

DRIVEN REVIEW

Text by David Baker

Photos by Walter Sidas

CEN RACING

Grey THUNDER

A hhhh... RC boating—a nice relaxing way to spend an afternoon. A gentle breeze caresses the water's surface, birds above demonstrate their elegant dance among the clouds as your little boat motors its way... BUZZZZZZZZ!!!! (Annoying wrong-answer buzzer for affect). Okay, that's not what I'm going for here. The scream of the engine! Smoke! Power! Churning water! That's what I'm going for! And that's exactly what I got when the Grey Thunder from CEN hit the neighborhood pond under cloudy skies without a bird in sight.



FAST FACTS

- MANUFACTURER: CEN Racing
- BOAT: Grey Thunder
- CLASS: Nitro Semi Deep-Vee
- DRIVER: Intermediate RC Boater
- SPEED (AS TESTED): 24.8 mph
- STREET PRICE: \$280

I think many RC car and truck enthusiasts overlook RC boating because they feel it just doesn't deliver the excitement that other surface vehicles do. Maybe they think it lacks the speed necessary to produce a sweat-on-the-brow adrenaline rush. Whatever their reasons for not giving RC boating a try, I'm here to say they're wrong...they're all wrong! Well, that may be a little harsh, but perhaps if I can get them to read about the Grey Thunder they may look at it a little differently.



STORM CHASERS BEWARE



## DRIVING IMPRESSIONS

### BOAT SETUP

**Comments:** Most of the setup required was purely aesthetic. Paint the hull, apply the decals and mount the "hand rail" on the front deck. Foam tape is included for sealing the hatch.

**Details:** White Lightning 20% fuel

**STEERING—** The Thunder is equipped with a single plastic rudder with an inline, shaft-driven, direct-drive prop. It's controlled by a standard servo. The rudder and prop shaft are adjustable to change the boat's attitude at high speed. Dropping the angle of the prop shaft will cause the hull to ride more towards level. Adversely, raising the angle will lift the nose out of the water. I kept the boat running closer to level. At speed, the turning radius was a wide sweeping arc. In fact, at slower

speeds it wasn't much tighter. It was only an issue when I was getting closer to the far shore. I had difficulty determining how close I actually was and, on occasion, got a little too close to the cattails and weeds. Out in the open it stayed on track unless coerced into doing the Cha Cha or Tango by running into it's own wake.

### ACCELERATION AND HANDLING—

When I first tossed the Grey Thunder into the pond, I drove slowly for a few seconds to get the water circulating through the cooling head. Once I had a stream of water spewing out the side of the hull I hit the throttle. The prop immediately began cavitating, which caused the boat to bog down in the water. But then... Whoosh! It got a bite of H<sub>2</sub>O and launched like a shot. It caught me off-guard, but I stayed on it as it shrunk into the distance towards the opposing shoreline. Once I was used to the way the boat wanted throttle applied, I didn't have too much of an issue with cavitating. The GP .16 marine engine got up to speed within a couple of seconds of applying full throttle. Most of the time, almost the entire hull was riding above the water's surface. Though it topped out at around 25 mph, the speed on water feels much faster than on land. My local pond was almost too small for the speeds I was experiencing. On fresh, smooth water, the Thunder didn't mind me leaning on the throttle through turns, but once I churned up the surface, it



began a dance that required concentration to maintain control throughout turns. The fun came to an abrupt halt when the tiny fuel tank emptied about 20 yards from shore. When I was unable to push it with the electric boat I had with me, I broke out my fishing pole with the floating crankbait. Twenty casts later I managed to hook it and bring it to shore.

**FUN FACTOR—** The nitro Grey Thunder provided all the adrenaline I desire for my RC addiction. It's definitely a different kind of fun than what I experience on land, but what a great departure. It was so easy to get caught up in moment, watching the Thunder cruise at what seemed like lightning speeds. I hated to stop, even to check the fuel level.

## INFO CENTER

**HULL/DECK—** The Grey Thunder's hull is made from molded plastic and has a "rocket" shape. It is made up of three pieces. The upper deck and lower hull pieces arrive pre-glued. The third is the hatch that is secured with two plastic lock bolts at the rear. Foam tape is included to seal the hatch. **STEERING—** Steering is handled by a single rudder/inline prop system. It's controlled by a standard servo that's mounted on the radio tray in the rear of the hull. The rudder assembly can be adjusted up or down to change the boat's attitude on the water at high speeds. **DRIVETRAIN—** The GP .16 engine is connected directly to the driveshaft and provides "instant-on" power. The shaft exits the rear of the hull and uses a drive cup/dogbone to allow rudder assembly adjustments. **ENGINE AND ELECTRONICS—** The powerplant is a pull-start GP .16 marine engine with a water-cooling unit in place of a heat sink head. It has a pickup tube at the rear that forces water through the head and sends it out the side of the hull through another tube. It features a rotary carb with three adjustment needles: high end, low end and idle. A composite pipe expels exhaust straight out the back with the help of a rubber extension tube. The fuel tank is rather small and is the same one found in CEN's Fun Factor series vehicles. The included radio is the Impact CII, also common on other CEN products. It's functional but still has a toy-like appearance and feel.

**FINAL ASSEMBLY—** For the boat to be truly ready to run, you only need to apply the sealing foam tape for the hatch. But of course you want the boat to look good, too. The grey hull arrives assembled but unpainted. If you use the boat's manual as a guide, you will only need to purchase blue paint because the grey of the hull serves as color for most of the completed scheme. Decals can be applied after the paint has had time to dry. After that, just install batteries in the boat and transmitter, fuel it up and go boating.



The rudder assembly can be adjusted up or down to change the way the boat rides at high speeds. Lower the prop shaft to give the hull a more level attitude and raise it to bring the hull's nose up. The tubing you see is the water pickup for the engine's cooling head unit. Water is forced into the tube and through the head before it is expelled out the side of the hull.



The layout of the Thunder's internal elements is simple and uncluttered. Everything you need to access is easy to reach.



The owner's manual includes assembly instructions to make it easier for maintenance and repairs.

## TECH SPECS

**LENGTH:** 32.28 in. (820mm)

**BEAM:** 10.63 in. (270mm)

**WEIGHT:** 67.2 oz., (1,905g)

**HULL/DECK:** Molded plastic

**DRIVE:** Shaft-drive

**ELECTRONICS:** CEN Impact CII

**STEERING:** Inline prop/rudder

**POWERPLANT:** GP .16 marine engine

### HELPFUL HINTS

**GOT TO GET:** Fuel, 12 AA batteries, fuel bottle, glow ignitor, plug wrench

**RECOMMENDED UPGRADES:** MDP 5-cell receiver pack, larger fuel tank

## CEN RACING GREY THUNDER



### WHAT WE LIKED

- ⊙ Design of the hull
- ⊙ Plenty of speed to get the adrenaline pumping

### WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- ⊙ It needs a bigger fuel tank.



### AUTHOR'S OPINION AND RATINGS

■ **HULL/DECK**—I like the style of the plastic hull. It looks like a rocket cruising across the water. I am not crazy about the blue/grey color combo. I found it difficult to see the boat through exhaust smoke at times. An afternoon with a can of yellow paint will fix that.

**RATING- 9**

■ **STEERING**—I think the steering could be a little more responsive and could use a tighter turning radius. Out of the box it was adequate and had no adverse effect on the day's playtime.

**RATING- 7**

■ **DRIVETRAIN**—The direct-drive system worked very well. I had to get used to starting slower to avoid cavitation, but once I got the hang of it, I had no problems at all.

**RATING- 9**

■ **ENGINE AND ELECTRONICS**—The .16 marine engine performed well. It fired up

for me with little effort and only stalled when I ran it out of fuel in the middle of the pond. Which brings me to my first criticism – the fuel tank. This should really be bigger. I was getting less than 10 minutes on a tank. The hull has plenty of room for something larger. My standard beef with CEN kits is the radio system. Even a foam steering wheel would help relieve some of its very toy-like appearance. It did, however, perform its duties without hesitation.

**RATING- 9**

■ **DURABILITY**—The Grey Thunder gave me zero issues in the durability department. Unless I take this thing out into some choppy water or decide to attempt to take out somebody's dock, I don't foresee problems.

**RATING- 10**

■ **EASE OF USE**—If you can run a nitro car then you can run the nitro Grey Thunder. The engine was easy to break in, and it required little adjustment during running. Controlling it on choppy water may take a little getting used to, but the adrenaline rush keeps it fun all the way.

**RATING- 9**

### CONCLUSION

To all those RC car and truck people that "just aren't into RC boating," I say don't knock it until you try it. Much of the equipment used for other RC vehicles crosses over to the water side for both nitro and electric. The Grey Thunder is a fun vessel that is available in an electric version as well as the nitro version tested here. At around \$300, it's not much different than investing in another land-based RC vehicle. So if you happen to have a body of water near you and have yet to throw a radio controlled boat into it, check out the CEN Grey Thunder. You won't be disappointed. ⊙

### Links

CEN/Genka Trading Corp., [www.cenracing.com](http://www.cenracing.com), (714) 792-1923.

For more information, please see our source guide on pg. 185.