



WILD WATER

MUSCLE UP

German engineering plus Finnish design equals a darkly distinctive chase boat. *Marilyn DeMartini* takes the wheel



Like James Dean in a black leather jacket, the Brabus Shadow 800 exudes masculine, rugged good looks. It owes its athletic prowess to Finnish boatbuilder Axopar Boats and its dark, brooding appeal to the late Bodo Buschmann, founder of Brabus, a renowned 40-year-old German automotive-tuning company that enhances performance brands such as Mercedes-Benz, Maybach and AMG.

Buschmann, an avid yachtsman, took a test ride on an Axopar while his superyacht was docked in Mallorca, Spain, and liked it so much that he bought an Axopar 37 Sun-Top as his tender. He added his company's signature upgrades to make it a standout blend of top German engineering and cool Finnish design. Before long the two companies saw an opportunity for a business and added a clever marketing twist – making owners of the Brabus Shadow 800 members of a small fraternity. They built only 20 of the special edition Axopar, all sold within weeks to current Brabus automotive customers and half a dozen marine dealers around the world. Named “Shadow” because

it is likely to be used as a chase boat for a larger yacht, the boat is powered by twin Mercury Verado 400R engines, hence 800.

Captivating in gunmetal gray with flat titanium trim, the Brabus Shadow looks tough with its axe bow and deep-V twin-stepped hull. Contrasting deep crimson upholstery adds a spark of sexy fashion appeal. After eyeing the boat during the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, I longed to experience this combination of muscle and class. Fortunately for me, Nautical Ventures of Dania Beach, Florida, the exclusive dealer for North America, purchased two of the 20 built and offered *Boat International* a date with this handsome vessel in South Florida's Atlantic Ocean.

After an admiring gaze from bow to swim platform, I step on board. The light gray composite flooring feels cool to my bare feet, which then encounter a metal step studded with black rubber like a racecar's pedals. It leads down into the cockpit, giving me the strange sensation of being in the boat rather than on it. At first look the automotive stitched red, water-resistant Silvertex upholstered seats appear stiff and

At speed, she churns through chop; at idle, she glides. At \$549,000, you get the best of both worlds

angular, but they are comfortable and ergonomically designed for proper seating posture. The helm seats fold up as bolsters for driving in a standing position, but I find that dropping the seat gives me an ideal sightline, even with my 5ft 4in stature.

The gleaming carbon-fiber dash is clean with push-button controls and dual Garmin 7416 multi-touch screens. The chart plotters, radar, sonar, Mercury VesselView 903 and Joystick Piloting 360 helm control system compete for attention, but I can't get my eyes – or hands – off the steering wheel. With its fine leather, embossed with the Brabus logo, it makes me feel like a test pilot on a racetrack. The intelligent steering module (ISM) that incorporates fingertip controls for trim tabs, bow thruster and the robust audio system, also melds driving and piloting. With the purchase of the Brabus Shadow, owners receive a Garmin quatix 5 Sapphire multisport marine watch for remote connectivity, control of electronics and integration to smartphones, but even without the watch, I feel like I have ultimate control in my hands.

We idle out on the Intracoastal with winds at a mild 10 to 15 knots. As we exit the cut into open ocean, where the true beauty of this beast will be unfurled, I understand why the low-set cockpit makes so much sense. On plane in seconds, the well-balanced hull lifts without bow rise. We hit one rogue wave and a splash comes over the gunwale, but rather than soaking the cockpit, the cabin or any of the passengers, the water flows behind us and disappears into the floor drains. The lowered cockpit and center of gravity are designed for stability while the tempered glass wrap-around windshield adds protection for an exceptionally dry and safe ride.

Strategically placed strakes and the vertical bow cut through the waves and force water under and behind the centered twin

I lean the boat like a motorcycle, accelerating through a curve, then counterturn just for fun

A GAME OF CHASE

With its agility and speed, the Brabus makes an ideal racing companion



DRY RIDE

No matter the speed or conditions, the Brabus Shadow keeps waves out, thanks to a low-set cockpit and plenty of freeboard



SPECS

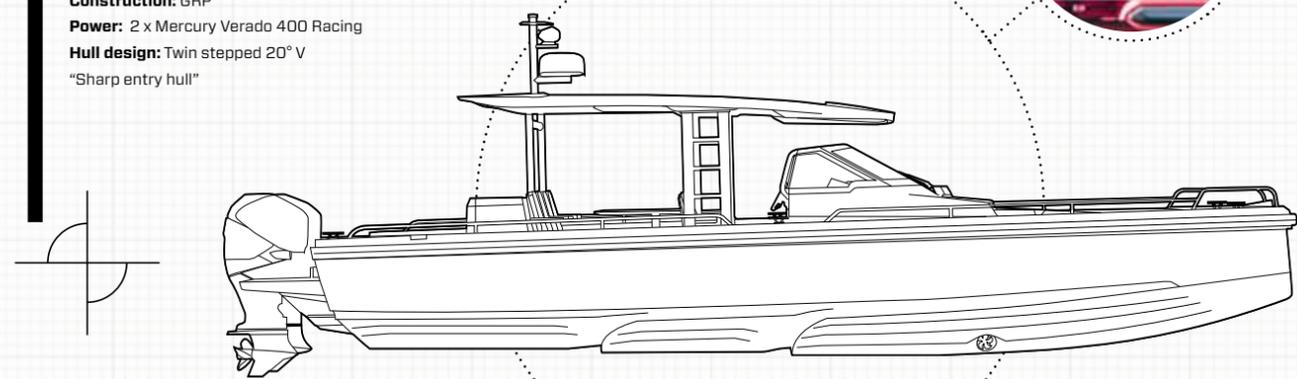
- Length:** 36' 9"
- Beam:** 10' 10"
- Draft:** 2' 9"
- Weight:** 7,910lb
- Fuel capacity:** 192 gallons
- Construction:** GRP
- Power:** 2 x Mercury Verado 400 Racing
- Hull design:** Twin stepped 20° V "Sharp entry hull"

ON BOARD



BELOW DECK
Interior upgrades include integrated Wi-Fi and Apple TV connectivity

BEHIND THE WHEEL
A leather steering wheel with the Brabus logo conveys a racecar feel



SMOOTH CRUISE
The axe bow cuts the seas while the deep V rises above them



POWER PLEASE
The 800hp delivered by Mercury Verado racing outboards brings the Brabus to 50 knots-plus

steps, for a consistent, smooth cruise. I ease the throttle through the gears, feeling comfort in speeds of over 40mph, free of pounding. Cutting big turns in choppy water, I lean the boat like a motorcycle, accelerating through a curve, with plenty of freeboard keeping us dry, then counterturn – just for fun – to feel the automotive-like wheel control. There is no slide, no cavitation, just the thrill of manning a well-tuned machine.

The deck easily holds 10 or more on large sunpads fore and aft, bow bench seating and four seats behind the helm. Carbon fiber and upholstered arm rests, cup holders and grab rails provide for comfort, safety and fun while the boat carves its way across the water. But come to a dock or drop the anchor, and this walkaround boat transforms into an entertainer with multiple seating areas and a Fusion sound system (two speakers, flush in the transom, subwoofers and amplifiers). Two refrigerator drawers under the cockpit seats keep passengers well supplied with cold drinks, food and ice. The electrically retractable Webasto sunroof offers dual options for sun worshippers or those who prefer to avoid rays. Additional fabric shades for the fore and aft deck further extend

the Sun-Top, with carbon supports conveniently tucking away in large floor storage compartments alongside additional legs for amidships and bow tables. Another storage area under the bow sunpad is spacious enough for luggage and provisions.

I envision a jaunt to a popular local sandbar; the shallow waters would be a fun place to show off the Shadow, which draws less than three feet, use its tow bar for some tubing and bring out other water toys, such as paddleboards. A few rod (or sun shade) holders may also entice some to cast a line and cook up a fresh catch on board. Under the wet bar's gray Corian counter, behind the cockpit, is a compact outdoor kitchen with two large storage cabinets framing a refrigerator topped by a sink and a grill.

After lunch, the need for a nap could strike. A manual hatch opens to the cabin, a cozy lounge with Alcantara-upholstered bench and berth and stitched black leather flooring. It's a luxurious and discreet place to rest, watch the 42in screen TV and use the electric, hidden head. While the boat comfortably sleeps two, converting the bench could snugly add two more.

When the Nautical Ventures test driver takes over to push the Shadow's limits, we easily reach 55mph at 5,500rpm. In the washing-machine-like waters – not rough, just confused and choppy – the boat lightly jumps the crests with only an occasional jolt from bigger waves. It feels more like a roller coaster than a bouncing boat hull. At speed, she churns through chop; at idle, she glides. At \$549,000, you get the best of both worlds.

More performance history is ahead with the yet-to-be-named Baby Brabus, a 27ft Axopar with Mercury's new 4.6L V8 engines, which a company rep promises "will drive like a supercar!" ■

ILLUSTRATION: SAMANTHA SCOTT