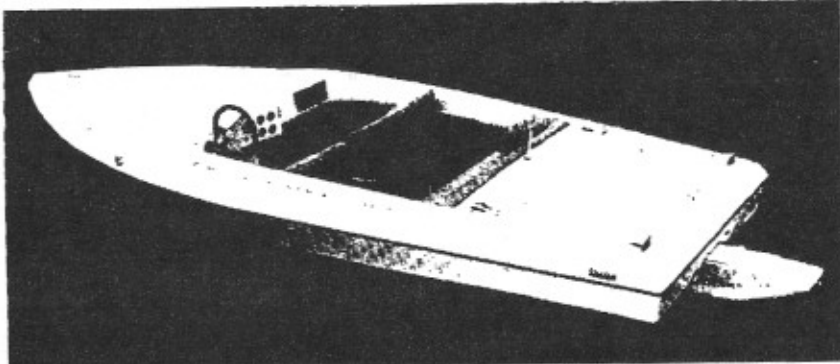


KEATON 18 JET

Two and a half years ago, we hesitated before allowing Jack Keaton to bring his 18-foot jet boat to our Performance Trials. He was a small custom builder, and we weren't sure his products warranted nationwide exposure. That shows how dumb we were: This family-style squirt boat won our Outstanding Jet Drive Performance award in '81, and again last year. It remains one of the best performing — and most surprising — jet boats we've ever driven.

In '81 our test boat was powered by a big-block 460 Ford/Berkeley package, and its acceleration was phenomenal; very few boats of any type have done better at our Trials. The 18 Jet went from zero to 36 mph in three seconds, and hit



its top end of 64 in less than 10. Its clean ride attitude and consistent overall performance left room for little debate when it came time to choose our award winners.

But the model seemed almost a contradiction in terms, intended as a family boat as well. True, it had a very normal two-buckets-and-rear-bench seating arrangement, featured more freeboard in contrast to the low-profile look of so many jets, and had a very plain exterior design, devoid of stripes and fancy graphics, but we were almost afraid that no one would stop ogling at the performance long enough to notice. (A nice problem to have.) So last year Keaton powered the jet with a 350 Chevy, to show us, among

other things, that the downsized powerplant offered fuel economy equal to a same-size 260 stern drive and larger outboards. Our test results, which showed a 5-mpg average in the midrange, proved it. The performance was better than we expected, with a top end of 60 mph, and the workmanship was once again excellent, although basic. As had been the case the year before, the 18 Jet hardly looked like a jet boat, with its windshield and enclosed engine hatch, striking a better balance between performance and family use simply because you won't constantly be awed by its power.

With the 350, Keaton's 18-footer sells for \$9,350. ■

KEATON TOURNAMENT/ BAREFOOT

If you're a serious skier and you live on the West Coast, you're familiar with the problem: you're Here, and Correct Craft, MasterCraft, Ski Supreme, et al. are There... 3,000 or so miles away. You have two choices: You can pay a scary shipping charge to have one of the top tournament boats sent, or you can go without. Or you can take a look at Keaton's 17'6" alternative.

This is the Tournament/Barefoot's first year, but don't take that to mean the company is sort of feeling around in the dark. On the contrary; Jack Keaton built his first center-engine, tournament-oriented ski boat back in 1959, specifically for hard-core skiers on the West Coast. In

1972, when the popularity of the Eastern tournament boat builders had spread, he withdrew from that segment of the market, but the requests kept coming. Keaton built a prototype of the new Tournament model in '81, and sent one to Lake Mead for us to test last fall. You'll see the results next month, but we can tell you that we were very impressed.

Like the company's 18-foot jet boat, the Tournament is very plain — mostly white, with not even so much as a word painted on the side. Largely because of its size, it's not designed to go head to head with the tournament regulars, but you can fairly compare it with one of their smaller sisters, like the Correct Craft Ski Tique.

With a 350 direct-drive, the latter sells for \$13,650; with the same power, the Keaton goes for \$10,800. Keaton does custom work, and the quality of construction is comparable. Hmm. Seems like a lot to pay for flashy graphics, and that's before the shipping charge.

But what about performance? We'll just tell you that the Keaton ran 54 mph with the 350, which is as fast as the others run with big-block power. Its double-chine, semi-flatbottom design is the secret of a higher, non-plowing ride and faster planing. So before you call Florida to place that expensive order...



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