

## XO DFNDR 9

*Sweet lines, versatility and sporty all-weather performance highlight this Finnish speedster*





BY PETER A. ROBSON

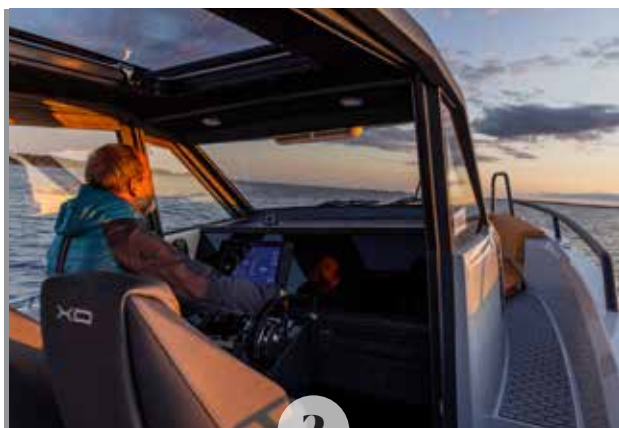
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It was late February, and darn cold—well below freezing—when I stepped aboard the latest addition to XO Boats' fleet, the DFNDR 9, at the West Vancouver Marina. My fingers were numb as I scribbled notes while SV Business Group (which also operates the marina) co-founder David Siradze walked me around the boat, showing me its many striking characteristics.

The XO line of Finnish deep-V aluminum sport yachts was founded in 2008 and is relatively new to Western Canada. XO Boats are versatile and designed for speed, performance and year-round operation, mostly as day boats or for short overnight cruises.

**DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION** The XO line offers eight models from 26 feet (8.03 metres) to 30 feet (9.4 metres) that can reach speeds up to 45 knots. The DFNDR 9 (28 feet, 10 inches/8.8 metres) reviewed here is a walkaround, with two Mercury 225-horsepower V6 outboards. Its sweet lines are characterized by an aft swept windshield and plumb bow with an attractive and tactical-looking vinyl hull wrap.

The hull is heavy gauge aluminum, while the deck and interior mold are fibreglass, with foam in between for buoyancy and added strength. It is notable that the decks and soles are so ▶



well built that there is absolutely no flex—which is rare. They are coated in PlasDeck, which is a thick, flexible PVC material which provides excellent traction plus soft cushioning underfoot. The hardtop's thick tubular support cage, interior handholds and bonded window frames are aluminum and very robust.

**ON DECK** The cockpit is compact, but versatile, with a forward-facing bench seat. When folded, it provides good walkaround access on the swim platform. Fronting the bench is a folding GRP table that is raised to serve as an outdoor dining table. The aft end of the helm/saloon area is enclosed by canvas, which can be moved out of the way to

allow the forward-facing bench seat backrest to flip forward so it faces the cockpit. When the table is raised and folded open, it creates a nice spot for six to enjoy drinks or food (on warmer days of course). In its lowered position, cushions can be added to convert the cockpit to a large sunpad. Deep, top-access lockers built into the bulwarks provide plen-

1. Most of the space below is taken up by the surprisingly roomy V-berth.
2. The helm/saloon area offers 6' 3" (190 centimetres) of headroom.
3. Fronting the cockpit bench is a folding table that is raised to serve as an outdoor dining table.

ty of storage for fenders and lines. The machinery access (filters, four AGM batteries, general storage and such) is accessed under the cockpit sole, though the latches were iced up during the sea trials so I couldn't evaluate that space.

Perhaps the most innovative feature of the DEFNDR 9 are its substantial sliding glass doors on either side. They open the helm/saloon area completely to the elements and allow passenger access to the rear bench seat.

The 16-inch-wide side decks and the 34-inch-high bulwarks topped with thick, rock-solid aluminum handrails between the bow and stern areas make for safe passage regardless of conditions. The windlass and anchor gear are tucked below a triangular bow hatch. Boats with plumb bows always raise concerns about the anchor damaging or scraping the paint off the hull. XO has come up with a clever hinged bow roller (and anchor) that tucks away into the windlass compartment when not in use and flips up over the bow when needed.

While there is no dedicated seating at the bow, sitting on the rubber sole and leaning on the bulwarks should be comfortable, however, bow cushions can be optioned. A step-through hatch provides easy secondary access to the V-berth from the bow. The hatch is large enough to load gear such as bikes, kayaks and paddleboards into the V-berth area, though there is also ample room for gear and toys on the foredeck or the hardtop. Both the bow and cockpit areas have recessed bases for support poles and tie downs for optional sunshades.

**INTERIOR** The helm/saloon area offers 6' 3" (190 centimetres) of headroom and consists of two hydraulic suspension seats in front of the previously mentioned and well-padded bench seat.

This area is compact—the helmsperson must walk outside and around the wheelhouse to change positions with the co-pilot and the glass doors must be slid back to access the aft bench—but once everyone is in position, it's a cosy space with room for everyone to travel in comfort. Under the bench seat on the test boat was a small drawer fridge. An off-the-shelf portable stove can be used for cooking. The helm arrangement is excellent with everything right at your fingertips. There's room for two touch screens (the test boat only had one) and the steering wheel is adjustable, as are the suspension seats that can swing 180 degrees to face the bench seat, thus creating a larger inside social area. Most of the switches are flush, with push button controls. A powerful defrost system should keep the windshield from fogging up. The test boat was ordered with an Optimus 360 joystick, bow thruster and Lenco automatic trim tabs. Overhead an electric sunroof provides both light and ventilation on those warm summer days. Once tucked inside, the Webasto forced air heater kept us toasty, despite the freezing weather outside.

Main access to the sleeping area is to starboard via a locking hatch that lifts

out of the way and a lower sliding plexi-glass door. Headroom is limited, but the cabin does not feel claustrophobic. Most of the space below is taken up by the surprisingly roomy V-berth. The aft end has a recessed pop-up step that lifts up at the push of a button to serve as a sturdy step to the bow area but also doubles as a small table. Good storage is provided by a shelf and side lockers across from the head. Air vents on either side of the cabin provide ventilation or can be closed off as required. The head compartment is again, quite compact, but it does the trick with an electric toilet, sink, faucet and shower wand. Everything inside and out is very well engineered with no rough edges—the finishing is flawless.

**UNDERWAY** David Siradze guided us out of the marina, past Eagle Island and its luxury homes, and into Howe Sound. Despite the cold, it was a fine, sunny day with a two-foot chop and outflow winds of about 15 knots—enough to give us a good idea of performance. XO Boats are designed to operate in the waters of Finland, Sweden and the Baltic Sea, which offer similar conditions to the West Coast, and are built accordingly to handle rough weather. As the company ▶



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literature says, "...head out when others stay in port." Sounds like fun!

The twin 225-horsepower outboards offered plenty of power and fast acceleration, with us climbing onto the plane in a mere 3.5 seconds with almost no bow rise (whether using the auto trims or not). Visibility was excellent all around. We were soon zipping along at 24 knots (3,500 rpm) and bouncing over the chop with none of that irritating slamming or pounding, thanks to the fine entry and deep-V hull. At this speed, the noise level in the helm area was whisper quiet at 65 dB. Our fuel burn was only 14 gallons per hour (53 litres per hour). When we advanced the throttles to their stops, the acceleration was enough to force us back into our seats. At full throttle, we were zipping along at an almost scary 43 knots (5,000 rpm) and the ride got

bumpy, but thanks in part to the suspension seats, we weren't getting thrown around and felt quite secure—whether standing with the bolster or fully seated (the aluminum footrests are very well placed). The centreline throttles are protected by an adjacent arch that can be used to brace the driver's hand when using the throttles while also preventing someone from accidentally stumbling and hitting the throttles. Back at 24 knots, with the wheel at various positions, including hard over, the XO clung to the water, heeling steeply with no skipping or ventilation of the props. The turning radius was as tight as I've seen and the steering was nicely responsive. There was absolutely no squeaking from anywhere inside—again something rare—thanks once again to engineering and build quality.



## SPECS

**LOA** (not including engines)  
8.8 m / 28' 10"

**Beam** 2.6 m / 8' 6"

**Draft to props** 0.99 m / 3' 3"

**Weight** (not including engines)  
2,710 kg / 5,975 lbs

**Fuel** 450 L / 119 USG

**Water** 98 L / 26 USG

**Holding** 45 L / 12 USG

**Std Power:** 2 x 225 hp Mercury

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**CONCLUDING REMARKS** I tried to find fault with the XO, but I'm happy to say I couldn't find anything to criticize—and that is very unusual for this reviewer. The DFNDR 9 is one tough aluminum boat and solid as a rock (but it floats a heck of a lot better). Versatility is another bonus, with several cockpit and cabin seating arrangements to choose from. For those hot summer days, with the doors, skylight and aft canvas removed, it becomes an open boat. The XO is also a speedy sports boat. At top speed, one could easily get from West Vancouver to the Gulf Islands (36 miles) in an hour. At 24 knots, it would take a little better than an hour and a half (while burning only about 21 gallons/80 litres total). I'm confident that the XO DFNDR 9 can also take any weather that can be thrown at it.

Although not designed for long cruises, the accommodation would work well for a couple or a couple and a child. The roof rack and bow and cabin storage means there's room for all the toys and/or adventure equipment. Price, as tested was \$350,000 at press time. The XO DFNDR 9 is earning an expanding niche in the sport class on the West Coast and perhaps best of all, it's a ton of fun to drive. 