

# SAXDOR 320 GTO

*Any concerns that the start-up Finnish brand's second boat might not live up to the hype were soon blown away during an exclusive test of an early pre-production boat*

Words Hugo Andrae Photos Paul Wyeth





It doesn't seem right to start a review of something as dynamic and stylish as the new Saxdor 320 GTO with something as dry and unsexy as a price tag but when that figure is £105,626 inc VAT for one of the coolest 33ft boats we've ever clapped eyes on, it's rather hard to ignore. It's not even as if that's for a stripped-out special with a feeble engine and zero spec – even the base boat comes with a 300hp Mercury V8, hardtop and those deeply desirable folding side platforms.

So you can understand why we were keen to get our hands on one as soon as possible, so keen, in fact, that the model we tested is technically an early handbuilt prototype rather than the fully sorted production boat. All too often this is an excuse for a test boat with all the structural integrity of a jelly that handles like an overloaded airport trolley. Not this time, even the prototype was a dream to drive, but it does mean that some of the fixtures, fittings and details are either in the process of, or already have been changed. More of that later but first let's get to the meat of the matter, that enticing looking hull and cockpit layout.

Designed by Sakari Mattila (one of the founding partners at Aquador, XO and Axopar) and J&J Design (Prestige, MCY, Bavaria, Greenline and others), it is a very

sweet-looking twin-stepped hull that sits neatly in the gap between its closest rivals, the Axopar 28 and 37. With its reverse-angle bow, long, lean appearance, walkaround cockpit design and outboard-only power source, the 320 GTO shares a number of similarities with its Finnish counterparts.

#### FAST SHOW

Like them it's also built in Poland, albeit at a different factory that holds a stake in Saxdor, which partly explains that appealing price tag. As mentioned, the finished production boat will be vacuum-infused rather than hand-laid, which if done well will result in a lighter and possibly even stiffer moulding.

Not that the test boat felt remotely compromised on either front. Powered by the largest possible engine option of twin 300hp Mercury V8 outboards, it flew to a top speed of 52.5 knots. We can't see owners being anything other than impressed by that (few people want to cruise at over 40 knots for long) but J&J Design reckons the resin-infused boat is 250kg lighter, which Sakari claims will push the top speed up to around 57 knots. Either way with these engines it's quick. Very quick. It also bodes well for the less powerful engine options where weight is likely to have a bigger impact on performance. Saxdor claims that even with the base option of a single 300hp engine, it will still



BELOW: Perspex mid-bulwarks give a great connection with the water



Discreet grab rails are recessed into the inner cockpit coamings



The electric folding side platforms are simple to deploy and a joy to use at anchor



Rear bench and table combine to make a big sunpad which supplements the forward one

crack 40 knots, while the middle option of twin 225hp V6s should split the difference nicely.

It's not just the pace of the GTO that impresses, it's the composure. The hull never feels remotely flustered or overpowered. Admittedly, the conditions were close to perfect, with just a slight ripple to break the surface tension and allow the slender forefoot to cleave through the water as cleanly as a butcher's knife, but it all felt so effortless. We had been concerned that those two folding aft sections might compromise its structural integrity but not a bit of it. The hull felt just as rigid as any other 32ft performance boat.

Even when driven at speed through the photo boat's wake it cut through it without a shake or a judder and a nice soft ride. Those twin steps ensure it maintains a wonderfully flat running attitude when planing with just enough lift to keep the bow clear of the water and avoid any risk of hooking (at least in these conditions). And there was no sign of any chine riding or skittishness at speed. Grip is prodigious when banked progressively into a turn at pace. Pile on the steering more aggressively and you can feel the back end start to slip a little but only in a controlled, progressive manner. We never got it to slide sharply then bite in the way some stepped hulls can.

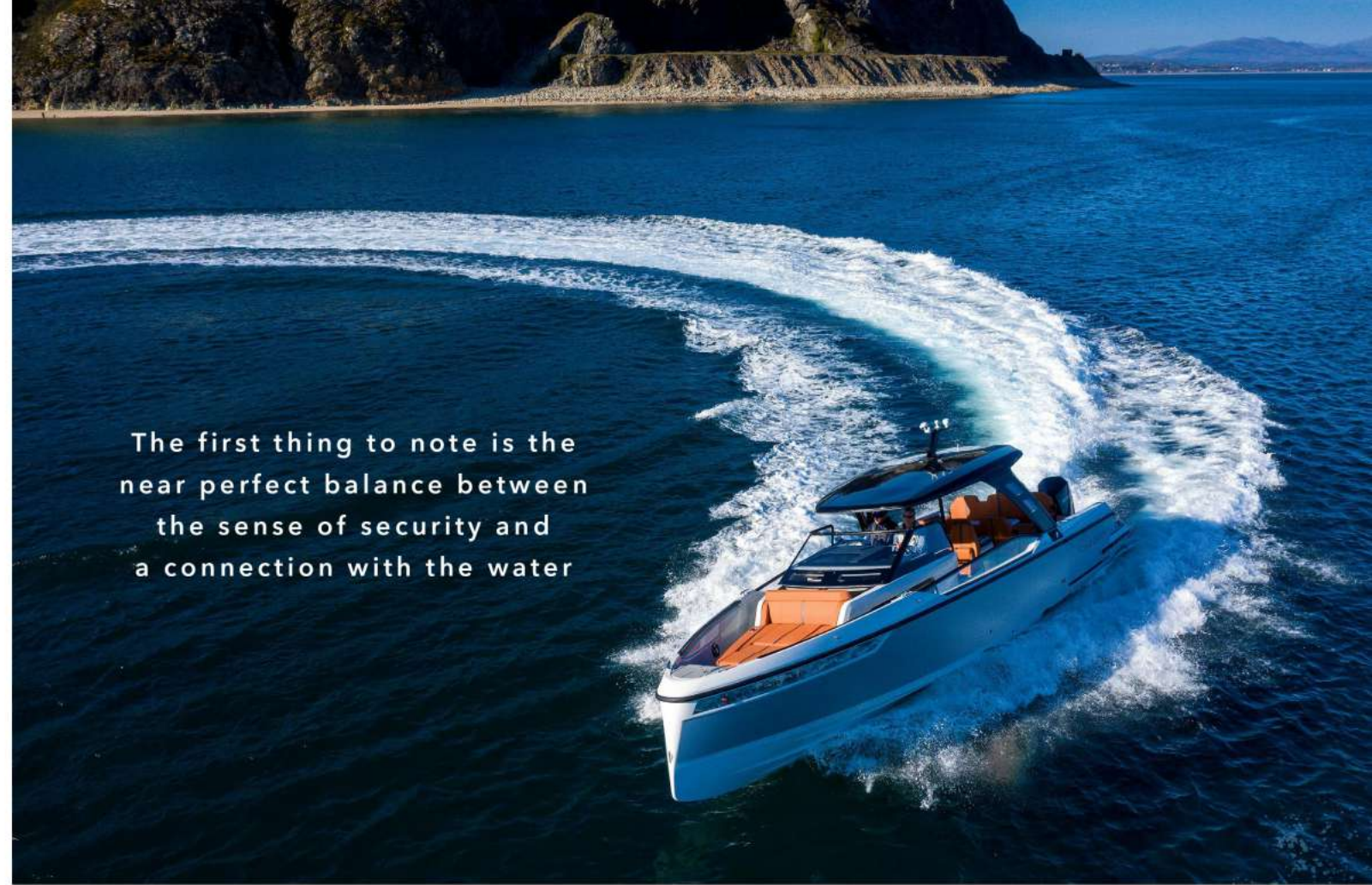
Credit must also go to Mercury's engines and steering system.

The new V8s are truly an engineering masterpiece, not just in terms of their consistent throttle response and progressive power delivery but also their controllability at idle when slipping into and out of gear. The gear engagement is so smooth that you find yourself checking for the little green throttle light that indicates when you're in neutral. If this all sounds a little too civilised for the racing community, there's still a soft switch buried in the Smartcraft control system that allows you to open a butterfly valve for a more urgent, rasping exhaust note that will snap heads the minute you fire up the engines. The power steering is ▶





Wetbar can only be accessed when bench is pushed back. Hob and fridge are options

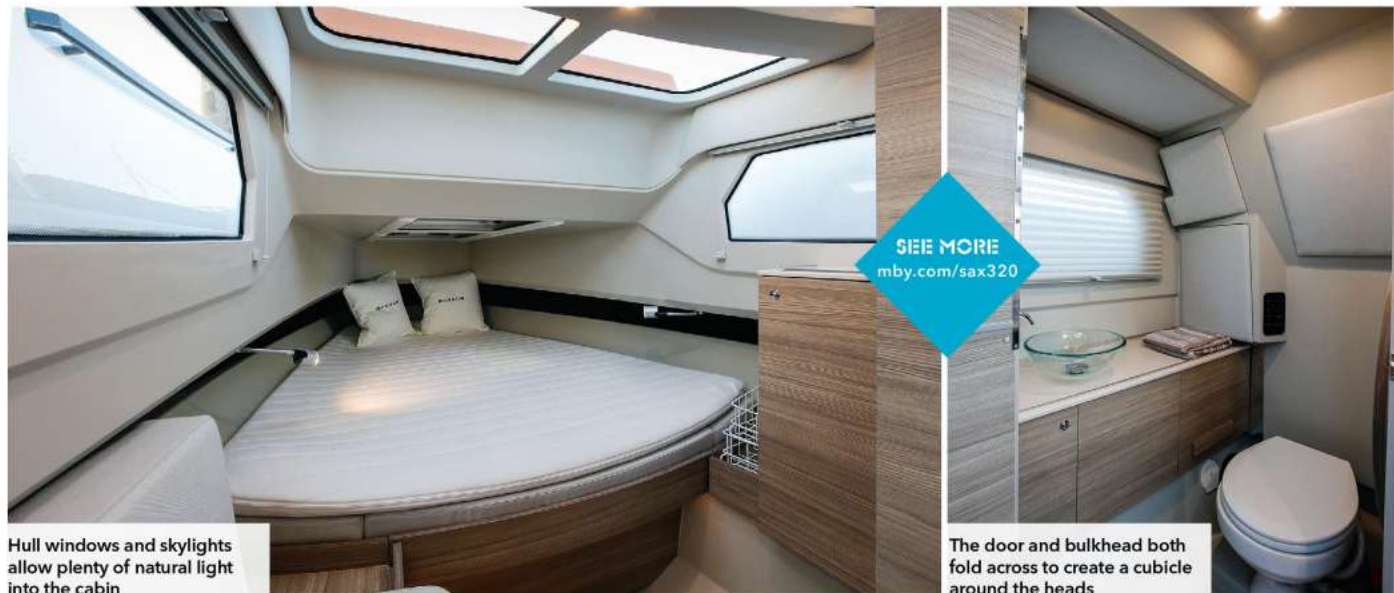


The first thing to note is the near perfect balance between the sense of security and a connection with the water

just as well judged, being perfectly weighted and geared to deliver responsive turn-in without being oversensitive at speed.

Top marks for the driving experience then, albeit with the caveat of not yet having an opportunity to test it in more challenging conditions, but what about the rest of it? The first thing to note is the near perfect balance between the sense of security and a connection with the water. For most of its length, the topsides and therefore the freeboard are usefully higher than the Axopar 28's, giving a greater sense of sitting in the boat rather

than on it. However, they dip down significantly amidships to be replaced by a perspex screen giving those at the helm a clear view of the water rushing by. It's a clever way of balancing the conflicting demands of wanting to feel secure without being cut off from the experience. The only downside of this approach is that there are no grabrails or cleats along this perspex section for tying springs or fenders to, something which is now being resolved with the aid of a pop-up cleat mounted vertically at the base of the T-Top. Forward and immediately behind this section



Hull windows and skylights allow plenty of natural light into the cabin

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mby.com/sax320

The door and bulkhead both fold across to create a cubicle around the heads



Further aft, the seating layout is even more versatile. Both benches have moveable backrests; the front one so that passengers can face forward or back, and the rear one so that it can be transformed into a big double sunpad. The front bench also slides fore and aft to give access to the wetbar unit immediately behind the helm seats.

ABOVE: The stepped hull grips well in fast turns and slides progressively even when pushed hard

**LOCKED AND LOADED**

It's a clever way of fitting a quart into a pint pot, but on this pre-production model the various latches, hinges and runners proved a bit stiff and fiddly to make this as effortless as it needs to make full use of it. Again, we're assured this has been improved on later boats and for those who want even greater flexibility, there is now an option for two lightweight freestanding armchairs that can quickly be unbolted from the floor and moved to wherever you want.

are three stainless steel buttons set into the topsides for securing fenders to, but it probably needs at least one more further aft to protect the folding side terraces.

The helm is well thought-out with three supportive seats that bolster and slide to allow comfortable driving when seated or standing. The relationship between wheel, throttles and seat is near perfect and although the windscreen on our prototype has since been extended to provide more side protection for the two outer seats, I never noticed any shortfall at the central helm position. The T-Top has been another subject of attention since our test. Ours was fully lined with fabric-covered foam and finished round the edge with some rather ugly plastic trim – the latest boats have two inset foam panels which look much smarter but still enjoy the same sound-deadening properties. I can't see this changing the visible flexing of the leading edge when bouncing over a wave at speed but this is purely a cosmetic niggle rather than a structural one – GRP is designed to flex.

This brings us neatly to the 320's pièce de résistance, the folding balconies. These could so easily have proved a gimmick too far, being either too flimsy or too fiddly to warrant using. In practice they proved exactly the opposite, deploying quickly and easily on electronic rams at the touch of a button, feeling secure underfoot and locking firmly into their raised position with the aid of a chunky manual lever. It was a little too early in the season for stripping down to my swim shorts for a dip in the Irish Sea but it doesn't take much imagination to realise how magical this could be when anchored up in a Mallorcan cala with your toes dangling in the sea or when easing your feet into wakeboard bindings without clattering into the engines or cockpit coamings.

Talking of which, there is a dedicated locker across the transom to store the ski pole as well as a much bigger locker in the aft bench for watersports equipment, covers and fenders. At the moment the backrest has to be swung right forward so you can lift the full-width seat cushion to access this but following ▶





In later models the lid will be split to allow quick access to one end of the locker

The breadth and versatility of the cockpit seating is particularly impressive. An extra mid-cleat is being added at the base of the hardtop

control. However, you could just as easily stick to the single engine, pick one or two key items and still have a cracking 40-knot 33ft boat for under £120,000 on the water.

### CONCLUSION

When the Saxdor factory heard I had sea-trialled an early pre-production boat they were horrified at the prospect of MBY testing anything less than the finished production boat. They needn't have worried. Even 95% sorted the 320 GTO is a mightily accomplished and deeply desirable machine. As for the handful of minor quibbles I picked up on, the majority had already been sorted by their before I'd mentioned them while the two that hadn't were immediately added to the list even though that meant delaying production. It's a sign of the yard's determination not just to deliver a good looking, strong performing, feature packed sportsboat at a knockout price but to set a new bar for what a 33ft sportsboat can do, regardless of price. **CONTACT** Ideal Boat +44 (0)1758 703013; www.saxdoryachts.com

our test, Saxdor now plans to add a split hatch on one side to give easier access to smaller items like lines and fenders.

Given all the focus on outside living, it would be easy to overlook the Saxdor's other great asset – a well proportioned cabin with a separate heads compartment. Strictly speaking, it's not a completely separate room, because the door and bulkhead don't quite meet the floor or ceiling, making it feel more like a posh cubicle than a proper bathroom. The reason for this is because it allows you to swing both the door and hinged bulkhead over to one side when not in use to give a brighter, more spacious open-plan vibe to the cabin space. As with almost every boat it's a compromise that is likely to satisfy the majority but may trouble the few.

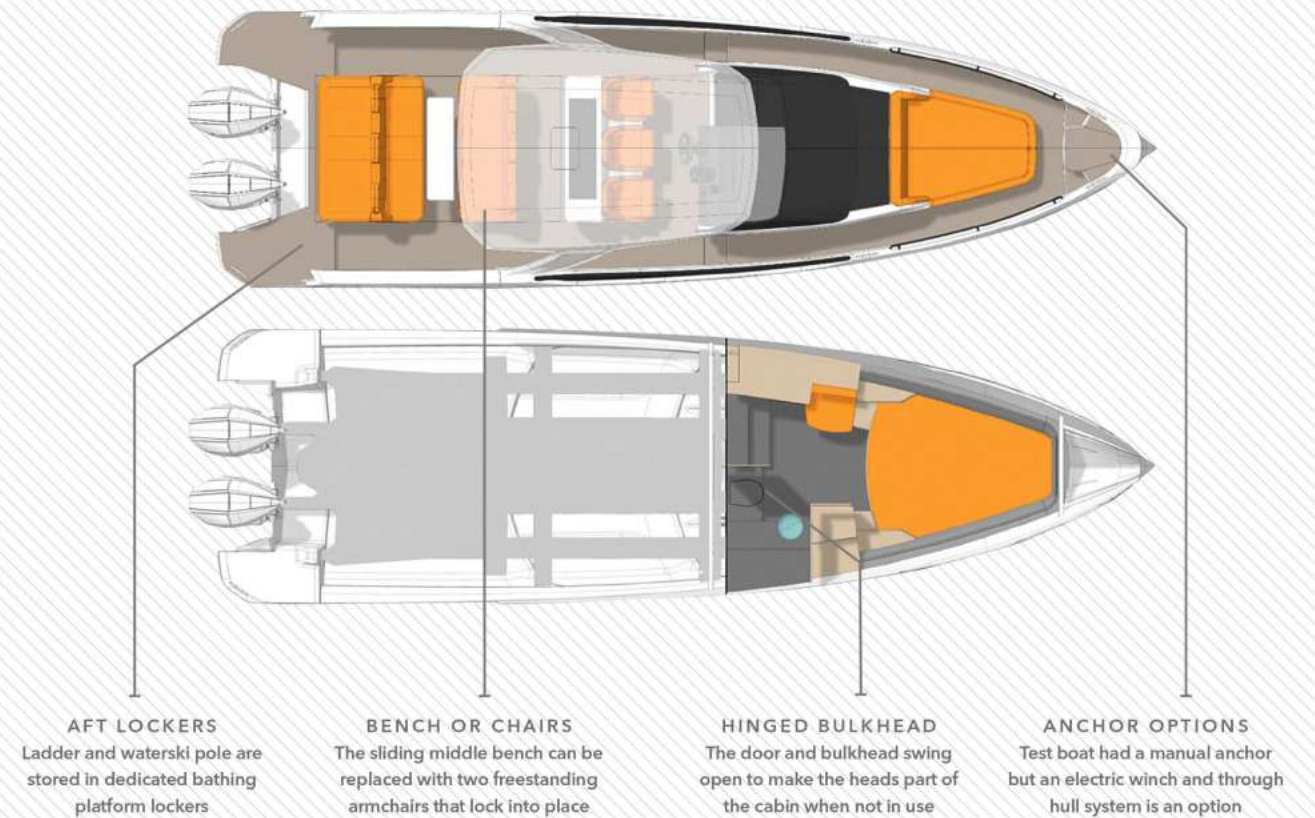
Last but not least there's the price. The eagle-eyed amongst you may have already spotted that the price as tested of our actual boat came to almost £176,991 inc VAT. To reach that sum you'd have to tick pretty much every option pack going, including navigation and entertainment, shorepower, wetbar, climate control, electric toilet, hull wrap and of course engine and joystick



**CENTRE STAGE**  
Central helm position gives a great view of the whole boat

**SIDESCREENS**  
These have been extended on later models to give better protection

**JOYSTICK**  
An expensive option but does make berthing easy for nervous types



### SPECIFICATION

LOA 33ft 8in (10.28m)  
Beam 10ft 2in (3.1m)  
Draught 1ft 11in (0.57m)  
Displacement 2,650kg (dry)  
Fuel capacity 450 litres  
Water capacity 100 litres  
RCD Cat C for 8 people  
Designer Saxdor Yachts with J&J Design

### COSTS & OPTIONS

Price from £105,626  
(single 300hp Mercury V8) inc VAT

Upgrade to twin 300hp V8s £32,073  
Joystick and bow thruster £18,437  
Navigation and entertainment package £7,440  
Toilet and fresh water package £3,459  
Shorepower package £12,502  
Wetbar package £2,139

### PERFORMANCE

Test engines Mercury V8 AMS. Twin 300hp @ 5,200-6,000rpm, 8-cylinder, 4.6-litre petrol outboard

	1,000	2,000	3,000	3,500	4,000	4,500	5,000	5,500	5,900
RPM									
Knots	5.3	9.1	15.1	23.1	33.0	39.5	44.5	50.0	52.5
Litres per hour	10	30	51	62	89	112	169	188	192
Litres per mile	1.89	3.30	3.38	2.68	2.70	2.84	3.80	3.76	3.65
Range (NM)	190	109	107	134	133	127	95	96	99

Calculated figures based on real-time readings, yours may vary considerably. All prices include 20% VAT. 30% fuel, 50% water, two crew, 15 degrees air temperature, F1 and calm seas