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# Powerboat

The World's Leading Performance Boating Magazine



**MERCURY**  
Racing



## FINE-TUNING

SMALL CHANGES TO THE 38 LIGHTNING KEEP FOUNTAIN AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION.

POWERBOAT'S TEST TEAM HAD JUST COMPLETED an evaluation of the 38 Lightning when they were greeted at the dock by Reggie Fountain. A tester mentioned offhandedly that the company's new bolsters had a little too much padding where his tailbone met the seat.

Within moments, Fountain was on the phone with the upholstery department to make the small change to the bolsters for the new boats that come out of the Washington, N.C., plant. It's been continual tweaks like these that have helped the production builder stay ahead of the competition.

Take the latest 38 Lightning. In addition to cosmetic changes, the builder has turned the stepped-bottom boat into a performance machine. Running with production mills, the V-bottom reached nearly 115 mph. To borrow a line, this isn't your daddy's Fountain.

### PERFORMANCE

Fountain has been at the forefront of squeezing more speed out of its boats using relatively mellow power plants. The 38 Lightning we tested had staggered Mercury Racing HP700SCi engines and a special drive

package. Fountain took NXT<sup>1</sup> transom assemblies and transmissions and mated them to No. 6 dry-sump drives. Latham Marine supplied the tiebar.

With the drives spinning 16 7/8" x 39" five-blade propellers from Hering, the builder prepped the boat for top speed. And a remarkable number it was. Considering there was just 1,400 horsepower under the hatches, the V-bottom ran 114.9 mph on GPS during a cool day on the Pamlico Sound. Our lead test driver believes the boat could go even faster with a larger-diameter prop.

It took awhile to get the last 10 mph out of the boat, but few stepped-bottom models felt as steady as the 38 Lightning at higher speeds. Even the crosswakes we came across on the Sound didn't upset the boat when going faster than 100 mph.

In slalom turns at all speeds the Fountain received nothing but the highest marks from our test driver. There was no slipping or hopping, which sometimes occurs in boats set up with higher X dimensions.

The effort to produce a 115-mph boat did come at the expense of getting on plane quickly. With the Mercury Racing 380S K-Planes down,

the 38-footer needed 6.9 seconds to level off. Up and running, the boat took 13 more seconds to get to a cruising speed of 63 mph.

Midrange acceleration was better than average, taking just 5.6 seconds to go from 30 to 50 mph and 6 seconds for the 40-to-60-mph drill. Running from 40 to 70 mph took 9.9 seconds.

### WORKMANSHIP

From sea strainers to windshields, Fountain Powerboats builds many of the parts for its performance boats in-house. The company believes it not only can build the parts better but it allows for greater flexibility. Rather than calling the supplier and waiting a few days for the new part, the company says it can make changes within hours.

The 38 Lightning featured a new upholstery design, which incorporated the headrests on the rear bench into the engine hatches. The updated design was also carried over into the new bolster seats. Fountain moved the switch for the electric dropout bottom from the armrest area to the gunwale. A smart move considering passengers in rougher water have a tendency to bump it.



## TEST RESULTS: FOUNTAIN 38 LIGHTNING

### TEST CONDITIONS

Temperature/humidity	60 degrees/NA
Wind speed/water conditions	2 mph/1' chop

### HULL INFORMATION

Deadrise at transom	22 degrees
Centerline/beam	38'/8"6"
Hull weight	8,950 pounds

### PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail with twin MerCruiser 496 Mag HO engines	\$268,508
Price as tested	\$388,616

### ENGINE & PROPELLER

Engine	(2) Mercury Racing HP700SCi
Cylinder type	V-8
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	502/700
Lower-unit gear ratio	1.5:1
Propeller	Hering five-blade 16 7/8" x 39"

### OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to Mercury Racing HP700SCi engines (\$114,856), stereo system (\$2,039), Monster dash (\$1,208), freshwater flush (\$732), Sirius satellite radio (\$465), depth gauge (\$528) and canvas cover (\$280).

### ACCELERATION

5 seconds	17 mph
10 seconds	34 mph
15 seconds	50 mph
20 seconds	63 mph

### MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	5.6 seconds
40-60 mph	6 seconds
40-70 mph	9.9 seconds

### RPM VS. MPH

1000	10 mph
1500	15 mph
2500	29 mph
3000	49 mph
3500	58 mph
4000	67 mph
4500	90 mph
5000	105 mph

### TOP SPEED AT RPM

Radar	112.7 mph at 5,400
GPS	114.9 mph

### PLANING

Time to plane	6.9 seconds
Minimum planing speed	15 mph

### FUEL ECONOMY

At 40 mph	1.3 mpg
At 50 mph	1.1 mpg
At 60 mph	1 mpg
At 70 mph	0.9 mpg
At 80 mph	0.9 mpg
At 90 mph	0.9 mpg

### FUEL CAPACITY

	180 gallons
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### TEST CONDUCTED AT (ELEVATION)

Washington, N.C. (8 feet)

### MANUFACTURER

Fountain Powerboats, Dept. PB, 1653 Whichards Beach Road, Washington, NC 27889, 800-438-2055, www.fountainpowerboats.com.

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**WHAT WE LOVED:** The boat's handling and stability particularly at speeds greater than 100 mph.

**WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:** A smoother bilge especially when it comes time to clean it.

When it came to painting the boat, The Art of Design was enlisted to do the bold graphics. Protecting the fine work was a black rubrail with a stainless-steel insert. The paint carried over to the underside of the engine hatches and onto the hullsides in the compartment.

Rigging was on par for a production boat but our workmanship inspector noted that the bilge wasn't up to the boat's overall high standards. A smoother finish would go a long way for the buyer when it comes time to clean it.

One thing our testers noticed out on the water was that the 38 Lightning didn't have any rattles. Credit goes to the workers in the factory for making sure items were securely fastened.

Pull-up cleats were appropriately placed around the boat. Black powder-coated railings on the deck and around the padded engine hatches were matched to the windshield.

### INTERIOR

As part of the new upholstery design, Fountain created three formed seats in the rear bench. Not only were they comfortable but they'll give rear-seat passengers something to hold onto when the boat encounters some rough water. In addition to the twin bolsters, the builder installed snap-in carpet with the Fountain logo in the cockpit.

The driver's spot to starboard included throttles and shifters from Livorsi Marine to

the left of the Latham Marine helm. Gauges with carbon-fiber faces were in a U-shape around the steering wheel. A Mercury SmartCraft SystemView screen was centered on the dash below the Monster gauges.

The 38 Lightning featured Fountain's new single-piece sliding cabin door. The spacious cabin had a V-berth and a U-shape lounge. An entertainment unit featured Corian countertops with a stainless sink and cabinets with a rosewood veneer. Two small ice chests were included to keep drinks and food cool.

Although there were two hatches for ventilation, there was no natural lighting in the cabin to speak of. The builder, however, provided abundant lighting throughout the space.

Fountain kept the enclosed head compartment simple. There was a portable toilet and a cabinet.

### OVERALL

Fountain Powerboats continues to evolve and the 38 Lightning is reflective of that. There are plenty of V-bottoms that run faster than 100 mph, but few are as stable as the 38-footer at speed. **And rarely do they go 115 mph on production horsepower.**

Reggie Fountain is really hands-on when it comes to the design of his boats. The new 38 Lightning shows he continues to have the winning touch. **P**

Clockwise from top left: Fountain's new upholstery package included three formed seats in the rear bench and twin bolsters. **Two Mercury Racing HP700SCi engines delivered enough power to get the 38-footer to 115 mph.** Livorsi Marine throttles and shifters were left of the Latham Marine helm. The spacious cabin had a large V-berth.

