



**H**oward's 28-foot Bullet lived up to its name from the first moments of its release four years ago and is unquestionably one of the naturally fastest, best-handling vee-bottom sport boats ever to find its way into lamination. It is, in fact, officially the fastest vee-bottom we've ever tested at our evaluations, after teaming with a Paul Pfaff quad-rotor Whipple to run an amazing 104 miles an hour. The anchor boat of the emerging, step-bottom Bullet series, the 28-footer debuted to HOT BOAT driver raves and caused serious beach buzz in the wake of its test.

There is more than a little bit of that boat within the graceful shaping and impeccable finish of Howard's mid-sized follow-up, the beautiful 25-foot Bullet. By faithfully scaling down the boat's bottom in exact proportion—and lowering its profile by 1.5 inches, again, to scale—Howard created a downsized version of the original, blistering-fast Bullet in their replacement for their veteran 250 Off-shore molds.

Howard has effectively engineered the downsizing and has captured the most

## 2004 Evaluations **Howard 25' Bullet**

appealing attributes of the bigger boat, including its single-step, variable-deadrise vee cut. Like the 28-footer, the aft portion of the 25's bottom changes in deadrise every inch. Also, it has a very familiar feel from the perspective of the driver's seat, incorporating nearly a mirrored image of the bigger boat's steering station—except that it's been slightly compressed, and the dash moved forward to offset for interior space lost to the missing three feet of hull displacement.

The workmanship that continues to help define one of the industry's true, premium custom boats is deeply imbedded in this sure-handling lake hull. MerCruiser's potent, 425-horse, 496HO/Bravo One train was well suited to the smaller-caliber Bullet, loading it with a potent, exhilarating and effortless driving personality.

We covered a lot of water between this boat's straight tracking idle and our wide-open sprint passes, which peaked at a very impressive 73 mph with a good load of gas. At \$69.9K, including the 320-horse 6.2L small block, it is the most expensive midsized lake boat Howard has ever built. Our boat's power upgrade

and a smattering of dress pieces that featured the wide-spread talent of Dana Marine—billet tabs, hatch hinges and some of the nicest billet seat mounts to be seen—pinned the "as tested" price at \$79,950.

This "baby Bullet" somehow manages to elude the stout, sometimes-stubby tendencies sometimes befall to the mid-cabin cuddy bowrider design. The tooling and design work on this boat are flawless, and the fiberglass and gelcoat work were equally impressive. The gray highlights and tapered black deck crown lent a rich texture against which the electric blue and green played, and the gelcoat practically shimmered, it was so diligently finished. Inside, an all-white vinyl treatment threw off a great contrast and was left pure except for a bit of logo work. Our boat was dressed in the anodized rubrailing option (polished aluminum is also available), in a brilliant, matching blue, and the Dana fuel fills and oversized, vented rear grab

handles were powdercoated pewter, to an amazing match with the silver gelcoat highlights. It was an exceptionally appealing mix, especially from colors that don't normally come to mind in association.

This Howard was set up to run and drive, including an overkill, full-hydraulic dual-ram steering system—a sharp bit of pre-planning on the owner's behalf, for the days when he pours more coal to the fire. Dana's LT500 tabs were added to extend the boat's versatility to include extreme low-speed wakeboard towing and to enhance the rough-water capabilities of a bottom that is, in natural state, almost impervious to it. The Howard didn't need the tabs—still, we've not yet seen

the boat that Dana's flaps do not improve, and they're worthwhile at \$800. A lab-finished 25-inch Bravo four-blade was added to this max after some testing revealed its significant effect on the hull's top end.

### ON BOARD

The Bullet mid-cabin design works, even for adult occupancy. The bow seating, wrapped with white powdercoated railing on pewter, touched off



a very attractive interior treatment, performed by Land and Water Interiors (Santa Ana, California). They utilized a relaxed, wrinkle finished vinyl that enhanced the boat's prevailing high-end feel and pulled off the look beautifully. We found this forward seating section particularly comfortable while occupying it in complete repose; otherwise, it will seat two crossways well enough. The bow area's gunnel insets stored incidentals, shaded beverage and showed off delicately cut interior detail work stitched and sewn into the interior's clean vinyl. Storage is molded into the bow seat bases, and a bow anchor locker is attractively trimmed and finished.

Here's something you won't find on a lot of midsized cuddy's: a usable cabin that will host two facing adults. The cabin seats are surprisingly comfortable. A two-slot bench on one side faces a single seat and adjacent pedestal-mounted ice chest. The seats are finished in a softer-grade vinyl, a simulated leather that feels very much like some of today's best-looking car seats, no accident. Custom, stationary, fiberglass ice chests, with padded, logo-stitched tops, drain overboard. Cuddy lighting is standard, part of an attractive flush-mounted interior-illumination network.

Our forward buckets were anchored on pewter-toned, billet pedestal mounts that took the art of micro-aluminum sculpture to a seldom-seen extreme, a \$1,000 option that weighed in with dramatic, long-term cosmetic mileage. Designed exclusively for Howard, the Dana hardware incorporates a stainless kick bar, giving the all-business look a bit of gleam. The brushed pewter was picked up by the Howard's bezels, plate mounts for the switches and controls, tab indicator bezel and other trim pieces.

Just like the larger Bullet, this boat's dash manages to cluster its standard contingent

of Gaffrig instruments, indicators and switches in readable fashion, in a limited surface area, without appearing cluttered. The layout is natural and driver friendly. Dual Gaffrig controls are standard, and tabs were individually toggled home, with assistance from Bluewater indicators. The billet pieces created a very clean look to the dash—the only thing on it that looked displaced was the rubber, push-button horn switch, a curious bit of 1980s in a 2010 design. The helm area is recessed around the knees.



**Test conditions:** Moderate  
**Centerline:** 25'  
**Beam:** 98"  
**Bottom:** Step-vee  
**Drivetrain:** MerCruiser 496 Magnum HO/Bravo One  
**HP @ prop:** 425  
**Overall weight:** 4,000 lbs.  
**Base price:** \$69,995  
**Standard features:** 6.2

MerCruiser/Bravo One, seven gelcoat colors, Dana hardware, interior lighting, Gaffrig gauges, Ritchie compass, Gaffrig dual-lever controls, electric hatch, stainless railing, Dino wheel, tilt helm

The loaded base boat is equipped with a Dino wheel on a tilt steering helm, power hatch, Ritchie compass and Sony CD system with four speakers. The 496HO tucked neatly into a tight, sanitary engine compartment. A Fire-buoy system stood sentry, as did dual batteries with isolating Perko switch, a \$395 option.

## PERFORMANCE

The Bullet bottom is a fairly complex mix of ventilating technology, variable vee angle and offset strakes that enhance the

boat's stability at high speed. The triangular running surface is stepped, but exhibits none of the transitory dynamics that can lead to porpoising.

We mention all of this only because it works so exceedingly well: This bottom design came alive at the hand of Howard GM Michael Willen, and the result is another elite boat from the hallowed house of Howard. In the tradition of the family bowrider, nothing is easier to drive, and the mid-cabin configuration, with its altered balance point and heavier torso, did nothing to blunt the performance of a very efficient underside. We found it impressive to get 73 mph from a turnkey 496HO mid-cabin, especially one that is built intentionally on the heavier side and which is absolutely slammed with features.

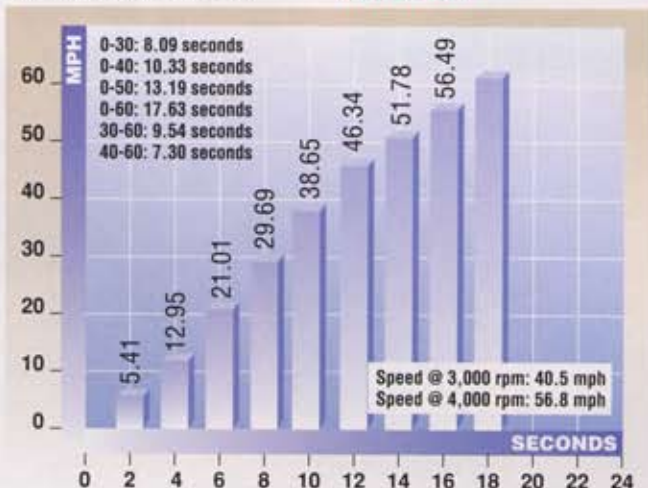
This is a stealth step-bottom: You don't feel the residual, transitioning effect of the aerating surface. Its superior performance is readily accessible, its full capabilities fully loaded at the uppermost surface of this easy, natural driving experience. It planes naturally and escaped porpoise or chine-walk while put through our paces. It runs as straight as can be, responds very well to trim and cruises easily.

Here's all that needs to be said about this hull's relative efficiency: At 4,000 rpm, we registered 56.8 mph on GPS. The Howard was dramatically quick between 40 and 60 mph, adding a measure of responsiveness usually reserved for boats with more power.

Five years ago, the stock-powered family bowrider had a benchmark speed of 65 miles an hour—that was a common ledge of respectability, often proclaimed, less seldom seen by the basic, big-block bowrider. The Bullet is one of the new breed of contemporary step-vee bowriders to elevate that mark to 70 and beyond. We're looking forward to getting our hands on one of

**Options on test boat:** MerCruiser 496 HO/Bravo One (\$6,500), full-hydraulic steering (\$3,000), Dana front pedestals (\$1,000), Dana power hinges (\$800), Dana HP500 tabs (\$800), Mercury lab-finished prop (\$500), dual batteries (\$395)  
**Price as tested:** \$82,990  
**Top speed, radar:** 73.0 mph  
**Mfg. est. speed:** 72 mph

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# HOWARD

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these Howards powered with serious intentions in mind.

The Bullet gripped and grabbed exceptionally well, almost to the point of imitating a tournament boat at low speeds. It likes a little more up trim in the turns than most vee-bottoms, flattening out and carving in instant sync with the wheel play above. We ambled through low-speed turns and cranked hard cuts at 60 plus, with equal, impressive results. Howard

has done its homework with this bottom: There is nothing it does not do well.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

With the introduction of this stylish 25-footer, the Bullet series is shaping up to be a significant subset in Howard's fabled big picture. Taking a very large cue from its elder sibling, it represents step-bottom family boating at its most refined and efficient. You pay more for a Howard—their slow-brewed production schedule, resulting low annual yield, and time-intensive finish command it. But, man, what a boat. ■

# AMT POWERBOATS

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