



RIDING THE BULLET

Howard Custom Boats' 28' Bullet step-vee has taken a giant leap in its evolution with the arrival of an all-composite model with triple-digit speed. by Brett Bayne

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JERRY TAYLOR

Introduced several years ago, the 28' Bullet was Howard Custom Boats' dramatic entrance into the evolutionary, contemporary superboating realm, where the serious hot-boaters come to play. Designed and overseen by Howard GM Michael Willen, the boat was an all-original tooling effort that showed off Howard's timeless talents on several fronts. It was a potent mix of advanced production technology, with various fiberglass components replacing much of the traditional wood interior framework. But the new-era machine contains no wood at all.

The composite construction features a heavy-duty foam from the DIAB Group, which has been at the leading edge of the development of composite materials for more than half a century. DIAB pioneered the use of the "sandwich" concept to make structures that are significantly lighter and stronger than those made from steel, aluminum and wood. In addition, the company was instrumental in introducing core kits to speed the fabrication process and has been in the vanguard of new processing techniques such as core infusion. The result is a 28' Bullet that weighs only 4,400 pounds—400 pounds lighter than a typical 28-foot boat made with wood.

The construction process is a wonder of technology, as the foam adheres to the knitted bi- and tri-directional fiberglass shell with a Plexus epoxy putty (a normal lay-up consists of balsa wood into fiberglass). Howard then uses a special pneumatic roller that acts as a kind of jackhammer, melding the foam and putty and pushing out any air pockets.

The new 28' is also Howard's first to feature an all-new fiberglass inner liner. Until now, Howard's line employed a ▶



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fiberglass floor made from four sections, including a rear-seat base. But the new inner liner, from transom to dash bulkheads, is all-inclusive—a single piece, including the molded-in rear seat base, with a nonskid cockpit floor that drains into the bilge area. What does this accomplish? A boat with a stronger unitized construction. The new 28' is a stronger, lighter and ultimately faster boat.

That's just the beginning. The Howard 28' all-composite Bullet, featured at the most recent Los Angeles Boat Show, came to a recent HOT BOAT shootout with a truly awesome powerplant, courtesy of the boat's owner, Gary Taylor of Taylor Performance. It's a 565 ci 1,100-hp motor that runs on pump gas. But it's not merely a banzai engine—it's one that we discovered to be very docile at the docks at idle; astonishingly, at 800 rpm, it idles like a stock motor. Equipped with Imco Gatlin mufflers, we recorded a decibel level 8 points lower than the allowable maximum noise requirements in California and Arizona.

This Howard also happens to be gorgeous, painted orange with gold metallic pearl.

Depending on what kind of day it is, it gives one the illusion of an orange sunset...or that the boat is on fire. It's a wonderful effect with depth to spare.

When HOT BOAT tested an open-bow version of the 28' Bullet three years ago, its speed of 103.9 made it the fastest single-engine vee-bottom ever tested by this magazine. This time, with Gary Taylor's engine, our top speed was 107.2 at 6,000 rpm. It's a thrill ride we won't soon forget, and neither will you. Every time you move the throttle, you can feel the boat respond with torque and acceleration. The boat is quite good in the turns, providing excellent controllability in all directions. In the words of our test driver: "What a great boat—everything about it is just spectacular." We award the Howard high marks in craftsmanship: it's Howard's flagship boat for some very good reasons, but it's an adventure not recommended for hot-boating's faint of heart. This is a rig designed for maximum impact. ■

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