

# COOL CREATION

Howard Custom Boats' new 28-foot sport catamaran has all the makings of a winning ride.

With its new 28 SCS Sport Cat, Howard Custom Boats wasn't trying to re-invent the wheel, or in this case, the sport catamaran. What the Valencia, Calif.-based builder was attempting to do was create a boat that seamlessly blended the styling of its 36 Bullet with the performance and comfort of its 28 Sport Deck.

From the looks of the few models the company has finished since building the first one last summer, it appears that Howard has accomplished that and more. Designed in house by Mike Willen, the new model, which is available in a closed-deck or an open-bow edition, rides on a modified version of the award-winning 28 Sport Deck hull.

Willen started by making the forward tunnels deeper and more aerodynamic in order to trap more air and give the hull

more natural lift as the air flows through and under the hull. Willen then tooled up an entirely new deck with the thought of making the front of the boat more like the leading edge of an airplane wing. Willen's intent was to have the section between the sponsons cut through the air (rather than push through it), in turn directing the airflow down to the tunnels to generate additional hull lift.

Willen and his father, Gene, own the company, and while they don't always see eye to eye, they both agree that the 28 SCS is a homerun from a performance standpoint and beyond.

"We believe this will be our No. 1-selling boat once people see it in person," Gene Willen said. "It's a very marketable boat. Basically we've built it for somebody who wants a sportier version of our deck boat. This boat actually came about because of

the wraparound windshield on our 36 Bullet. All four of the boats we've built so far were sold to existing Howard customers who wanted the look of our new windshield on our deck boat."

The windshield wasn't the only thing inspired by the 36 Bullet. The engine hatch on the 28 SCS is identical to the 36-footer's hatch, which includes a portion of each gunwale with it when it rises to provide easier access to the engine compartment from the docks or the trailer. Another cool feature on the 28 SCS is the optional bimini top that's mounted to the gunwales and folds down into the engine compartment. Not only is the canopy portion hidden under the hatch, Howard designed a support bracket that mounts to an engine to keep the canvas off the engine and protected.

Featuring a full, one-piece, molded inner liner with built-in seat bases and storage

compartments, the interior of the boat was modernized to include race-inspired bucket seats for the driver and co-pilot as well as a four-person rear bench with headrests that are part of the engine hatch. (Howard also offers a poker run edition with three high-back bucket seats in the rear with billet T-style grab handles between them.) There's plenty of storage space in the boat between the two in-sole ski lockers and the compartments in the forward consoles that can be equipped with slide-out coolers and even a portable toilet.

"From the ergonomics to the functionality to the styling, I don't think we missed anything on this boat," Gene Willen said.

And from a performance standpoint, the sky is kind of the limit in Howard's 28-footer. Starting around \$130,000, the base model features a MerCruiser 8.2 Mag HO engine and a Bravo One drive, although Howard has yet to build one with that engine package. So far, one boat includes a Mercury Racing HP600SCi engine (top speed is around 95 mph) and another is equipped with a 1,000-hp Paul Pfaff engine (top speed is reported to be between 115 and 120 mph).

From experience with the smooth and stable 28 Sport Deck, the *Powerboat* Test Team knows the hull can handle the power.



From left: Howard's new 28 SCS is offered with a four-person rear bench or three high-back bucket seats. Along with bucket seats for the driver and co-pilot, the open-bow version includes twin lounges up front.

But 1,000 hp is only the beginning. The third boat out of the mold is being fitted with a GT Performance engine that reportedly produces 1,250 hp on pump gas (more than 1,300 with race fuel). And then there's the latest model, which isn't finished, but is going to feature twin big-block engines in the 700- to 800-hp range.

Gene Willen stressed that his company's boats are not just about how fast you can go.

"It's about the ride quality in rough water or what the ride is like when you put five people in the boat rather than one person," Gene Willen said. "That's the performance aspect—how does it handle, how does it ride, is it comfortable?"

"What I see in this economy, and with the environmental regulations that are coming on these high-performance motors, I see people coming back to reality," he added. "I'm talking about an 80- or 90-mph boat with stock power that runs on 87-octane fuel and is warranted anywhere in the country. To me, that's more impressive than running some ridiculous speed."

After seeing the boats at the Howard facility and having high expectations thanks to our experience with the 28-foot deck boat, we can't wait to get our hands on the model for an evaluation. Keep an eye out for *Powerboat's* complete review of the 28-footer coming soon. **PB**

Two of the company's new 28-foot catamarans—the open-bow and closed-deck models—were on hand for the 2010 Howard Custom Boats regatta in Lake Havasu City, Ariz.



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