

By Dave Kelley



All Inclusive

Tigé makes sure that no detail is left out on its 2006 24Vé, a watersports boat that doubles as a cruiser.

When Charlie Pigeon announced that he was moving his boat company, Tigé, and all its production to Abilene, Texas, back in 1995, most people in and out of the boating world thought it was the final, irrefutable proof that he was crazy. Abilene's a flat spot on a flat spot, a place you might go if you want to work with cattle or cotton; it's not what anyone would ever call a boating Mecca. Ten years later, Pigeon and Tigé are flying higher than ever, and while Abilene still hasn't quite reached Mecca status, it's worth making a pilgrimage there to take a ride on an all-new, fresh off the line, 2006 24Vé.

Pilgrimages tend to be digressive affairs, even for the single-minded, and this is no exception. Instead of a

making a beeline to the beach, the first stop is a visit to Tigé's spanking new factory. Unlike laws and sausage, it's not a bad idea to take a look every now and then at what goes into the making of a boat. In the case of the 24Vé, a look inside is revealing.

Layer upon layer of glass and resin, extensive (the bean counters probably say "excessive") use of Penske board composite, and an effort to come as close as possible to true monocoque construction are what's on display on the production line, as well as what has to be called an obsessive attention to detail. For example — you can't see this, but at the hull/deck seam, where the rivets that hold the rub rail in place are installed, Tigé slightly etches the gel coat. The etching confines the tiny

but inevitable (and insignificant in terms of integrity) gel coat cracks that result from the rivet installation. The cracks are so small that you'd probably never notice them anyway, but Tigé takes the time and trouble to etch the gel coat to make sure you'll never notice these trivial little imperfections.

Another discovery: Every Tigé is lake-tested when it comes off the production line. Like the gel coat etching, this may seem trivial, but it's a pretty big deal. While putting a just-finished boat in a test tank reveals a lot, putting that boat in the lake and having a professional drive it for an hour or so reveals a lot more. Is the steering right? Is there a rattle in the rough? Does the boat "feel" like it's supposed to? Tigé believes these questions are best

answered by taking the boat out on the water. Good idea. And there's no time like the present, right?

Fort Phantom Hill Lake will never, under any circumstances, be a boating Mecca. It's shallow (only 66 feet at its deepest point), the water level fluctuates widely, and it's whipped by near-constant winds. And then there's the water itself, the color of heavily creamed coffee, about as inviting as a box of rattlesnakes. There will be no wakeboarding, skiing, or any other activity that might possibly result in a dunking, not today.

There will, however, be a good test of the hull and Tigé's attention to detail when it comes to building a solid, rattle-

with the seat bottom high enough so your knees aren't stuffed up under your chin when sitting, but with enough seat back to actually provide a little lower-back support.



free boat, because the wind's coming down the plains at about 25 miles an hour, and there's nothing within 200 miles to slow it down. As a result, the creamy coffee waters of Fort Phantom Hill Lake are especially frothy, like something the Starbucks of the gods might serve up to one of the immortals, only not at all tasty.

The 24Vé is tasty, at least metaphorically, even as it slides off the trailer, thanks to the spacious interior layout. The bow seating is average, but the cockpit is nice and roomy, with a wraparound seat that holds at least eight adults comfortably. The seat height strikes a nice balance,

On a day this rough, that lower-back support is welcome, as is the high freeboard and convex hull that keeps the spray (and there's lots of it) away from the passenger compartment. It's a bouncy ride, but a dry one. And to be fair, the 24Vé hull does a good job of slicing through the rough. Good enough to show that while you might not want to do any wakeboarding or skiing on a day like this, you still might want to take the family across the lake or up the river to that cool little waterside restaurant everybody's talking about. The 24Vé is first and foremost a watersports boat, but it's

THE VERDICT

Tigé's new flagship deserves the title. This is a watersports boat that can double as an inland or Intracoastal cruiser, or as a family fun boat as the situation arises, which helps to justify the price tag.

Tigé 24Vé

LOA 24'
Beam 8'6"
Weight 4,320 lbs.
Fuel 47 gal.
Top Speed 43.2 mph
 (w/340-hp, 5.7L Vortec Marine Power MPI)
Time To Plane 4.8 seconds
0-30 mph 7.3 seconds
Decibels @ Idle 69 dB-A
Decibels @ 30 mph 82 dB-A
Decibels @ WOT 92 dB-A
Base Price \$51,625
 (w/315-hp, 5.7L Vortec Marine Power)
Price As Tested \$54,425
 (w/340-hp, 5.7L Vortec Marine Power MPI)
Hull Warranty Limited Lifetime
NMMA Certified? Yes

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big enough, dry enough, and seaworthy enough to fill the role of occasional weekend cruiser, especially if you stay inland or on the Intracoastal.


Especially impressive is the fact that even while the boat and all aboard are taking a pretty good thumping from the waters of Fort Phantom Hill Lake, the 24Vé doesn't rattle. Not once. It's even more impressive upon taking the helm, where that convex hull and the construction "overkill" team up to make the boat feel rock-steady and massively chop-resistant, yet at the same time, light and nimble and responsive to steering input.

At least part of that responsiveness should be credited to the 24Vé engine; in this case, it's a 5.7L Marine Power Vortec MPI producing a cool 340 horsepower. Unsolicited advice: This is the engine package to get. A 315-hp, 5.7L Vortec is standard, and Tigé offers packages all the way up to a 380-hp, 6.0L Vortec MPI, but the 340-hp 5.7L gives you the optimum blend of performance and economy.

With five people and full gear on board, carrying a quarter-tank of fuel, the 5.7L Vortec accelerates from a standing start to 30 mph in 7.3 seconds, and from a standing start to tournament skiing speed (36 mph) in 9.6 seconds before climbing to a top speed of 43.2 mph. Add the standard drive-by-wire electronic throttle, and it's a power package that's economical, powerful, and highly respon-

sive. A package that makes you want to never relinquish the helm.

Then again, if you're on a lake that's not mocha-colored, the 24Vé's wake is the sort of thing that can pull even the strongest of us away from the wheel and to the ends of our ropes. Tigé's patented TAPS has long been recognized for its ability to sculpt outstanding wakes for both skiers and wakeboarders, but it's a step better on a boat this size, able to create huge, surfable wakes that break either left or right — even without adding ballast. This is a bonus if you're switching from skiing to wakeboarding; you don't have to spend any extra time filling or draining tanks, and you don't have to compromise the boat's performance and handling by loading it up with a few hundred extra pounds of water.

On a normal day and lake, a boat test can be as digressive as any pilgrimage, but not today. When it's this windy and the water's this color, even a boat the caliber of the 24Vé can't keep folks out on the water much longer than necessary. A little bit longer than necessary, but not much. As with any pilgrimage, though, this trip to Abilene ends with promises made — including vows to spend much more time with the 24Vé on smoother, clearer water. Even a promise to make another trip down the road to Abilene, where a Mecca may be aborning. 

For more boat tests, visit www.boatingworldonline.com.