



CHART TOPPER

Howard's 28 Bullet is everything a custom sport boat should be—and then some.

HAVE YOU EVER DRIVEN A REALLY FINE SPORTS SEDAN AND ASKED YOURSELF, "Why don't all cars drive like this?" The experience is at once enlightening and, if your vehicle isn't as pleasant from behind the wheel, exasperating.

During our most recent encounter with Howard's spectacular 28 Bullet, we found ourselves asking much the same question, though in relation to sport boats.

Smooth. Precise. Solid. Efficient. Those were the words that came to mind while we were testing the midcabin open bow 28-footer. Of course, having evaluated the boat before, we expected nothing less. But this time around, having gone with big power, including a twin-turbocharged engine in the past, Howard sent the boat with a 500-horsepower engine from Mercury Racing. And the boat was every bit as delightful as we remembered.

PERFORMANCE

Howard principal Gene Willen showed up at our Parker, Ariz., test with the 28 Bullet and the fervent hope that it would reach 79 mph. We did him one better—as in 1 mph better—with the boat when it ran an even 80 mph with its motor turning 5,300 rpm.

To get the power from the Mercury Racing HP525EFI engine to the water, the builder used a 1.5:1 reduction Bravo XR drive with a lab-finished Bravo One 15 1/4" x 27" four-blade stainless-steel propeller. Spunky for the power, the boat hit 72 mph in 20 seconds after coming on plane in 4.3 seconds with its Dana trim tabs down. It also proved steady in midrange tests, where it ran from 30 to 50 mph in 4.7 seconds and from 40 to 60 mph in 6.3 seconds.

You could add more power to the 28 Bullet and, at least according to our experiences with the model, the boat could handle it. We've run the 28-footer at more than 100 mph, and it felt uncommonly stable at all times. But for those looking for a sophisticated, naturally aspirated, close-cooled engine with a warranty, the 525 is an exceptional choice.

And thanks to exceptional handling and tracking, the boat was a blast to drive, even with "mild" power—that a 500-hp engine rates as mild says a lot about where we

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are on the marine power curve these days. With slightly positive trim, the stepped-bottom 28 Bullet whipped through slalom after slalom, circle after circle, and pierced 2- to 3-foot river chop with ease.

WORKMANSHIP

Tooling for the 28 Bullet was spot-on, devoid of a dimple or a blemish. Howard has set a high construction-quality bar for itself, and once again the company cleared that bar with room to spare. Although the builder did not provide a lamination schedule, we know it uses vinylester resin and various layers of knitted fiberglass. The boat's hull and deck were tabbed together and are allowed to cure in the mold for 14 days.

Running counter to the West Coast aesthet-

ic, where a custom boat isn't the real thing without an explosion of in-gelcoat graphics, Howard dressed the 28 Bullet in various tones of gray. And though gray is, traditionally speaking, a conservative color—think battleships if you need proof—it looked exotic on our test boat thanks to a pearlescent finish. Execution of the gelcoat color scheme, like that of the tooling, was astounding.

Custom pewter grab handles matched the exterior colors, as did Accon Pull-Up cleats in pewter bezels. Stainless-steel rails around the bow seating looked right at home.

The engine hatch/sun pad opened on a pair of Dana hydraulic hinges. New for the 2005 model year, a scupper around the opening for the hatch was added. It drained via a plastic hose to the bilge.

On each side of the engine, which was

installed on L-angles through-bolted to the stringers, there was a gun-metal-gray retainer that formed a stowage area. For access to the sides of the engine, the retainers were removable. Cables were well secured with evenly spaced stainless-steel cushion clamps, as was the conduit-wrapped wiring. Billet boxes housed the boat's two batteries.

INTERIOR

Rich gunwale padding comes in handy, especially in a boat that can run hard in rough water. The people at Howard obviously considered this when they padded the gunwales for the 28 Bullet. They also appreciated the merits of a perfectly installed, dedicated gray Berber carpet, which should be kind to bare feet.

Color matched to the exterior, the cockpit

seating layout included a deep bench seat with finished stowage lockers underneath the bottom cushion and plush bucket seats. Grab handles, reachable from the rear bench, were mounted on the back sides of the buckets.

To enable the driver and co-pilot to stand up in rough conditions, Howard made bottom cushions for the buckets removable. Though the buckets weren't of full-bolster height, they were tall enough to make standing comfortable and supportive. Sitting or standing, we found the angled footrests useful in the chop.

Arranged around the stainless-steel helm to starboard were Auto Meter Pro Comp Marine gauges. Accessory switches were mounted in silver panels. The Livorsi Marine throttle and shift levers were mounted on the gunwale.

Finished to the same high standards as the rest of the 28 Bullet, the midcabin included a dedicated cooler in its own recess—not an add-on retainer, but a molded-in spot on the port side of the boat. Opposite the cooler was a lockable stowage console. Additional cabin features included cupholders, directional spotlights and stowage spaces.

Thanks to dedicated tooling for the open-bow version of the 28 Bullet—the boat also comes in a closed-deck version—the bow rider portion of the boat had an uncommonly finished appearance.

OVERALL

Once again, Howard's 28 Bullet has dazzled us. This time around, the builder made a mel-low power move, and that put the spotlight right where it belonged, on the exceptional sport boat itself. We were prepared to be spoiled by the 28-footer and, once again, it didn't disappoint. 🍷



From left: Over the years, we have tested Howard Custom Boat's 28 Bullet with big custom power and liked the boat's handling capabilities. When company owner Gene Willen brought the V-bottom with relatively tame power—a Mercury Racing HP525EFI motor—it gave us a chance to see how the boat performed with a stock engine. The blue motor's 500 horsepower was good enough to deliver 80 mph speeds in less-than-perfect conditions on the Colorado River. Being a small-volume custom builder gives the Southern California company time to do things right. Notice the small details when it came to rigging in the engine compartment. Wires are properly supported and access to the batteries is as easy as it gets.

TEST RESULTS



TEST CONDITIONS

Temperature	80 degrees
Humidity	36 percent
Wind speed	8 mph, 20 mph wind gusts
Sea conditions	2' to 3' chop
Elevation	450 feet

HULL INFORMATION

Deadrise at transom	22.5 degrees
Centerline	28"
Beam	8'4"
Hull weight	4,500 pounds

PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail	\$82,500
Price as tested	\$121,930

ENGINE & PROPELLER

Engine	Mercury Racing HP525EFI
Cylinder type	V-8
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	502/500
Lower-unit gear ratio	1.5:1
Propeller	Lab-finished Mercury Bravo One 15 1/4" x 27"

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to Mercury Racing HP525EFI engine (\$19,950), BICO dual-ram full-hydraulic steering (\$4,800), open bow (\$2,500), triple-axe trailer upgrade (\$2,500), Diana HP500 boom tabs (\$2,000), BICO mufflers (\$1,500), custom bikini top (\$950), lab-finished grip (\$825), billet stainless lift helm (\$800), removable air system (\$800), Blue Water drive/trim indicators (\$650), dual batteries with switch (\$400), GPS speedometer (\$400), extra interior cabinet (\$400), Aqua boarding ladder (\$300), wind deflector (\$300), laser fire system (\$275), digital depthfinder (\$275) and drive shower (\$105).

ACCELERATION

5 seconds	30 mph
10 seconds	50 mph
15 seconds	64 mph
20 seconds	72 mph

MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	4.7 seconds
40-60 mph	6.3 seconds
40-70 mph	12.5 seconds

RPM VS. MPH

1000	7 mph
1500	9 mph
2000	20 mph
2500	35 mph
3000	43 mph
3500	51 mph
4000	59 mph
4500	68 mph
5000	74 mph

TOP SPEED AT RPM

Radar	80 mph at 5300
GPS	80.8 mph

PLANING

Time to plane	4.3 seconds
Minimum planing speed	18 mph

FUEL ECONOMY

At 25 mph	3.3 mpg
At 35 mph	3.5 mpg
At 45 mph	2.8 mpg
At 55 mph	2.4 mpg
At 65 mph	2.2 mpg
At WOT	1.9 mpg

FUEL CAPACITY

	80 gallons
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TEST CONDUCTED AT

Parker, Ariz.

MANUFACTURER

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