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Powerboat

The World's Leading Performance Boating Magazine





ANOTHER GEM

THE 28 BULLET FROM HOWARD CUSTOM BOATS SHINES NO MATTER THE ENGINE PACKAGE.

THERE AREN'T TOO MANY BOATS THAT WE'VE had the pleasure of testing with an extremely wide range of power. One exception is the top-selling boat from Howard Custom Boats—the 28 Bullet.

We've tested a half-dozen or so variations of the 28-foot sport boat since the Valencia, Calif., builder introduced it in 1999, and three times the boat has taken home the magazine's Sport Boat of the Year honors. With single-engine packages ranging from 425 to 1,100 horsepower, the 28 Bullet's performance has always impressed our Test Team.

This time, Howard delivered a 600-hp, closed-deck edition to the Parker, Ariz., leg of our Performance Trials, and it didn't disappoint.

PERFORMANCE

In our first go-around with a Mercury Racing HP600SCi power plant in the 28 Bullet, the production mill provided nice punch in the single-step V-bottom designed by Howard's General Manager Mike Willen. The boat tracked perfectly at all speeds and never got upset by the 1- to 2-foot river chop.

The boat, which checked in at \$140,200, was smooth through the turns and slaloms, maintaining an even attitude throughout. During higher-speed turns, our lead test driver did have to back off the throttles a bit.

Howard hooked the engine up to a Bravo One XR drive with a 1.5:1 gear ratio and a 32"-pitch Mercury Racing Bravo One propeller. With that setup, our Test Team squeezed out a top speed of 89.4 mph at 5,400 rpm on radar. Our lead test driver believed the boat would top 90 mph in less breezy conditions, but he was still impressed with how the boat handled the supercharged package.

The acceleration of the 28 Bullet was acceptable, although the top-end fell a little short of our expectations. The V-bottom took 9.5 seconds to run from 40 to 70 mph, while the 40-to-60-mph drill took 5.7 seconds. From a standing start, the sport boat reached 50 mph in 10 seconds, the same speed it ran while cruising at 3,000 rpm.

Time to plane (5.1 seconds) was the same with or without the Dana Marine HP900 trim tabs down. Fuel efficiency was reasonable as the 28 Bullet got more than 2.5 mpg at 40 and

50 mph, and at wide-open throttle was still better than 1.7 mpg.

WORKMANSHIP

While the performance usually steals the show, the builder's workmanship always comes in a close second. The tooling and gel-coat work on this year's 28 Bullet was once again next to perfect.

Laid up with vinylester resin, Knytex and bi- and tri-directional knitted glass, the builder also used Decolite panels at the bulkheads to reduce weight in the 28-footer that tipped the scales at 4,800 pounds. All deck hardware, which consisted of six Accon Pull-Up cleats, twin fuel caps, cat-eye navigation lights and billet grab handles on the built-in swim platform, was stainless steel.

The in-gelcoat red and gray graphics were protected by a stainless-steel rubrail that was neatly installed. And the all-white deck was impeccable—we couldn't find a single blemish no matter how hard we looked.

The clean appearance carried into the engine compartment that opened on Dana Marine



TEST RESULTS: HOWARD CUSTOM BOATS 28 BULLET

TEST CONDITIONS

Temperature/humidity	89 degrees/15 percent
Wind speed/water conditions	5 to 7 mph/1' to 2' chop

HULL INFORMATION

Deadrise at transom	22.5 degrees
Centerline/beam	28'4"/8'4"
Hull weight	4,800 pounds

PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail with MerCruiser MX 6.2 MPI engine	\$87,995
Price as tested	\$140,200

ENGINE & PROPELLER

Engine	Mercury Racing HP600SCi
Cylinder type	V-8
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	502/600
Lower-unit gear ratio	1.5:1
Propeller	Lab-finished Mercury Bravo One 15 1/4" x 32"

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to Mercury Racing HP600SCi engine (\$34,270), IMCO Marine full hydraulic steering (\$5,200), Sony stereo upgrade (\$2,900), Dana Marine HP900 trim tabs (\$2,395), scoop on sun deck (\$1,195), sliding cabin door (\$995), bimini top (\$950), lab-finished propeller (\$795), Bluewater drive and trim indicators (\$650), dual batteries (\$450), fender holders (\$400), glove box (\$350), ladder (\$300), depthfinder (\$295), halon (\$295), wind deflectors (\$295), cabin fans (\$270) and flexible drive shower (\$200).

ACCELERATION

3 seconds	19 mph
5 seconds	28 mph
10 seconds	50 mph
15 seconds	67 mph

MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	4.4 seconds
40-60 mph	5.7 seconds
40-70 mph	9.5 seconds

RPM VS. MPH

1000	NA
1500	NA
2000	28 mph
2500	40 mph
3000	50 mph
3500	58 mph
4000	70 mph
4500	78 mph
5000	86 mph

TOP SPEED AT RPM

Radar	89.4 mph at 5,400
GPS	89 mph

PLANING

Time to plane	5.1 seconds
Minimum planing speed	19 mph

FUEL ECONOMY

At 30 mph	3.1 mpg
At 40 mph	2.7 mpg
At 50 mph	2.6 mpg
At 60 mph	2.3 mpg
At WOT	1.7 mpg

FUEL CAPACITY

85 gallons

TEST CONDUCTED AT (ELEVATION)

Parker, Ariz. (450 feet)

MANUFACTURER

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WHAT WE LOVED: The 28-footer runs faster than most sport boats its size and its handling is among the best in its class.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: A rear bench with bucket seats and better placement of the trim indicators.

hydraulic hinges. The underside of the hatch was a metallic gun metal, and the bilge and transom were painted to match. To provide clearance for the motor, a scoop was integrated into the hatch.

Howard included a pair of fiberglass-molded fender holders on each side of the engine. All the wiring was gathered and tie-wrapped precisely, which always pleases our workmanship inspector. The engine was installed using Mercury race mounts attached to L-angles through-bolted to the stringers.

INTERIOR

Howard owner Gene Willen said he's seen a resurgence in the closed-deck 28 Bullet. In the past, the company produced four open-bow models for every closed-deck model. That changed in 2006, and Willen said it has to do with his customers putting high-horsepower engines in the V-bottom.

The closed-deck version had a spacious cabin with a V-berth and two facing lounges. Just ahead of the port-side lounge was a strapped-down cooler. The builder also included a head compartment underneath the V-berth's forward cushion.

In the cockpit, Howard installed gray snap-in Berber-style carpet that matched the gray panels on the wide bolster seats and rear bench. Padding on all the seats and the gun-

wales was ample, and the pewter billet seat bases provided a footrest for rear passengers. Grab handles were also mounted to the back of the bolsters to give those in the back something to hold onto at high speed.

At the helm, the 28 Bullet featured a pewter Livorsi Marine throttle and shifter mounted on an extension from the gunwale. Ahead was a column of rocker switches with trim indicators mounted above on the gunwale. The positioning of the indicators made them somewhat difficult to see.

Sitting up high on the dash at an angle were two Auto Meter Pro-Comp Marine Monster gauges for the speed and tachometer and a Livorsi compass, all in chrome bezels. A row of smaller gauges was mounted below, just above the IMCO Marine tilt steering wheel.

Howard installed a glove box in front of the co-pilot, as well as a grab handle on the gunwale. Stowage within the cockpit included cutouts in the gunwales behind the driver and co-pilot and compartments under the rear bench cushions.

OVERALL

From top speed to high-quality production, Howard's 28 Bullet impressed us again. No matter the engine package, the V-bottom always responds. The 28-footer may come with a higher price tag than other boats in its class, but it's worth every penny. **P**

Clockwise from top left: Howard squeezed a Mercury Racing HP600SCi into its immaculate engine compartment. The helm featured Auto Meter Pro-Comp Marine gauges and a tilt steering wheel from IMCO Marine. The cabin of the 28 Bullet included a large V-berth and facing lounges. Wide bolster seats and a flat rear bench filled the cockpit.

