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ON THE ROAD



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TESTED STINGRAY 198LX



'Ray of Light

STINGRAY'S NEW 198LX TAKES WHAT WE LIKE BEST ABOUT DECKBOATS AND SERVES IT UP IN A SLEEK PACKAGE THAT CAN REALLY MOVE.

In the sub-20-foot runabout market, you'll find a dizzying number of choices on the list. But if you start ticking off a checklist of things that really matter — good looks, comfort, efficiency, speed, quality and value — the list shrinks quickly. One of the survivors is a boat built in Hartsville, S.C., called the Stingray 198LX.

UNIQUE FACTOR

Stingray describes the 198LX as a Sport Deck, and the biggest difference between it and the similar-sized 195LX is in the bow area. On the 198LX, the beam is carried farther forward for more bow-riding space. I wouldn't call this a deckboat, but rather a hybrid that gives you extra room while still retaining a sporty silhouette. Instead of terminating in a mako shark-like pointy bow, like the 195, the 198 features a wide bow walkover section, so guests can easily board via the bow when you dock ferry style. The bow hatch is secured by a metal post in a rubber grommet, which requires some muscle to disengage, and underneath is a two-step beach boarding ladder and a cradle for a Danforth-style anchor.

BY ALAN JONES

Stingray is one of the few companies that has figured out a way to integrate the boarding ladder and anchor cradle, making for a tidy installation.

One of the best features on the 198LX is something that used to be common but is nearly extinct: vent windows. I'm not sure why they disappeared, but it wouldn't surprise me if Al Fink, Stingray's owner, had something to do with bringing them back, since he loves vintage cars, which commonly sported this feature. Other helm features include a full gauge array, an Italian sport wheel, circuit breakers instead of fuses and a gray dash, which reduces reflective ghosts.

PERFORMANCE

Fink is a performance guy who races

dragsters in his spare time at nearby Darlington Dragway, and the 198LX fits into the overachieving mold that has made this brand famous. Credit the lightweight Z-Plane hull's efficiency for its stellar performance numbers, which are achieved without resorting to an extreme amount of power to make it fly. Our test boat has a MerCruiser 4.3 MPIC V-6 that produces 220 hp, which is a relatively modest amount of power. With two people and a full 34 gallons of fuel on board, we reached 58 mph. The folks at Stingray want you to have a boat that performs, so this is the only engine offered, which takes away your first agonizing decision, which many people get wrong anyway.

For comparison, we went to the MerCruiser website, which has a number of Boat House Performance Bulletins. The most similar boat there was the Larson LX 950, which is 2 inches wider but 3 inches shorter and weighs 38 pounds more. Its top speed was 10.5 mph slower than the



► The port-side bucket seat swivels 180 degrees for comfortable ski spotting.

number we recorded. The 198LX's time to plane was a quick 3 seconds flat, and it reached 30 mph in 7.2 seconds. Fuel economy at the best cruise speed is reported to be a very respectable 5.6 mpg.

HANDLING

We had two test sessions with this boat on different lakes and in wildly varying conditions. On Prestwood Lake in the late afternoon, we had placid waters and balmy temperatures. The lake is fairly narrow, so we got to test the turning ability of the 198LX, and the boat rewarded us with excellent cornering in hard turns. I didn't note any propensity for porpoising at midrange speeds, which is common for sterndrive boats of this size. During our top-speed runs, I trimmed the outdrive as far up as it would go, just short of ventilating, and predictably it felt very light with that much hull out of the water. Stingrays feature a notched transom, like on racing boats, which allows the outdrive to be mounted higher for the least amount of resistance possible.

The next day a front moved through, and it was cold, windy, rainy and nasty. To shoot running shots for our videos, we make extended straight-line runs; with the wind direction, there was no lee to cowardly hide behind, except at the very beginning of the run. Checking out the footage afterward confirmed my impressions while driving. The 198LX runs very level, even in the

worst of it, and I was able to maintain a very straight line despite the quartering seas. All Stingrays in the lineup have 19 degrees of deadrise, which is the perfect amount for the Z-Plane hull and leaves enough vee to cleave the waves rather than pound against them.

BEST USES

This is your quintessential fun-in-the-sun runabout that does a number of things really well. And it's just as easy to have fun on this boat at rest as when streaking across the surface of the lake at Mach 1. The stern section of the 198LX is made for lounging with a scalloped, integrated swim platform and a wide transom jump seat. Apparently Jensen has upped its stereo game, because the MP3-ready Bluetooth model on our boat sounded really good. The giant sunpad is ideal for catching rays and is stylishly designed with tuck-and-roll-look custom upholstery along with color accent panels. There's a starboard-side walkover that keeps people from trodding on the 36-ounce vinyl, which features a PreFixx barrier to keep it looking great. Add the optional filler cushions, and you regain lost lounging space. Fore and aft coolers keep your passengers near a beverage.

As expansive as the stern section is, I was surprised to find enough legroom in the bowrider section for a 6-footer to stretch out on the layback seats; this is a sub-20-footer after all.

SPECIFICATIONS

LENGTH	19 ft., 9 in.
BEAM	7 ft., 10 in. DEADRISE 19 degrees
CAPACITY	9 people
DRY WEIGHT (HULL)	2,662 lbs.
FUEL CAPACITY	34 gals. MAX HP 220

PERFORMANCE

	MPH	RPM	DBA
PEAK	58.0	4800	93
CRUISE	32.1	3000	84
TIME TO PLANE			3.0 secs.
TIME TO 25 MPH			7.2 secs.

POWER

TEST	MerCruiser 4.3 MPI ECT
CYLINDERS	V-6 DISPLACEMENT 4.3L
WEIGHT W/OUTDRIVE	775 lbs.
WOT RANGE	4400-4800 rpm
BASE PRICE W/TEST POWER	\$33,485

VALUE-ADDED STANDARD FEATURES: Bimini top, bow and stern boarding ladders, Jensen Bluetooth stereo, 12v plug, hourmeter, transom-mounted trim switch, side vent windows, in-deck ski locker

MUST-HAVE OPTIONS: Snap-in carpeting, trailer (dealer option), filler cushions, transom remote, twin batteries w/switch, two-tone hull color, tilt steering, tonneau boat covers, bow and stern showers



Scan the QR code or go to boatingworld.com to watch a video of this boat.

\$ \$240/month w/15% down and 6% interest for 15 years

Stingray managed this feat by slightly canting the bowrider seats inward to direct riders' feet toward the centerline and by reducing the backrest angle to gain a few inches. Under-seat storage is accessed by removing the entire seat bottoms of the bowrider seats and stern bench.

When you add the Stainless Steel Package, which blings up various items such as cupholders, vent window hardware and supports, you also get a flush-mounted ski tow. There is no tower option with the 198LX, but if that is a deal-breaker, the 11-inch-longer 208LR gives you that option.



Owner Feedback

Lisa and Larry Evans, Raleigh, N.C.
PURCHASED AT CHATLEE BOAT & MARINE, SANFORD, N.C.

What we liked:

- Attractive styling
- Performance and handling
- Stern lounging area
- Bow boarding ladder
- Great sound system

What we would change:

We got it equipped with every feature we wanted, so for us, it's perfect.

Why we bought it:

My husband and I have a friend who owned a Stingray, and he used to invite us out boating all the time, and we really liked his boat. Unfortunately, he sold it, so we decided to buy a Stingray of our own, even though we had never owned

a boat before. My husband, who has had more experience driving a boat, is helping me learn to drive it. I was a little nervous the first time I put it on a trailer, but I've been doing really well since then. We love the way it looks and often get compliments. We are empty-nesters, but sometimes our daughter and her kids join us, and they love to go tubing. Our son is in the service, but we hope he can join us also. We do our boating on Falls Lake, which is surrounded by a picturesque state park, and we like to cruise for a while then cut off the engine, drift, turn on the great stereo and just relax or explore the many



beaches there. We love boating because it's such a great stress reliever and a great escape from the "real" world. We plan on taking our boat to Lake Gaston this summer on vacation. The people at Chatlee were really great. They knew at first we were just looking and didn't put any pressure on us to buy and helped put us in the perfect boat.

FEATURES



Same goes for trim tabs.

PREFERRED SETUP

As usual, Stingray primes the option pump with its Convenience Package, giving you \$2,854 worth of items free of charge — a Bimini top, an hourmeter, a Bluetooth Jensen stereo, indirect LED cockpit mood lighting and side vents, to name a few. In fact, the Standard Package is so complete, you really only need to add a few options to have a well-set-up boat.

First on my list is the two-tone hull color option, which gives you five choices in addition to the classic Stingray white. There's a bow shower option for rinse-offs after beach excursions and another add-on for a transom shower, for après ski. Other must-have options include bolster bucket seats for the crew, tilt steering and filler cushions for the walkthrough and bow section. **BW**



➤ (Clockwise from top left) Wide bow walk-through and step-down make it easy to board. Stern sunpad features a tuck-and-roll-like surface. There are two built-in coolers for passenger refreshment. Full gauge array is shaded under an eyebrow. Balanced floor plan gives plenty of room everywhere. Optional bucket seats have flip-up bolsters.