The runabout has been redefined in recent years by a growing group of boaters — day cruisers. These are folks who may operate from a cottage but more likely make a marina or a local launch ramp their home base, enjoying life on the water one day at a time.

For them the runabout is a floating pleasure island with enough space to let a family or a group of friends spread out and relax; enough room to store tubes, water toys, wakeboards and waterskis; and enough power to pull them easily. A head is essential for providing genuine self-sufficiency for those long days of cruising, lounging on deserted beaches or hanging on the hook in a favourite cove. Northeastern U.S. boaters have created their own type of day cruiser with the “picnic boat” and others prefer deck boats or pontoons. For most boaters, though, 22- to 25-foot bowriders offer optimum performance and space in a seaworthy, nautical package.

The 246 SSi is a perfect example of the day-cruising bowrider with plenty of space, speed and style. At 24 feet 11 inches in length overall, with a moderate V-hull, powered by a MerCruiser 350 MAG MPI pushing a twin-prop Bravo Three stern-drive, the test boat is fast and almost sporty. Thanks in part to the twin-prop drives, the boat accelerates to 20 mph in under five seconds and reaches 30 mph in 7.65 seconds. For all that low-end grunt, the boat still cruises effortlessly at 25.2 mph at 3000 rpm and 32.1 mph at 3500, topping out at 50.7 mph at 5000 rpm.

Low-speed planing tests show the boat solidly on plane at 18.7 mph at 2500 rpm, indicating an easily driven hull. It’s the same kind of performance that would make the 246 SSi a good recreational towboat. As for handling, the boat is tight, with none of the ponderous response of some 24-footers (the boat feels more like a 20-footer than many 24-footers). The Bravo Three drives help the boat grip and go, especially in tight turns and slalom testing.

For spending full days aboard, the boat must have a comfortable, well laid-out cockpit and bow seating area. Forward, the 246 SSi has a nicely rounded seating area with a deep footwell. Two adults could easily ride here while underway without affecting the driver’s forward visibility. Nicely upholstered in off-white vinyl with taupe accents, the forward seat bottoms are hinged, lifting to reveal large carpeted storage lockers. There are two speakers and two drink holders forward (more would be better); access forward is through the fold-back windscreen. A folding windbreak door cuts airflow to the cockpit.

Large consoles provide space for an enclosed head compartment to port and a large storage locker to starboard, forward of the helm area. The head is one of the best of its breed, with an electric light, opening portlight, and easy-
clean vinyl and fibreglass surfaces. The Porta Potti chemical head will work fine for light use, but either way must be permanently installed with a pumpout hose and fitting to be legal on Canadian inshore waters. A JBL Marine AM/FM CD player is mounted in the head; there are two more speakers in the main cockpit area.

The centreline walk-thru to the bolt-on swim platform provides easy access aft for swimming and sports, but it’s the main cockpit seating area that defines the boat and lets it perform as an accommodating day boat. The helm and companion seats slide and adjust but also swivel right around when the boat is at rest, facing inward. In conjunction with a U-shaped aft lounge (with an insert cushion covering the walkway aft) the helm and companion chair form a conversation and entertainment zone comfortable enough for half a dozen adults.

If a picnic is on the agenda, install the table, pull out the Igloo portable cooler from under the portside settee and serve up the food and drinks. Water toys will stay stored and out of sight in the large “basement” locker until everyone’s ready for action.

Plenty of fun will be found aboard the 246 SSI, but at the end of the day, everyone gets to go home, ready to rest up and head out again tomorrow.

Mike Milne

An optional tower will appeal to wakeboarders. At left, the 246 SSI’s open layout, adjustable helm seat and enclosed head combine to create a comfortable day cruiser.