

# POWERBOAT

THE WORLD'S LEADING PERFORMANCE BOATING MAGAZINE

2003 AWARDS *for* PRODUCT EXCELLENCE

## HOWARD 28 BULLET | *Sport Boat of the Year*



**T**HAT A MANUFACTURER MIGHT WIN A COUPLE OF Boat of the Year awards isn't all that unusual. The performance-boat world is small and the top players, though they might have off years, don't change a whole lot. But for a builder to take top honors within three years with the same model in the same category is downright rare.

That's exactly what Howard has done with the 28' Bullet, our 2003 (and 2001) Sport Boat of the Year.

Of course, knowing that they'd have to dazzle us to even have a hope of walking away with the top prize again, the Southern California builder sent an upgraded customer's boat with a 900-plus-hp turbocharged engine. That was a big change from the 470-hp Mercury Racing HP500EFI mill in the first boat, but beyond the motor and a Bmax drive, all other changes were cosmetic.

There aren't a whole lot of single-engine V-bottoms that can top the century mark, much less those that can do it without leaving you feeling as if you've just cheated death. On a 100-plus degree desert day better suited to testing hotel room air conditioning than testing boats, the Howard 28' Bullet hit 101.1 mph without so much as an unwanted twitch or vibration. It wasn't just one of the most stable 100-mph single-engine V-bottoms we tested this year. It was among the most stable 100-mph boats we tested, period. And that includes the catamarans.

A little turbo lag kept the 28' Bullet from being snappy out of the hole, but once the turbo spooled, the boat was reflex-quick.

Shooting from 40 to 60 mph took 3 seconds and blasting from 50 to 70 mph took 2.7 seconds. Suffice it to say, that the turbo had caught up.

At all speeds, the 28' Bullet handled perfectly. Of course, having become awfully fond of breathing we didn't throw it hard over at high speeds, but the boat did ace radical slalom turns at low speeds and carved deep, graceful arcs up top.

Cored with balsa and laid up by hand, the 28' Bullet exhibited phenomenal mold work on its flat-to-convex deck and straight hullsides. Although just a few tribal flames adorned the predominantly white boat, all gelcoat gleamed. Pewter bezels were used to accent the boat's hardware, most of which was fashioned from billet aluminum.

Rigging, too, was completely sanitary with wire looms held by cushion clamps, batteries in billet-aluminum brackets and the bilge finished in smooth gelcoat. Trick hydraulic hinges raised and lowered the engine hatch.

The 28' Bullet's interior offered everything you could reasonably want, but nothing you didn't need. Its straightforward cabin was devoid of appliances that won't last in a 100-mph boat, but it did have functional lounges and a berth, as well as the same plush Berber carpet on the cockpit sole. Bolster-style bucket seats and angled footrests were supplied in the cockpit for the driver and co-pilot. Best word for the entire layout? Clean.

Howard's 28' Bullet is a winner. Again. ●



# HIGH CALIBER

With a turbocharged 900-plus-hp engine, the Howard 28' Bullet runs more than 100 mph—with stability to spare.



From left: The helm station included Gaffrig by Livorsi instrumentation and levers, and plastic windscreens for front passengers. Inside, the cabin featured a V-berth and facing lounges. Outside, the forward bolsters were mounted on powder-painted billet stands and complemented by angled footrests.

**N**OT MANY SINGLE-ENGINE V-bottoms can reach 100 mph. The power required is monstrous, but that's the least of it. A small V-bottom can begin to get squirrely above 80 mph. And the difference between 80 and 100 mph is a lot more dramatic than the 20 mph it represents.

Howard's 28' Bullet is one of those rare offerings that can hit and handle "the big number," which 100 mph on the water is and always will be. Running flat-out on the Colorado River in the fall, the boat proved uncommonly stable and required no heroic driving measures.

## PERFORMANCE

In our first go-round with the 28' Bullet, which earned the boat our 2001 Custom Sport Boat of the Year honor, we suggested that it could fare well on the APBA Offshore Factory 1 circuit. We also noted that it could handle bigger power. Although we've yet to see the 28-footer in Factory 1 competition, we now can say we've seen it with a serious motor.

Built by Carson Brummet and based on a 540-cubic-inch block, the intercooled motor included twin turbochargers. Mike Willen, general manager of Howard Boats, estimated that the motor produced between 900 and 1,000 hp. (The boat belonged to a Howard customer with a penchant for exotic turbo power.)

The first thing we noticed about the engine, which worked flawlessly throughout our evaluations, was how quietly it ran. With that kind of hefty horsepower under the hatch, we're more



Test Conditions | Parker, Ariz.

Temperature	101 degrees
Humidity	21 percent
Wind Speed	None
Sea Conditions	Glassy
Fuel Level Out	1/2 tank
Fuel Level In	1/4 tank
Elevation	450 feet





# TestResults

## HULL INFORMATION

Deadrise at transom	22 degrees
Centerline	28'
Beam	8'4"
Hull weight	4,400 pounds

## PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail	\$75,000
Price as tested	\$137,580

## ENGINE & PROPELLER

Engine	Carson Brummet twin-turbo
Cylinder type	V-8
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	540/980
Lower-unit gear ratio	1.3:1
Propeller	Mercury Maximus 15 1/2" x 32"

## STANDARD EQUIPMENT

MerCruiser NX 6.2 MPI engine, full Gaffrig instrumentation, Gaffrig throttle/shifter, electric engine hatch, stainless pop-up cleats, balsa-cored deck and hull, seven-color gelcoat with fade, Dino steering wheel, illuminated rocker-switch panel, powder-coated hardware, interior lighting, custom billet seat bolsters, ski-tow, Dana hatch hinges and Ritchie electronic compass.

## OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to Carson Brummet twin-turbo engine (\$25,000), Bmax drive with HD transom (\$15,000), IMCO full hydraulic steering (\$5,100), custom Alpine stereo (\$5,000), turbo rigging package (\$3,500), Dana trim tabs (\$2,400), snap-on cockpit cover (\$1,000), lab-finished Maximus prop (\$1,000), sliding cabin door with lock (\$900), Bluewater drive and tab indicator (\$700), hot and cold transom shower (\$400), Gaffrig GPS speedometer (\$400), dual battery switch (\$400), wind deflectors (\$335), locking glove box (\$320), two extra pop-up cleats (\$300), depthfinder (\$275), drive shower (\$275) and halon fire extinguisher (\$275).

## ACCELERATION

5 seconds	16 mph
10 seconds	28 mph
15 seconds	50 mph
20 seconds	80 mph

## MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	3.8 seconds
40-60 mph	3 seconds
40-70 mph	5.5 seconds

## RPM VS. MPH

1000	7 mph
1500	22 mph
2000	38 mph
2500	47 mph
3000	60 mph
3500	69 mph
4000	80 mph
4500	88 mph
5000	96 mph

## TOP SPEED AT RPM

Radar	101.1 mph at 5500
Nordskog Performance Products GPS	100.7 mph

## PLANING

Time to plane	6 seconds
Minimum planing speed	14 mph

## FUEL ECONOMY

At 25 mph	NA
At 35 mph	NA
At 45 mph	NA
At 55 mph	NA
At 65 mph	NA
At WOT	NA

FUEL CAPACITY 80 gallons

TEST CONDUCTED AT Parker, Ariz.

## MANUFACTURER

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accustomed to the rumble of a blown big-block. The lack of engine thunder and the uncommonly quiet running characteristics of the single-step, 22-degree deep-V hull made the 28' Bullet one of the quietest high-performance boats we've ever tested.

Except, of course, at its top speed of 101.1 mph at 5,500 rpm, where the wind noise was, and always is in open-cockpit boats, substantial. To manage the engine's power, the boat was outfitted with a Bmax drive with a 1.3:1 gear reduction. The propeller was a prototype Mercury Maximus 15 1/2" x 32" five-blade, one of the company's new stainless-steel wheels that debuted at the Miami International Boat Show in February.

Turbochargers take a moment or two to spool up, and that was reflected in the 28-footer's 6-second time to plane with its Dana trim tabs down. Once the turbos kicked in, the 28' Bullet delivered the kind of midrange acceleration that makes grown men grin. The boat went from 30 to 50 mph in 3.8 seconds, 40 to 60 mph in 3 seconds and 40 to 70 mph in 5.5 seconds. For kicks, we put the boat through a 50-to-70-mph drill, which took 2.7 seconds.

In a boat that didn't track and handle perfectly, the top speed and acceleration numbers would have been scary. But the 28' Bullet, with its dual-ram hydraulic steering system from IMCO, earned top scores in all of our agility and tracking drills. It simply is one of the best-handling and stable boats in its class.

## WORKMANSHIP

Even after a close look at the 28' Bullet, it was hard to believe the boat had 90 hours on it. That's a tribute to Howard's custom craftsmanship (and, in all fairness, the boat's fastidious owner). The balsa-cored 28-footer was handlaid with vinylester resin and various weights and weaves of fiberglass.

Mold work was phenomenal. The 28' Bullet has a fairly low-profile, flat deck—and we couldn't find the slightest wave in it. The same applied to its straight hull-sides. Although the graphics were far from intricate on the mostly white (with tribal flames) boat, the gelcoat shine was brilliant and protected by a rubrail with indexed screw heads.

About the only pieces of "production" hardware on the boat were six Accon Pull-Up cleats in pewter-colored bezels.

Cat-eye navigation lights were flush-mounted on the nose. Grab handles throughout the boat, including those above the swim platform, were billet aluminum.

Dana Products hydraulic hinges raised the fiberglass-based engine hatch. Holding the engine firmly in place were L-angles through-bolted to the stringers. Cushion clamps held the wire looms and cables in place, dual batteries were installed in billet boxes and the bilge was finished in sanded-smooth gelcoat.

## INTERIOR

Impeccably installed gray Berber carpet covered the sole of the 28' Bullet's cabin, which had two facing lounges and a three-cushion V-berth. The boat had no deck hatches or port holes to let in light, but the light beige vinyl upholstery gave the cabin an open feel. Plus, when open, the acrylic cabin door let in ample natural light. For ventilation, the manufacturer included electric fans. Stowage areas were behind the backrests on the lounges.

Howard installed the same Berber carpet, with the same high level of care, in the boat's cockpit. Bolster-style bucket seats for the co-pilot and driver were mounted on powder-painted billet stands. Angled footrests were molded into the cockpit sole.

Basics at the port-side co-pilot's spot included a locking glove box, a billet grab handle and the requisite cupholder. There also was an effective acrylic windscreen.

The starboard-side helm station also was supplied with one of those windcreens, as well as a tilt steering wheel and a Gaffrig by Livorsi throttle-and-shifter unit. Among the Gaffrig by Livorsi gauges in the dash was a 120-mph GPS speedometer and an 8,000-rpm tachometer. For keeping track of the tabs and drive, the builder installed Bluewater mechanical indicators. Accessory switches were set in etched panels.

Passengers could stow gear in lockers under the four-person rear bench or, in the case of smaller items, in the carpeted gunwale trays on each side of the cockpit.

## OVERALL

We get more than our share of comfortable 100-plus-mph boat rides, but almost none of them is in a 28'-long V-bottom. As a rule, it takes a lot more for a V-bottom to be comfortable at that speed. Howard's 28' Bullet presents an extraordinary exception to that rule. ●