

AXOPAR 37 SUN-TOP 37

As comfortable slicing through big seas as it is anchored in a Mediterranean bay, this is one cool customer

Words **Jack Haines** Pictures **Paul Wyeth**



The Axopar 37 is totally in its element, skipping joyfully from the top of the rolling swell we have off Mallorca. Actually, that should be Axopars, plural. We're lucky enough to have both a 37 Hard-top and 37 Sun-top on test, the difference between both boats being subtle and something we will uncover later. But for now, both have the same hull, the same pair of 350hp Mercury Verados (though one has black cowlings, the other white) and the same appetite for a spot of wave jumping.

I'm at the helm of the Sun-top while photographer Paul is standing amidships on the Hard-top facing aft, holding nothing but his camera and shooting away as we barrel headlong into the swell at nearly 40 knots. There aren't many boats that he could do this on, but so at ease is the hull in these conditions and so soft are the landings as it launches from wave to wave, that he's doing just fine.

A BOAT THAT HAS IT ALL

Standing on the centreline of the boat with the wheel close into my chest and the twin throttles a hand's width away, I'm struggling to see what the yard could do to improve what is a simply sublime driving environment. It has it all; a position that's perfect whether you stand at the helm or choose to sit in front of it, anti-glare material wherever you look, an excellent view of (and access to) both plotters, and even an Alcantara-clad chart holder that pops away from the dash so that you can take it home with you. There's more – you drop down into a well to stand at the helm so you are totally protected by the windscreen, which has mullions fitted with small glass panels to eradicate blind spots. The seats are excellent too – well shaped, comfortable, supportive and with plenty of adjustment, plus there are three of them, so two passengers can enjoy the ride in front of the helm and four more from the comfort of an identical row of seats the other side of the gigantic cockpit table.

When you combine this driving environment with this hull and the smooth, torquey grunt of a pair of Mercury's finest, you begin to struggle for grand enough

superlatives. During the photoshoot, where my eyes are trained intently on the chase boat and the not-insignificant sea in front of us, a quick glance down at the GPS tells me we're doing 41 knots over the ground. It genuinely feels like less than half that speed; the boat isn't even breaking a sweat. Staggering. The hull is so adept, so unflappable and so flattering that it's easy to drive fast in a big sea and still feel utterly safe and in control. I didn't touch the trim tabs all day and though they kept telling me that they were still experimenting with the exact angle of the outboards' transom brackets and propeller specs, it felt as sorted as they come to me. A touch of trim angle adjustment was all that was needed. After that, I just let the hull do its thing.

As sweet as the 350s are (and they really are a lovely match for the 37), you can have any pair of engines from twin 200hp up. Even that version will apparently top 40 knots – more than enough for some – but being able to hustle the 37 along at just shy of 50 knots really opens up its cruising ability. It's perfectly viable to cruise at 45 knots in the right conditions though Jan-Erik Viitala, the man behind Axopar, tells me that the real sweet spot is up to 4 knots either side of 30 knots. He's right – 30 knots feels like walking pace and at 26 knots, you may as well be going backwards. But what a comfortable way to eat up the sea miles.

Mercury really has got its act together with the latest generation of Verados and it's not just the engines. The VesselView software is truly excellent, the steering a fine balance of light at low speeds and meaty when speed gathers, and the throttles click in and out of gear with near surgical precision but provide just the right amount of resistance in bumpy weather.

The Sun-top that I'm on is called so because of its extended T-top and a manually operated canvas sunroof that peels all the way back to expose the central dinette to the sunshine. The Hard-top gets a far stubbier roof and no opening section and I have to say, in the Med, the Sun-top strikes the perfect balance of shelter and sunbathing ability. There is, of course, the Cabin version if you intend to do your boating in less agreeable conditions.

Speaking of agreeable conditions, it's lunchtime, and we've ducked into a protected

SEE THE VIDEO



mby.com/a37

Want a wheelhouse version with an open aft deck? Go for it. A Sun-top with a wet-bar aft? No problem



The sizable table and seven chairs give you the comfortable dining space of a 60-70ft boat

cala to break out the baguettes. We are surrounded by a handful of anchored boats enjoying the spring sunshine and some (presumably rather uncomfortable) nudists perched on the surrounding rocks. We head for a dazzling turquoise patch close to shore and raft up on anchor for lunch. It's the perfect opportunity to assess the two boats' slightly different deck designs.

DECKED OUT

The Hard-top has a relatively open stern with a big wet-bar installed just aft of the dinette seats, whereas the Sun-top has the optional aft cabin arrangement, which gives you sleeping space for an additional two people in cosy yet perfectly comfortable surroundings. There aren't any lockers for storing clothes down here, just some vinyl pockets popped to the cabin sides, but nobody's likely to be staying here for long. The rest of the time it's likely to be used as a glorified lazarette.

Something that both boats share is the super-social dinette amidships. It's a uniquely brilliant layout where the three helm seats swivel to face the four seats aft and the table opens out to span the entire space in between. The table could have been plucked from a 70ft flybridge boat, such is its sheer size, but when it's folded in half there's still plenty of space for you to be able to pass from deck to deck unencumbered. That being said, I did whack my head on the Sun-top quite a number of times, but the yard has plans to avoid this by dropping the floor beneath the dinette so you step down into it, much like at the helm.

The boat with the wet-bar is probably the better day boat because you have more open deck space, better cooking facilities and increased fridge capacity. But the aft cabin is for people who will sleep on board with guests more often, and also for those who like a sunpad because with the dinette table lowered and cushions in place, you have three, yes *three*, vast sunpads, all on one 37ft deck. Or you could buy two and raft them together; it certainly did the trick for us. It's worth mentioning that for those who want to use the boat primarily for watersports or fishing, there's a version available with a totally open aft deck, though it's not the most sociable layout.

We seem to have got this far without yet mentioning one of the key selling points of the 37 and something that really sets it apart from the smaller award-winning 28, and that is the forward cabin. Not only do you get a spacious double berth, but the added comfort of an electric toilet and a small sink. The toilet isn't separate but it does at least mean you don't have to 'wild wee' off the back of the boat in an anchorage. Let's not pretend that people who buy a 37 are often going to spend two weeks sleeping on board their boat, but it's good to know that if you want to, you can, and in adequate comfort too.

I know what you're thinking: yes, this all sounds super, but what are we going to pay for such a talented beast? The answer is €225,000, ex-factory, tax paid. That includes the largest motors, a decent navigation package, bow thruster and heating. Given its relative capability, that might make the Axopar 37 the steal of the century.

Build quality, it has to be said, isn't on par with the best of the best, and there are a few rough edges and lockers that could do with gas struts. There was also quite a lot of shaking and wobbling coming from the T-top itself as we landed off waves, something that the yard insisted it was built to take and cope with. Still a little disconcerting though, it has to be said.

But the build is a world away from shabby, and the yard has spent money wisely on things like top-notch upholstery, expensive covers, an attractive steering wheel and smart stainless steel. When you look at the value of the 37 compared to its rivals then the odd rough edge here and there suddenly becomes easier to take.

MADE TO MEASURE

The 37 is a boat that ripples with the touches of a person who actually goes boating, and that person is the founder Jan-Erik. As we sit having a beer, overlooking the boats in the late evening sunshine, he describes how he cast an engine option aside because the base of the throttles was too painful on his palm in rough seas, which brought the seat design in house because no-one could quite get them right. He pours over the minutiae with infectious passion and obsessive attention to detail, and



Axopar plans to drop the floor beneath the table to improve headroom

The cabin has all you need for a comfortable few nights sleeping on board



The foredeck sunpad, one of three on the boat



Intelligent use of glazing makes for lots of natural light



A CLOSER LOOK WITH JACK HAINES

TRANSOM SHOWER

With an open transom and split bathing platform, it's very easy to swim from the 37 and prepare for watersports. The upholstered locker tops, combined with the shower, make for an ideal spot to sit and hose off after you've been for a dip. And why wouldn't you in this water?



SUNPAD CITY

With the aft cabin version, the dinette table lowered and this spacious foredeck sunpad, there are now fewer than three huge sunbathing spots on board the 37. Although they're narrow, the deep decks and plethora of handholds make progress forward safe and easy.



KEEPING COOL

There is an option to have the starboard stern locker converted to a chiller so you can pack it with drinks in a convenient location adjacent to the aft sunpad and near the transom. If you don't spec the wet-bar on deck then fridge space is one thing that's somewhat limited.



ENGINE ROOM

Engine access couldn't be easier on the 37, simply lift the outboards and remove the cowling to get to the 6-cylinder petrols beneath. Part of the charm of outboards, aside from their performance, is how easy they are to inspect and maintain. Combine that with how smooth and quiet the modern outboard is and the case for them is very strong.



This boat is comfortable going fast in heavy weather and transforms into a sociable, fun platform the moment the anchor is out



The 37's seats are excellent: supportive, well made, comfortable and good to look at



the boat is all the better for it. The boats we had on test were so well suited to enjoying the best the Med has to offer but thanks to Axopar's modular construction methods, you can tweak the layout to suit your exact needs. Want a wheelhouse version with a totally open aft deck? Go for it. A Sun-top with a wet-bar aft (the configuration I would choose)? No problem.

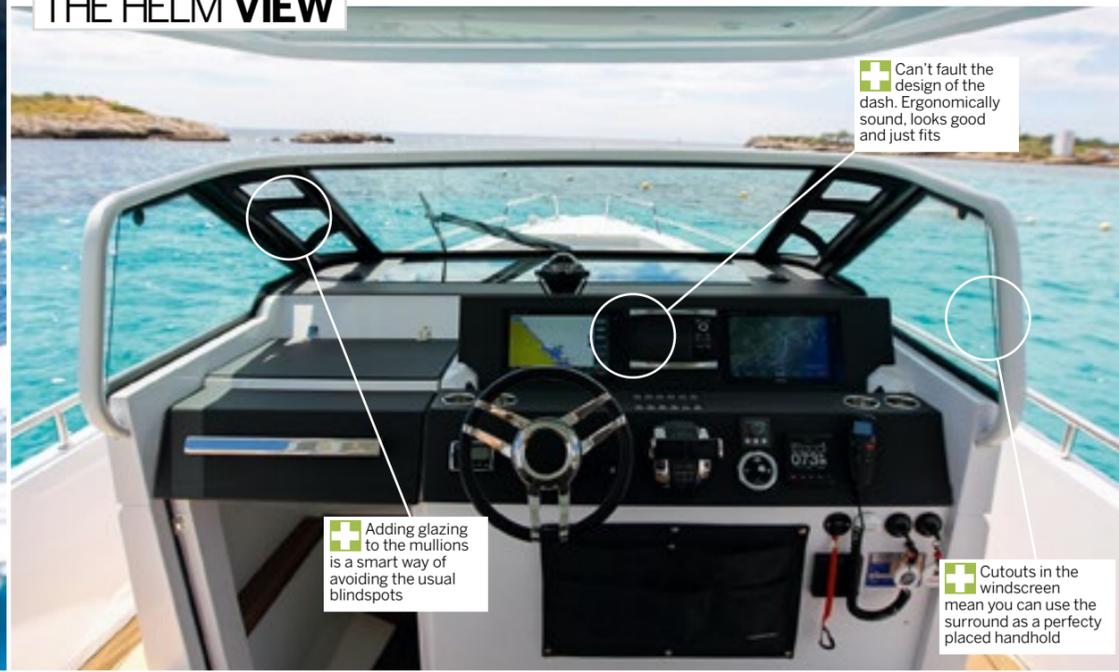
VERDICT

Surfing back towards base, I struggle to think of a boat I've tested that I'd rather be on in these conditions. The wind and waves have

increased, but the Axopar is making progress with such ease, it's as if we're traversing the Serpentine. How often do you find a boat this size that's so comfortable going fast in heavy weather, but transforms into a sociable, fun platform the moment the anchor is out and the engines are off? There are 37ft boats with better cabins and a proper bathroom, but there are few that are so talented across the board and well attuned to how people actually use their boats. It's a very special boat, this, there's no doubt about it. **MBY**
Contact Offshore Powerboats.
 Tel: +44 (0)1590 677955 . Web: www.axopar.fi



THE HELM VIEW

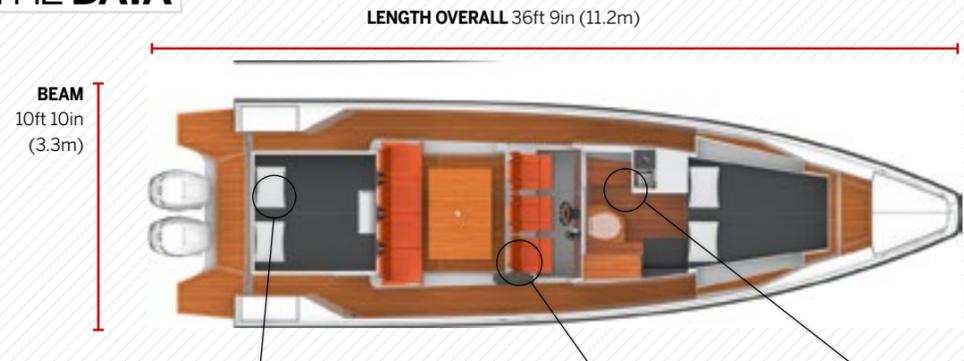


Can't fault the design of the dash. Ergonomically sound, looks good and just fits

Adding glazing to the mullions is a smart way of avoiding the usual blindspots

Cutouts in the windscreen mean you can use the surround as a perfectly placed handhold

THE DATA



It may not be a long-term sleeping option but the aft cabin is perfectly comfortable

Seven forward-facing seats make long passages with big groups an absolute pleasure

Even if you don't plan to sleep on board, the sink, stove and toilet are useful day boat additions

FUEL CAPACITY
169 imp gal (770 litres)
WATER CAPACITY
22 imp gal (100 litres)
DRAUGHT
2ft 9in (0.85m)
RCD CATEGORY
B for 10 people
DESIGNERS
Axopar
DISPLACEMENT
2.9 tonnes (excl. engines)

PERFORMANCE

TEST ENGINES Mercury Verado 350. Twin 350hp @ 5,700hp outboards. 6-cylinder, 2.6-litre petrols

FIGURES	ECO	FAST	MAX
RPM	1,250 3,400	4,000 4,500 5,000 5,200 5,400	5,700
Speed	6.4 20.1	30.7 35.1 40.1 43.4 44.0	47.0
LPH	11.5 67.2	85.2 112 143 159 238	233
GPH	2.5 14.8	18.7 24.6 31.5 35.0 52.4	51.3
MPG	2.53 1.34	1.64 1.42 1.27 1.24 0.84	0.92
Range	342 184	221 192 172 168 113	124

Speed in knots. GPH & MPG figures use imperial gallons. Range in nautical miles and allows for 20% reserve. Calculated figures based on readings from onboard fuel gauges, your figures may vary considerably. All prices include VAT at exchange rate of 1.27 from € at time of writing. 60% fuel, 100% water, 2 crew, no stores or tender; liferaft onboard, 21°C air temp, F2 + moderate conditions for sea trials

THE COSTS & OPTIONS

Price from	£100,625 (Twin 225hp)
Price as tested	£179,286
Side-power SE60 bowthruster	£2,549
Silvertrex Meteor upholstery	std
Grey hull colour	£1,094
Ski pole	£701
230V shorepower with charger	£1,358
Webasto heating	£2,233
Adjustable cockpit table	£998
Twin Garmin 7412 MFD	£5,210
Wooden flooring in cabin	£338

— = Options on test boat

RIVALS

XO 360
Price from £287,400
 Not as leisure-friendly as the 37 but a fearsome sea boat.
Buy the test: mby.com/xo360

Boston Whaler 370 Outrage
Price from £399,134
 The 'unsinkable legend' it may be but my word do you pay for that moniker.

