

Keaton 18' Jet

Power: 460 Ford/Berkeley

We don't have a crystal ball but it will not take a marine fortune teller very long to forecast that if the jet industry is going to survive the next five years, some changes must be made.

Leading jet builders like Tahiti and Sleek Craft have noticed a significant

drop in sales since the energy crunch. Industry economists seriously doubt whether high sales volume will ever return. On a positive note, most of the fast buck "splash craft" manufacturers who popped up during the 70s throughout Southern California have appeared to

disappear forever. Good riddance. So what remains...hopefully are only the quality manufacturers like Keaton Boats of Sacramento, California.

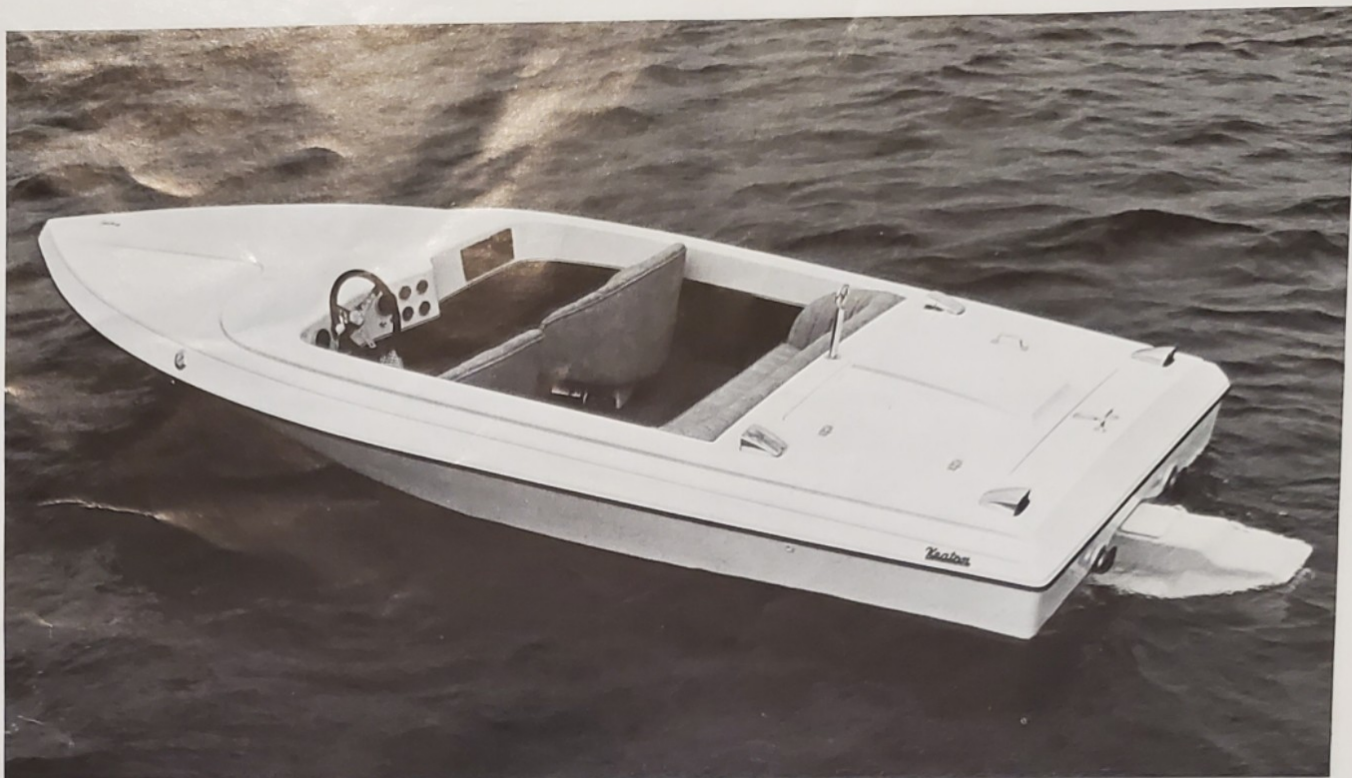
Because they are a highly customized manufacturer, Keaton Boats has not received any national exposure during their



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Powerboat Magazine
Performance Report





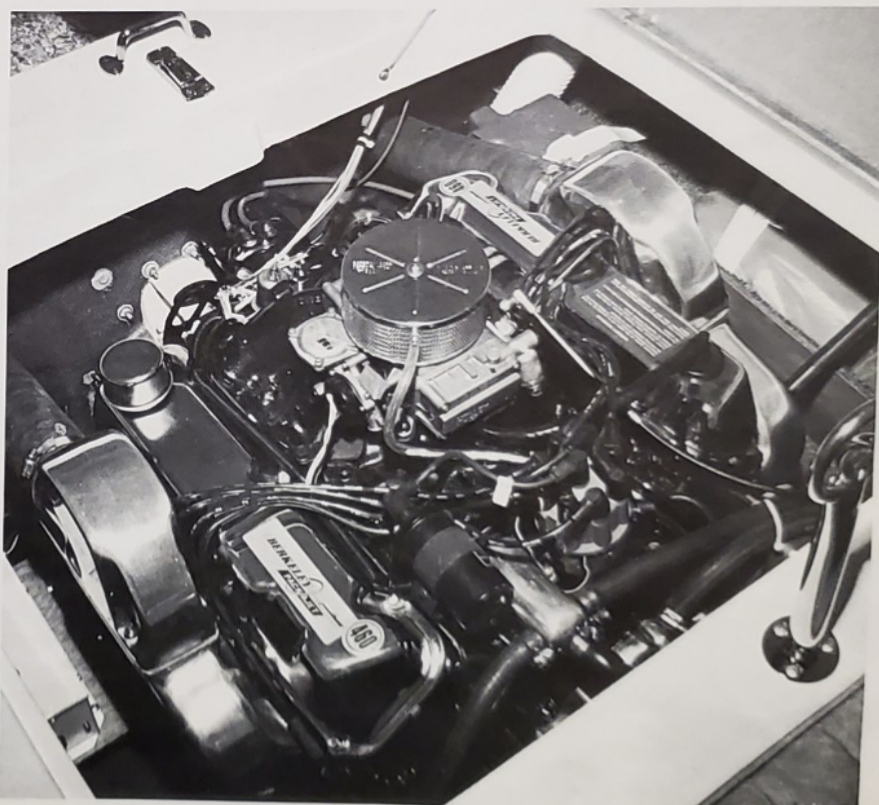
eight year manufacturing existence. Initially, we were very hesitant to include this rather obscure manufacturer in our '81 Performance Trials because of their low volume building. However, after testing the boat we can now confidently say it's one of the finest jet boat packages we've had the pleasure of driving.

At this point, we can offer no guarantees but this first year Performance Trials' participant has a very solid chance of winning our Jet Boat of the Year laurels for 1981. When we put this 18 foot wonder back on the trailer, after a most thorough battery of evaluations, the entire test team agreed we'd uncovered a diamond in the rough.

Weighing in at a solid 2,100 pounds with engine, our Keaton test candidate was powered by a Harman Marine 460 Ford and mated to a Berkeley 21JF jet drive with an "A" impeller. The boat sported a well conceived 12 degree modified vee-bottom with three lifting strakes per side and a rounded keel.

Perhaps the thing we liked most about the Keaton was its cross breeding between a sleek high performance jet boat of the 70s and a recreational family cruiser. The boat had a fair amount of freeboard, a comfortable cockpit lay-out and performance stats that would make many of the 18' outboard and stern drive manufacturers cry. In addition, Keaton was able to incorporate top-notch custom craftsmanship on this mid-sized stornier while keeping the price below \$8,500.

Jet boats have always been highly regarded for their performance spunk and the Keaton showcased the finest attri-



butes of the pump industry. The boat was equipped with a very worthwhile jet trim device which allowed for rocketship-like acceleration and a very adequate 60+ mph top-end.

Pulling the thrust down, the Keaton was one of the quickest boats we've ever tested. The boat moved from 0-36 mph in

an incredibly quick three seconds and obtained top-end in under 10 seconds. Coming out of the hole, the boat was awesome in its throttle response. A word of caution to jet boat owners who read this article but decide not to buy a Keaton... never get into a drag race with this bottom-end killer.

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One of the reasons the Keaton was so phenomenally quick was its natural tendency to assume a very clean ride attitude. Once the boat was on plane, we gently directed the thrust upward and the spray broke very cleanly off the last two feet of the hull. On top-end, we played an interesting game to find out how much the variable angle thrust was worth. With the unit fully down, the boat registered a 54 mph reading on our calibrated water speed indicator at 4700 rpm. Moving the thrust up, we gained a solid 10 mph to 64 mph while only gaining 200 rpm.

Two areas that have plagued jet boats

in the past were low speed performance and fuel economy. Moving in and out of the no-wake zone, we did make several corrections in the wheel to keep the boat tracking straight however, the Keaton was far superior at speeds below 10 mph than most jet boats we've tested. Looking at our performance charts, you'll see that the boat recorded a respectable 28 mph reading at 3000 rpm which is better than many of the modern squirters.

Examining the boat's fuel figures, we detected some improvements, particularly in the upper speed ranges. Granted, the boat's numbers of 7 and 10 gph at 25

and 35 mph were slightly excessive, but the 13 and 14 gph readings at 45 and 50 mph were very acceptable in relation to stern drive and outboard powered boats. When comparing fuel stats with the small block mills used in today's stern drives you must not overlook the fact that the Keaton utilizes a big block powerplant.

In our slalom course evaluations, the boat had a slight tendency to skid, surprisingly more at higher speeds than in our 20 and 30 mph tests. Generally speaking, jet boats turn more responsively as additional water is pushed through the pump but that was definitely not the case with the Keaton. It should be mentioned that at any speed and in every direction we turned the boat, we never were concerned that it would spin completely out of control as some of the early style pumps had a reputation of doing.

The Keaton handled our rough water tests incredibly well, despite its bottom design and 18' length. Naturally, jet boats will never be the optimum drive when the water gets nasty since you constantly must guard against over-revving the engine. However, in our wake jump test we noted that the Keaton kept a very level attitude, had a smooth re-entry and did not chine. Despite the boat's rather shallow bottom, the ride comfort was more than adequate, due primarily to the boat's superb quality of craftsmanship.

One trend we've noticed in these last few fuel conscious years, is that people who can afford to buy recreational power boats have the money to demand top-notch workmanship. Unfortunately, a sizeable number of jet boat builders were more interested in high profits than in satisfied customers. The jet industry has been unfairly tagged with accusations of shoddy workmanship that reputable manufacturers like Keaton should not have to live with.

In our dry land inspection, we rated the Keaton on par with the finest boats on the water today. The boat was done with a very simple white paint job that was a little too "plain" for our performance tastes. Despite the lack of color, we still admired the straight clean lines and fabulous attention to detail.

Keaton's emphasis was not centered on elaborate cosmetic "goodies" but instead on putting the material where it was needed most. The boat's lay-up was far above industry standards. Foam flotation was very neatly placed in the forward bow section and the engine compartment was laminated for easy clean-up. There is nothing we like better than to test a boat that is sanitary in construction, fun to drive and most importantly, easy on the wallet when you sign on the dotted line.

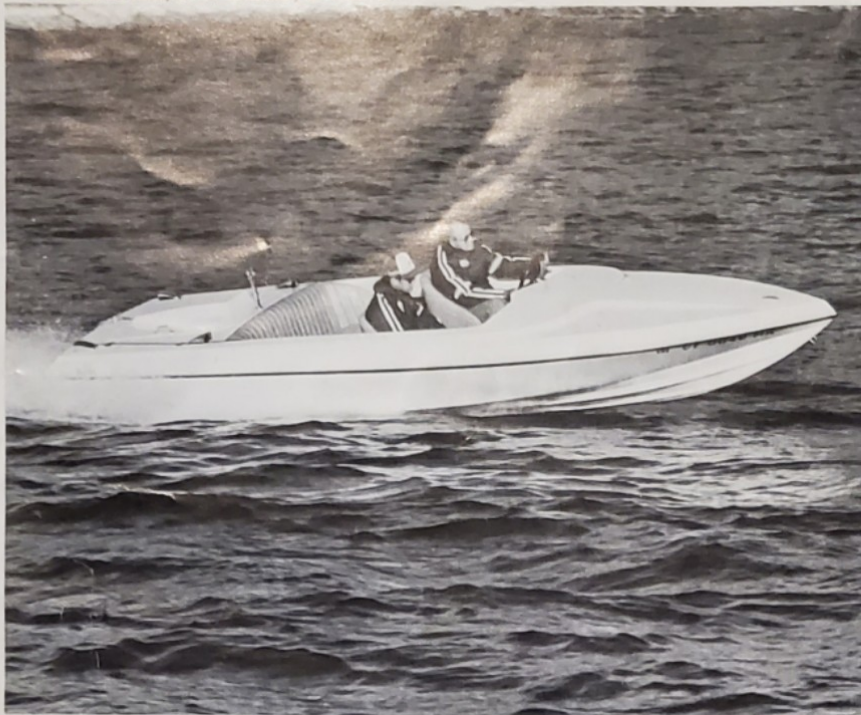
BOB NORDSKOG ON PERFORMANCE: "A properly tuned jet boat like the Keaton is a delightful driving experience in high performance boating. Although I didn't check all the charts, I can't recall ever driving a jet boat with so much acceleration. Coming on plane, I felt like I was back in one of my quarter milers - the pulling power was that quick. The Harman Marine Ford proved a very reliable powerplant with loads of mid-range punch. It felt like the boat had a sizeable amount of rocker built into the bottom which would help account for the low-end performance but to Keaton's credit, it never had a tendency to glue-in upstairs. With the trim unit out, the boat assumed a very clean attitude. In the slalom course, I felt the boat was lacking a little in high speed responsiveness as I had a difficult time negotiating all the buoys at 40 mph. Because of the hull's deck profile, my visibility was never impaired in the slightest. As a closing sidelight, it should be noted that the Keaton's distance to stop was among the highest of any boat tested at the Performance Trials which is directly attributed to the modified vee-bottom design and drag-free jet unit."

NORM TEAGUE ON DRYLAND INSPECTION: "Considering that the Keaton is really a family recreation styled machine, I was surprised that the boat exhibited construction techniques as good as the hot-rod custom builders. Lay-up, mold work and finish detail were superb although the boat had a very basic white paint scheme. One of the minor things that typifies Keaton's craftsmanship was that they sealed the seats of the boat with resin for water protection. I've always been amazed at how many manufacturers don't protect their seats from water corrosion. It's an incidental item that far too often is overlooked. The only two complaints I could register on the Keaton were the poor location of the fuel tank forward and the inadequate use of universal motor mounts on the Ford powerplant."

WADE WORLEY ON SKI TOW PROFICIENCY: "When it comes to water skiing you won't find a better performing machine than the potent Keaton. The boat had so much low-end torque I'm positive I could have pulled a half-dozen Pittsburgh Steelers out of the water on slalom skis! There is no way even the strongest of skiers could hold back on this boat when I gave the throttle full pedal. Once under way, the boat leaves a very substantial wake with a high, square crest. Hot doggers will find the Keaton delightful and even the purist slalom participant will find the boat a worthwhile challenge. Test skier Kurt Schoen never budged the boat around in slalom cuts as the tracking was dead arrow even. Boarding and debarking were easy as the pump housing provided a safe and ideal step ladder."

MARK SPENCER—OVERALL SUMMARY: "For the jet industry to survive, it must offer today's consumer high quality products that make sense for the family man. The days of metalflake, low freeboard, chromed jet boats appear doomed but machines like the Keaton have proved more than ever before that jet drives deserve a reputable niche in the marine marketplace. As we mentioned in the evaluation, the Keaton stands a very good chance of emerging as our Jet Boat of the Year from a rather short field of possibilities. Rating the boat against other 18 footers not necessarily jet driven we found the Keaton one of the best performing mid-sized dollar values on the market today."

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ENGINE AND PROPULSION SPECIFICATIONS

Make/Model . . . Harman-Berkeley 460 Ford
Cylinder type . . . V-8
Cubic inch displacement . . . 460 c.i.
Maximum horsepower at rpm . . . 320 at 4600
Prop: . . . Berkeley "A"

MEASURED PERFORMANCE DATA

Indicated top speed-calibrated
speedometer . . . 64
Indicated top speed-stock speedometer . . . 63
Recorded top speed-radar gun . . . 64
Measured top speed-measured 1/8 mile 63.5
Maximum rpm-calibrated tachometer . . . 4900
Maximum rpm-stock tachometer . . . 4800
Time to reach plane . . . 2.1 seconds
Minimum plane speed . . . 16 mph
Distance to stop from 35 mph . . . 220 feet
Decibel reading (35 mph at 50 feet) 82 dB(A)

FUEL CONSUMPTION DATA

25 mph consumes 7 gph = 3.57 mpg
35 mph consumes 10 gph = 3.5 mpg
45 mph consumes 13 gph = 3.46 mpg

CONSTRUCTION-WORKMANSHIP

EVALUATION

Fiberglass lay-up . . . 10
Mold detail and finish . . . 10
Placement and quality of deck hardware . . . 8
Dashboard instrument lay-out . . . 9
Controls placement . . . 8
Installation of electrical wiring . . . 8
Installation of fuel tanks . . . 8
Seat padding . . . 8
Access to minor services . . . 8
Storage space . . . 8
Access to storage space . . . 7
Interior styling . . . 8

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

LOW SPEED

Tracking . . . 8
Throttle response . . . 10
Shifting of passenger weight . . . 8
Docking maneuverability . . . 8
Visibility coming on plane . . . 10
Ease of boarding and debarking . . . 8

CRUISE SPEED

Tracking . . . 8
Throttle response . . . 10
Slalom course at 20 mph . . . 8
Slalom course at 30 mph . . . 8
Slalom course at 40 mph . . . 7
Rough water ride attitude . . . 8
Hull recovery in rough water . . . 8

HIGH SPEED

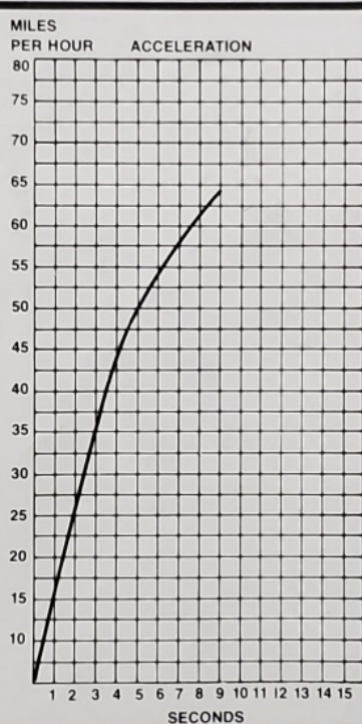
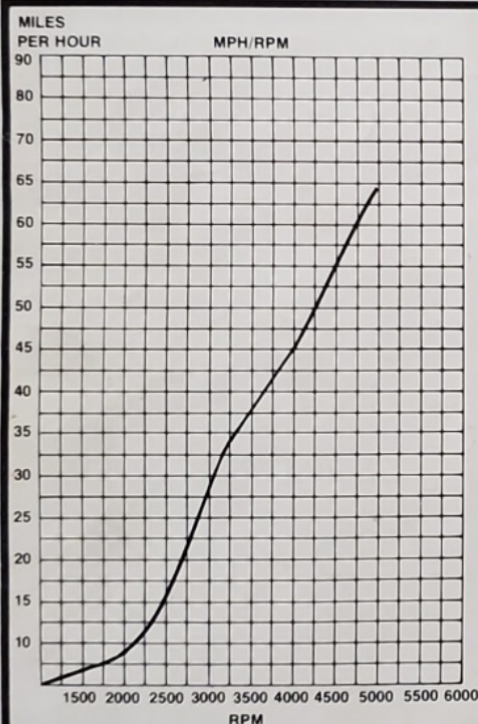
Tracking . . . 8
Throttle response . . . 10
Right turn . . . 8
Left turn . . . 8
Visibility . . . 10
Ride comfort . . . 8

WATER SKI EVALUATION

Take-off power . . . 10
Tracking consistency of hull . . . 9
Throttle sensitivity . . . 10
Visibility coming on plane . . . 10
Visibility at speed . . . 10
Wake . . . 10
Ease of boarding and debarking . . . 9

TEST STAFF

Test Driver . . . Bob Nordskog
Test Observer . . . Mark Spencer
Ski Driver . . . Wade Worley
Ski Observer . . . Danny Churchill
Skier . . . Kurt Schoen
Dry Land Inspector . . . Norm Teague



HULL SPECIFICATIONS

Make/Model . . . Keaton 18 Jet
Hull configuration . . . Modified vee
Length . . . 18'
Beam . . . 86"
Hull weight
(without engine) . . . 950 pounds
Construction process . . . Hand/chop lay-up
Passenger capacity . . . 1050 pounds
Retail price as tested . . . \$8,250
(not including trailer)

STANDARD EQUIPMENT: Automatic bilge pump, center ski tow, striping, pump cover with

step, 90 amp battery, hour meter, oil drainer, full instrumentation.

OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT: Running lights, windshield, speedometer, AM/FM stereo and cassette, mooring cover.

OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT ON TEST BOAT: Running lights, speedometer.

COLOR OPTIONS: Available in any color.

ADDRESS OF HULL MANUFACTURER:

Keaton Boats
8509 Folsom Blvd.
Sacramento, Ca., 95826