

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS...DONZI

Nicknamed “The Chameleon”, Donzi’s sparkling new Poker Run entry has panache

By Mark Rotharmel

Swift, Sure - Donzi’s “Orange Comp” looks magical flying over the water. Painted in PPG’s vibrant O-So-Orange, it’s a boat of many colors.

Every successful boat builder understands the importance of differentiation - but during times when allocating capital to new manufacturing projects may not be considered prudent, a company must call upon its most creative minds to set their products apart from the competition.

Craig Barrie recently spoke to PRA about Donzi’s dazzling new 38 ZR Comp, a 100-mph plus multi-stepped monohull. Appropriately dubbed “The Chameleon”, it literally changes color depending on light conditions.

Barrie, Donzi Marine’s Vice President of Sales, is creative and practical. He, like others in Donzi’s custom and racing division, represents the company well by combining talent and experience when designing high performance boats. Blessed with an entrepreneurial spirit, his passion for making fast boats better is obvious – and fortunately he’s been around long enough to know what makes sense at a practical level.

While manufacturers strive for a certain look, changes to a boat’s exterior lines can be costly. Most owners would agree that a great paint scheme is perhaps the most effective way to distinguish their ride, but given a virtual sea of colors on the Poker Run circuit, it’s getting tougher and tougher to stand out.

As Barrie says, “The theory behind the 38 ZR Comp was



PHOTO BY TAMARA TAYLOR



Twin color-matched staggered Mercury Racing HP700 SCI’s push the 38 ZR COMP to a top speed of 110 MPH.



This dual helm set-up puts passengers in the driver’s seat. Naturally the gauges have orange faces and chrome bezels.



Whether sitting on the port or starboard side, the operator stays in control with chrome arch-base throttles and shifters.

to make it different. When someone comes up to you at a Poker Run and asks, "Which boat is yours?", and you say, "It's that blue, red and yellow one over there with the purple accents", that person could easily mistake it for one of several multi-colored boats on display. Everyone has one these days."

What everyone doesn't have is a rig painted vibrant metallic orange – PPG's O-So-Orange to be precise – a product that transforms itself into another color thanks to its special base coats and metal-flakes. "It goes from O-So-Orange to Green and finally into a metallic-like sunburst yellow. Now everyone knows it as the Orange Comp", says Barrie.

On one Poker Run, the ZRC passed another entrant who later commented, "When the Donzi first came upon us, it was orange. While running beside us it was green and when it ultimately went by it turned yellow". Three boats in one - how's that for value!

One thing is certain; The Orange Comp is gaining notoriety with every Poker Run entered. As Barrie says, "It's developing its own personality. Donzi is coming out with a whole series of vibrant colors in 2009, some translucent. One is candy apple red, there's watermelon and some other outrageous shades. These will fall under the Donzi Custom Racing banner – it shows what we can do on an upscale level."

While sporting a new image, the 38 ZR is not a new model. The boat has been a work in progress for seven years, tuned and refined to handle better and accommodate different powerplants. First earning offshore titles in Europe's P1 and Evolution class, the 38 raced successfully throughout the



Silver helm pods coordinate with Donzi's custom upholstery. A Livorsi Data Tech Gauge replaces the standard GPS Monster gauge.

2006 season in North America. As Craig Barrie notes, "There have been many improvements along the way in the Comp series".

Barrie is a big fan of sit-down boats. When comparing them to his competition's stand up models, he feels the Donzi is more relaxing to drive and that he has a better on-the-water perspective when sitting. "Physically, you don't get as beat up", says Barrie.

Interestingly, when it came to choosing a Poker Run boat, Donzi discussed using a 43, a base 38 ZR and the Comp – ultimately deciding on just the Comp to be their fashion plate and promote the DCR program.

Barrie matter-of-factly pointed out the issues Donzi dealt with in coming to a decision. "When you see a boat, the first thing you look at is the overall boat itself – it either has the WOW factor or it doesn't. The second thing you see is the cockpit, so you ask yourself the same question; Does it have the WOW factor?"

"The third thing, which used to be the first thing, is the powerplant", says Barrie. "It either has a pair of 700's, or 1075s or 1200's and they come in all colors with painted engine rooms – but that's getting a bit old now – so once again it's back to the boat."

So how did Donzi address the interior? They found a custom liquid silver upholstery material that others were not using, changed the silver carbon fiber dashboard ergonomics and installed dual helms with Hardin Hide-Away adaptors so the boat could be driven from either the port or starboard side.

Equipped with a NASCAR-like "Fearless" steering wheel, the 38 ZR Comp is packed with electronics including two Mercury Vessel View's, a Livorsi Data Tech Gauge, Garmin GPS and a second GPS speedo for rear-seated passengers in the aft face of the shifter console.

While the instrument cluster boasts attractive orange-faced gauges with



Mark Rotharmel inspects Mercury's robust NXT1 drives. Donzi's Custom and Racing Division rigged the boat – safety is their number one priority.

custom bezels, Barrie admits that the functional side could still be ignored. "Generally speaking, people tend to notice the engine functions only after they smell something".

Fortunately, given today's electronics technology, the motor sends a message before the gauge even registers a problem. "It often saves the motor, goes into a default mode, retards itself etc. Just say you pick up a bag... you stop the motor, take off the bag, reset it, count to five and you're good to go", quips Barrie.

As attention-grabbing as the Carbon Shockwave seats are to look at, you can't help but think they might be hot to sit in. Barrie claims they're not. "It's really weird, but as the boat moves, the seats cool right off – almost like they are ventilated", says Barrie.

Speaking of cool options, there is also a cockpit ventilation system - forced air with blower motors and adjustable air vents in the dash. It has three speeds; low, medium and high - utilizing the cold air that spills off the deck, not air conditioning", says Barrie.

Naturally the Orange Comp comes with a 5-person intercom headset system, a wicked Kenwood stereo with MB Quart speakers and subwoofer - and an electric engine hatch that replaces the traditional gas strut. New are aluminum foot-rests and higher-placed grab bars for aft-seated passengers. A taller wind deflector has also been placed between the two canopies that virtually eradicates wind blowing around the back seat.

"That wasn't an easy", Barrie explains. "It was a trial-and-error process – first it was three-inches high,

then four-inches - and then we ran it with a five-inch deflector. We got to the point where people wanted a bit more air and no longer wanted to sit in the back seat! Now you can put your hand up at 60-mph and feel exactly where the air passes by - it's really very comfortable now."

For power, the Comp has twin Mercury Racing HP 700 SCi's with NXT1 drives and Teague 450 ST exhaust tips. "With five people and three-quarters full of fuel, the boat will see 109.9 - 110.1 mph. The drive height has been raised on this one and we're turning Mercury's CNC 17 1/2" x 37" props – a good size wheel at 5350 RPM", says Barrie.

As is the case with all Donzi's performance models, including center-consoles, the bottom has been blue-printed. Having tested an earlier 38-foot Donzi at approximately the same speed, I concur with Barrie's assertion that the Comp's ride is stable. "Actually", says Barrie, "Gene Weeks (Donzi's talented Director of Performance), just built a 1075 Comp that went to Bulgaria - It's running in the mid 130's!"

So – given that the Orange Comp has undeniable exterior WOW factor, a cockpit designed from the seat and a performance-proven appropriately-powered hull, I'd say Donzi is moving forward in a tough economy with a very fashionable product.

As Craig Barrie is quick to mention, "Everything is based on "New". Dealers want new products to sell, so we're giving it to them. Donzi is thinking globally and building boats for tomorrow's market".



Being a sit-down boat, all passengers are treated equally. These seats are cool, comfortable and equipped with grab handles.

Lee Kimmell, the dynamic CEO of Donzi's parent company American Marine Holdings, named this particular boat "Z Best Hand"... by George, we think he's got it! 🍀

POWER & PERFORMANCE

Test boat engines:

Twin Mercury Racing HP700SCi's
700 hp each, 502 CID, 8.2L, V8
NXT1 Dry Sump Drives
17 -1/2" X 37" Pitch Mercury
CNC Machined 5-Blade Cleaver
Propellers

Top reported speed by Donzi (GPS)

110 mph @ 5350 RPM

SPECIFICATIONS

Length:38 ft, 1 in
Beam8 ft, 2 in.
Weight8,700 lb.
Fuel:210 U.S. gal.
MSRP (with Myco Trailer)
.....\$485,000

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The Comp rides level and smooth. Wind is deflected over the heads of all passengers, fore and aft.