 290 SunDeck's 9-foot beam allows an astonishing amount of room, from the twin forward-facing lounges to the extended swim platform. The boat can accommodate a large party: In addition to the bow lounges, with their ergonomic contouring and integrated fold-up armrests, the 290 has a bucket helm seat, port-side back-to-back companion seating, a starboard-side lounge, an aft bench and integrated transom seating. The companion seat has a sliding bolster, and the swivel-deployed cockpit dining table is height-adjustable to create a sunpad along the boat's port side.

Sea Ray also took advantage of space belowdecks. Between the helm and companion seats is a huge lockable storage compartment. The starboard seat conceals dedicated storage for the cooler and garbage bin, and there's more storage in the cockpit floor farther forward and beneath the port-side bow lounge.

The 290's pièces de résistance are an interior berth concealed beneath the helm console and starboard-side forward lounge, and a head compartment—complete with sink and pull-out shower—hidden beneath a port-side console. Both feature a port-light for natural ventilation and are surprisingly roomy.

Other amenities include a wetbar with sink, faucet, cutting board and the built-in cooler. The 290 boasts a concealed, three-

step stainless steel ladder and freshwater shower on the transom. The integrated seat here will come in handy whether you are watching the kids or watching the sunset. Our test boat also came equipped with a propane barbecue grill and cockpit refrigerator.

For hardcore watersports enthusiasts, Sea Ray has an impressive goodie list. While a ski tow eye and six-speaker Clarion AM/FM CD stereo come standard, an integrated tower, premium cockpit sound system, iPod interface with docking station, Sirius satellite receiver and powerful tower speakers are available options.

The 290 sports style, from the rear speaker grills to the black and silver wheel and dash. Yet there's function as well as form, with SmartCraft Digital Throttle & Shift and SmartCraft Diagnostics System.

Although thick cloud bands from distant Hurricane Gabrielle threatened rain, little wind stirred the humid air or ruffled the lake as we put the 290 through its paces—the deckboat charged onto plane and, thanks to a 21-degree transom deadrise, banked sweetly through turns. Now this more-than-meets-the-eye deckboat just has to wait for summer to come around again.

Specs

LOA	29'6"
Beam	9'1"
Draft	3'3"
Weight	6,044 lbs.
Fuel capacity	93 gals.
Base power	MX6.2 MPI DTS w/Bravo 3 (320 hp)
Base price	\$86,110
Power as tested	496 Magnum MPI DTS w/Bravo 3 (375 hp)
Price as tested	\$115,518

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