

CHAPARRAL H2O



Billed as the H2O Series and targeted directly at a sea of traditional low-priced entry-level sport boat brands, Chaparral Boats is taking a bold step forward as it launches into the entry-level boat market. What does Chaparral bring to the competitive arena of selling boats at nationally advertised prices? Styling, quality and performance. Utilizing a number of features from its highly successful -- and more expensive -- SSi Series, Chaparral is going full speed ahead with a four boat line that features 18 and 19 foot offerings in Sport and Ski Fish configurations.

The primary challenge Chaparral faced while developing its H2O Series, according to spokesman Bill Pegg, was maintaining the company's quality and styling standards while keeping the asking price within the range of first-time or budget-oriented buyers. A tall order indeed, but it's the

key element that will differentiate the H2O Series from the traditional low-priced brands on the market.

Performance Comes First

Historically, dowdy performance has been the Achilles heel of entry-level boats. Chaparral counters the trend by building the 18 Sport with its award winning Extended V-Plane hull design and keeping the weight down. The configuration, which allows the hull to extend aft of where the outdrive meets the transom, gives the boat a longer running surface. That added length allows the boat to get on plane -- and stay there -- at lower speeds, Chaparral says. Interestingly, while an easy way to get speed out of a boat is to flatten its bottom, thus giving up riding comfort in a chop for speed, Chaparral has not done that. Rather, its deadrise at the transom is the same 18-degrees that are found on its SSi 196.



Boaters like the high freeboard of the Sport 18 because it provides a dryer ride in sloppy conditions, is better suited for larger bodies of water, and permits a deeper cockpit in which to help keep kids corralled. Both the main and bow cockpits surround passengers with gunwales rising at least 32" (81 cm) from sole to coaming. There is a three-step integrated swim ladder and a built-in handhold.



The Cockpit

The bench seat that crosses the aft end of the new Chaparral's cockpit is comprised of three removable cushions that double as covers for storage lockers to port and starboard. There is a 70 quart integrated cooler beneath the larger, center pad. The padded seat backs are 13.5" (34 cm) high. The 18 Sport's helm and companion seats are not affixed to an aluminium pedestal as is traditional in this class of sport boat. Rather, the pair of adjustable (forward, aft and rotate) contoured bucket seats is mounted on top of moulded-in fiberglass bases. This design goes a long way toward solving the problem of wobbly seats on aluminium pedestals. Both seating positions are faced with angled footrests, also integrated into the sole. Clever! Between the two seats is an in-floor storage compartment that measures 72" (182 cm) long by 22" (55 cm) wide but, at 11" (27 cm) deep.



The Helm

The 18's control dash features glass lens, "fog resistant" gauges surrounded by stainless steel bezels. The electrical components are protected by circuit breakers rather than automotive-type fuses. Boaters would like the height of the wrap-around windshield, which measures 16" (40 cm) above the dash panel to allow good visibility through the tinted, tempered glass screen. Some sport boats have as little as 9" (23 cm) of clearance between the top of the dash and the frame of the windshield. The throttle appears to be in the right position for comfortable control of the standard MerCruiser 3.0 Liter MPI Alpha 135-hp sterndrive. Power steering is standard.

The Bow

The bow cockpit is roomy for 18 footer and the backrests are slightly angled for comfort. There is not a traditional anchor locker

in the bow. Rather, the stowage bin under one of the seats should be dedicated for the anchor, chain and rode. There are two cleats on the bow of the 18 Sport for easy tie-off.



Recommendation

Based on all of the above we can recommend that people in the market for an affordable sport boat take a look at the new H2O Series before buying anything else.