

Checkmate Powerboats ZT 244

BY MATT TRULIO PHOTOS BY ROBERT BROWN

You have to admire Doug Smith and his team at Checkmate Powerboats in Bucyrus, Ohio. At a time when, thanks to economic doldrums, most high-performance boatbuilders are circling the wagons, Smith, who bought the company a couple years ago, and his crew are still adding new models.

Their thinking? When things turn—and they will turn—the revamped Checkmate line needs to be complete and well established. And Smith, who founded and owned Baja Marine, knows a few things about rounding out a model line.

The latest addition to the Checkmate family is the ZT 244, and we got our hands on one in Fort Myers, Fla. Based on the conventional V-bottom's

performance, construction quality and features, we'd say Smith and company are on the right track.

The boat was set up with a 375-horsepower MerCruiser 496 Mag engine and a 1.5:1-gear-ratio Bravo One drive with a 26"-pitch Bravo One four-blade propeller. That propulsion package was good enough to get the V-bottom to 68 mph.

Handling was, generally speaking, consistent and predictable. The nimble 24-footer carved cleanly through turns and handled 1- to 2-foot chop with ease. Full hydraulic steering likely would clear up some of the slop/play in the steering wheel. Sure, it would increase the price of the model, but hydraulic steering makes great sense in 60-plus-mph boats.

On the Edge

Checkmate's ZT 244 should appeal to performance-minded runabout buyers.



Left: The ZT 244's cockpit included bucket seats with angled bases that served as footrests for those on the rear bench. Right: Checkmate installed a grab handle and a telescoping ladder on the port side of the molded swim platform.

The Baja influence definitely showed in the ZT 244's sleek, soft-angled lines. Checkmate did a solid job with the boat's tooling and gelcoat—far above standard production-boat fare—and the V-bottom was loaded with hardware including five retractable cleats accented with powder-painted bezels and an acrylic fairing with an effective, wind-deflecting lip. Rigging in the engine compartment was uncluttered, and the big-block was through-bolted to the stringers.

Bucket seats were supplied in the cockpit,

which had lay-in carpet. Molded into the sole, the angled fiberglass bases for the buckets provided footrests for the outside passengers on the three- to four-person rear bench. Grab handles for those passengers were mounted on the gunwales, which included small stowage recesses that were ringed with padding.

The builder kept things simple and clean at the starboard-side helm. A single row of gauges in blue bezels lined the top of the dash above the tilt steering wheel. Rocker switches for the accessories were mounted

on the gunwale just ahead of the Mercury throttle and shifter.

To port, the co-pilot's spot was equipped with a locking glove box, a stereo and a grab handle.

Accessible through a pair of sliding and locking acrylic doors, the cozy cabin of the ZT 244 had a V-berth, a deck hatch and a carpeted headliner. As stowage space in the cockpit was minimal, the cabin likely would find itself most often used as a giant locker.

The Checkmate ZT 244 would be a good choice for buyers getting into their first go-fast boat. It has the look and performance of a sport boat, yet retains all the functionality of a runabout with a cuddy cabin. And priced at \$69,015, the model is very affordable. What's more, it's a good value for the money considering its features, construction quality and performance.

It's quite clear that Smith and the team at Checkmate have breathed new life into a venerable brand with a loyal following. **P**

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