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[07 PERFORMANCE TRIALS PART V]



COOL BREEZE

NEW CANOPIES ON THE COBRA 260C VENOM ARE AS EFFECTIVE AS THEY ARE GREAT LOOKING.

WE DON'T MIND A GENTLE BREEZE ON our faces now and then, especially on hot days. But there's a not-so-fine line between a caressing breeze and one that leaves you with hurricane hair and lost contact lenses. And starting at around 70 mph in a performance boat without wind protection, that's exactly what you can expect.

So we appreciate quarter-canoopies. And apparently, so do a lot of sport catamaran buyers as more and more sport cats are being equipped with them. Among those cats is the Cobra 260C Venom. As you'd guess, the "C" designation stands for "Canopies," and the builder redesigned the cat's deck in 2006 to accept a pair of them.

Strong move, especially for a boat that with a single 525-horsepower engine ran more than 88 mph during our tests on the Colorado River in Parker, Ariz.

PERFORMANCE

The 260C Venom rode on triple-step sponsons and a center pod. To make use of the power from the Mercury Racing HP525EFI engine, the builder opted for a Bravo One XR drive with a Sport Master lower unit, a 1.5:1

gear ratio and a lab-finished 31"-pitch Bravo One four-blade stainless-steel propeller.

With the engine turning 5,150 rpm, the 260C Venom topped out at 88.4 mph. Though lead test driver Bob Teague was able to bring the engine to 5,400 rpm, that did not produce the highest top speed. To achieve the 88.4-mph mark, he had to trim down the drive a bit, which scrubbed engine rpm.

That's pretty fast for a sport catamaran with a single docile engine. But there was a trade-off, and it came in anemic acceleration. It took 8.1 seconds for the cat to come on plane, and from a standing start it reached just 56 mph in 20 seconds. Midrange bite was only fair, as the boat ran from 30 to 50 mph in 7.4 seconds, 40 to 60 mph in 8.5 seconds and 40 to 70 mph in 12 seconds.

The easy solution, of course, would be to go with a lower-pitch propeller. Chances are good that the 260C Venom would be slower up top. But chances are equally good that its overall performance would improve. We'd gladly give up 3 or 4 mph of top speed for snappier standing-starts and midrange acceleration.

At even the highest speeds, the undistorted canopies kept the wind off our Test Team. Plus, just enough air flowed around the

canopy edges to keep everyone cool.

In finding the boat's sweet spot for trim, Teague and his co-pilot drove more than 10 miles up the Colorado River at 80-plus mph. In hard and sweeping turns through tow-boat-produced chop and crosswinds, the smooth-carving boat never strayed from its course.

WORKMANSHIP

In terms of build quality, Cobra ranks among the top West Coast custom manufacturers. We've seen nothing but high-quality construction in every Cobra model we've evaluated, and we saw it again in the 260C Venom.

Clearly, the company has dialed in its gel-coat graphics and tooling work. All of the accent fades in the boat's graphics, the base of which was metallic pearl, were flawless. The mold work for the deck and hull was impeccable. The boat was capped at the bow and stern, and an arrow-straight stainless-steel strip covered and protected the hull-sides' sheer lines. Both canopies precisely fit the boat's new deck.

In keeping with the boat's sleek lines, the builder flush-mounted its cat-eye-style navigation lights and used receptacles for the lines



TEST RESULTS: COBRA 260C VENOM

TEST CONDITIONS

Temperature/humidity	89 degrees/15 percent
Wind speed/water conditions	1 to 2 mph/flat

HULL INFORMATION

Deadrise at transom	14 degrees
Centerline/beam	26/8'6"
Hull weight	4,100 pounds

PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail with MerCruiser 496 Mag HO engine	\$95,900
Price as tested	\$142,000

ENGINE & PROPELLER

Engine	Mercury Racing HP525EFI
Cylinder type	V-8
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	502/525
Lower-unit gear ratio	1.5:1
Propeller	Lab-finished Mercury Bravo One 15 1/4" x 31"

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to Mercury Racing HP525EFI engine (\$22,500), full hydraulic steering with dual rams (\$5,900), half-capped hull with stainless-steel rubrail (\$5,000), metallic gelcoat with custom logo on deck (\$3,500), Auto Meter Pro-Comp Marine Monster gauges with GPS speedo (\$1,600), Extreme triple-axle trailer (\$1,500), digital amp with speakers (\$1,200), heads-up mechanical trim indicator (\$1,200), billet seat bases (\$1,000), bimini top (\$1,000), fenders (\$950), foot rinse shower (\$350), billet stereo cover (\$250) and Dino steering wheel (\$150).

ACCELERATION

5 seconds	14 mph
10 seconds	27 mph
15 seconds	44 mph
20 seconds	56 mph

MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	7.4 seconds
40-60 mph	8.5 seconds
40-70 mph	12 seconds

RPM VS. MPH

1000	4 mph
1500	5 mph
2000	6 mph
2500	26 mph
3000	37 mph
3500	51 mph
4000	63 mph
4500	78 mph
5000	85 mph

TOP SPEED AT RPM

Radar	88.4 mph at 5,150
GPS	87.6 mph

PLANING

Time to plane	8.1 seconds
Minimum planing speed	18 mph

FUEL ECONOMY

At 30 mph	2.2 mpg
At 40 mph	2.5 mpg
At 50 mph	2.5 mpg
At 60 mph	2.5 mpg
At WOT	2.1 mpg

FUEL CAPACITY

90 gallons

TEST CONDUCTED AT (ELEVATION)

Parker, Ariz. (450 feet)

MANUFACTURER

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WHAT WE LOVED: Two undistorted, perfectly installed canopies that didn't cut out all of the cooling breeze.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Better standing-start and midrange acceleration—a smaller prop should do the job.

and fenders rather than conventional retractable cleats. Black powder-painted bilge vents/grab handles were mounted on the transom above a pair of billet swim platforms. A foot shower unit was installed on the bow.

A pair of hydraulic hinges from Dana Marine opened the engine hatch. As usual, Cobra did excellent rigging work. The engine was mounted on standard Mercury mounts and L-angles through-bolted to the stringers. For added working space in the compartment, the builder wisely incorporated step plates on the billet battery boxes.

Support for the wiring in the engine compartment was good. It was even better behind the dash, where we found parallel looms and evenly spaced tie-wraps.

INTERIOR

Cobra has demonstrated a penchant for cool interior features such as the hydraulic seat bases it installed in one model a couple of years back. In the 260C Venom, the builder took the time to install LEDs in every cupholder. When not in use, hardware for the bimini top disappeared under the engine hatch.

Though the three-person bench was standard fare, the twin bucket seats mounted on billet stands were anything but. Cobra constructed their structure from fiberglass, which, according to a company representative, made them light.

At a glance, the buckets appeared to have minimal padding. Our guess was they'd be hard and uncomfortable. On the contrary, they were among the most comfortable bucket seats we've encountered. Every member of our Test Team who sat in them found their contours and padding perfect.

The 260C Venom was amply endowed with billet grab handles within reach of every seat in the cockpit. The observer's dash was home to the stereo system, which was protected by a hefty billet lid.

To starboard was the helm, which was set up with Auto Meter Pro-Comp Marine gauges around a tilt steering wheel. A Hardin Marine throttle and shifter was mounted on the gunwale.

For stowage, there was a long locker underneath the bottom cushions for the bench, as well as an in-sole locker under the snap-in carpet for the cockpit. But in reality, the entire under-deck area could be considered one big stowage space. It was outfitted with a pair of 54-quart coolers in their own retainers.

OVERALL

Canopies on sport catamarans might be a trend, but they are a trend we welcome. Even at high speeds, they help keep the ride civilized. Cobra was smart to upgrade its 260C Venom with canopies. Doing so made a finely crafted, good-performing sport cat even better. **P**

Clockwise from top left: The 260C Venom's bucket seats were among the most comfortable we've ever sat in. Cobra used Auto Meter Pro-Comp Marine gauges and a blue Dino steering wheel at the helm. A billet lid protected the stereo in the co-pilot's dash. **Fender holders and a Mercury Racing HP525EFI motor filled the engine compartment.**

