

HOWARD 28 BULLET

BULL'S EYE

THANKS TO SIZZLING PERFORMANCE AND ASTONISHING WORKMANSHIP, HOWARD'S 28 BULLET HITS THE MARK.

TAKE A HANDFUL OF STONES AND SKIP them, one by one, across the water. Some will dig and disappear, others will skip two or three times, then veer off into oblivion. Now and then, though, you'll skip a stone that dances level across the water in a true straight line.

The best offshore performance boats remind us of those rare stones. They dance across the water with the lightest touch. They feel as if we could shut off the power and they'd keep right on running, all the way to the horizon.

Howard Custom Boats' 28 Bullet feels like that. The 28'-long, 8'4"-wide boat rides on an efficient stepped bottom that produces a light and lively yet solid and sure ride in the open ocean at speeds beyond 70 mph.

Base price for the 28 Bullet with a MerCruiser 7.4-liter MPI engine is \$69,995. The model we tested off Long Beach, Calif., had a Mercury Racing HP500EFI and scads of other upgrades that raised the price to \$105,125.

PERFORMANCE

The 28 Bullet's 22-degree modified-V-pad bottom had a single step and a notch. Of the boat's four strakes, only the outer set ran full length. The inner set terminated at the step. Handling the juice of the 470-hp fuel-injected engine was a standard Bravo One drive churning a lab-finished Mercury Bravo One 15 1/4" x 28" four-blade stainless-steel propeller.

A top speed of 76.7 mph at 5,200 rpm supported the 28 Bullet's ballistic moniker. We found further validation for the



name in its 3.5-second time to plane with the Bennett trim tabs down and speed of 69 mph in 20 seconds.

In midrange acceleration tests, the boat remained strong, running from 30 to 50 mph in 5.5 seconds and from 40 to 60 mph in 6.9 seconds. Running from 40 to 70 mph took a substantially longer 14.4 seconds, but we expected that. This was, after all, a single-engine, 4,400-pounder.

In agility drills the 28 Bullet earned top scores, thanks to its uncanny carving ability. Never did it come unsettled during slalom turns at 30, 40 or 50 mph, and it always felt light and nimble. It displayed none of the skips, hops or slides that plague some stepped hulls, and tracked as if guided by a higher force at all speeds.

However pleasing, none of that surprised us. What did surprise us—big time—was the 28 Bullet's performance in the open water.



FROM LEFT: PART OF THE BULLET'S BEAUTY LIES IN ITS SIMPLICITY, WHICH IS APPARENT AT THE HELM AND IN THE INTERIOR, BOTH OF WHICH OFFER EVERYTHING YOU NEED, BUT NOTHING IN EXCESS. THE SLIPPERY HULL ALSO COMPLEMENTS THE MERCURY RACING HP500EFI UNDER THE HATCH AS WELL OR BETTER THAN ANY 28-FOOTER WE'VE SEEN.

TestResults

HOWARD 28 BULLET

HULL INFORMATION

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

PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail	\$69,995
Price as tested	\$105,125

ENGINE & PROPELLERS

Engine	Mercury Racing HP500EFI
Cylinder type	V-8
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	502/470
Lower-unit gear ratio	1.5:1
Propeller	Mercury Bravo One 15 1/4" x 28"

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Gaffrig gauges and controls, Ritchie electronic compass, electric engine hatch, stand-up bolsters, nav lights, interior lighting, 40-ounce marine carpeting, stainless-steel Bravo One prop, through-transom exhaust, Dino steering wheel, Ellis tandem trailer.

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to Mercury Racing HP500EFI engine (\$18,500), IMCO dual-ram hydraulic steering (\$3,300), Ellis custom triple-axle trailer (\$2,460), Sony premium sound system (\$2,300), Bennett trim tabs (\$1,050), sliding plexiglass cabin door (\$895), lab-finished Mercury prop (\$795), VHF radio with antenna (\$785), cockpit cover (\$675), under-swim-step exhaust kit (\$625), Bluewater drive-trim indicator (\$575), Accon stainless Pop Up® cleats, hot/cold transom shower (\$495), second hatch motor (\$445), Perko battery switch (\$295), retracting swim ladder (\$295), halon fire extinguisher (\$255), digital depthfinder (\$250), interior grab handles (\$195), Porta Potti (\$125), drive shower (\$95), 12-volt receptacle (\$80).

ACCELERATION

5 seconds	28 mph
10 seconds	49 mph
15 seconds	59 mph
20 seconds	67 mph

MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	5.5 seconds
40-60 mph	6.9 seconds
40-70 mph	14.4 seconds

RPM VS. MPH

1000	7 mph
1500	8 mph
2000	20 mph
2500	36 mph
3000	42 mph
3500	51 mph
4000	57 mph
4500	66 mph
5000	75.4 mph

TOP SPEED AT RPM

Speedometer	80 mph
Radar	76.7 mph at 5200
Nordskog Performance Products GPS	74.2 mph

PLANING

Time to plane	3.5 seconds
Minimum planing speed	16.5 mph

FUEL ECONOMY

At 45 mph	2.7 mpg
At 55 mph	2.6 mpg
At 65 mph	2.0 mpg
At WOT	1.9 mpg

FUEL CAPACITY

80 gallons

TEST CONDUCTED AT

Long Beach, Calif.

MANUFACTURER

Howard Custom Boats, Dept PB, 28113 Ave. Stanford, Valencia, CA 91355, (861) 257-9275, www.howard-boats.com.

In the 2- to 4-foot seas, it behaved, in the words of our lead test driver "like a much bigger" boat. The Bullet impressed us with its ability to knife through swells and follow them with a comfortable, nose-level attitude, always landing softly. But it was most dazzling in quartering conditions.

"We had 2- to 4-footers and a sideways wind chop out here today," said our lead test driver. "We were running full speed and the boat just danced across all of it without any problems."

WORKMANSHIP

We love the sleek look of a long, flat deck and straight hullsides—if tooling is perfect. If not, errors such as ripples, waves and dimples stick out. The 28 Bullet displayed no such errors, and the boat's in-gelcoat graphics were among the best we saw during our 2001 Performance Trials.

Howard lays up every boat it makes at its small plant in Valencia, Calif., by hand, and that process includes two full weeks of curing time in the mold. Lamination materials include matting from three-quarter ounce to 3 ounces, Baltek foam and end-grain balsa, Knytex 1708 bidirectional knitted-fiberglass fabric, 7.5-ounce cloth and vinylester resin.

Engine compartment rigging for the 28 Bullet was first rate, and we got a close look at it with the engine hatch raised on its electric screw jack. The motor was installed with L-angles through-bolted to the stringers and the standard transom assembly. All wires, hoses and cables were routed logically—out of harm's way—and supported by stainless-steel cushion clamps. Both batteries were mounted on the starboard side of the engine in billet boxes from Eddie Marine.

INTERIOR

Howard kept things smart, clean and simple in the 28 Bullet's interior, and that translated to a cabin with large V-berth, facing lounges and abundant interior lighting. (We've seen less in a

few 38-footers.) With a filler cushion, the lounges converted to a berth extension. To starboard, a locker contained a Sony Explode stereo with a six-disc CD changer.

For rough-water bracing, the manufacturer installed angled footrests forward of each bolster. The co-pilot's station had no glove box (the cabin door slides into the space behind co-pilot's dash), but it did have a grab handle and two cupholders.

At the helm was a tilt steering wheel, with a Gaffrig throttle and shifter mounted on the gunwale. All gauges were from Gaffrig, and none were blocked from the driver's view by the steering wheel. Accessory switches were installed on the ride side of the dash in an attractive anodized aluminum panel. Also at the helm were a depthsounder and a remote control for the stereo.

Deep and comfortable, the rear bench could accommodate three or four people. Under the seat cushion, which was held in place by hook-and-loop fasteners, was generous carpeted stowage space, which could be used as a supplement for the gunwale trays on each side of the boat.

OVERALL

Howard specializes in crafting custom river hot rods. The 28 Bullet is its first foray into the offshore market. Turns out the builder's aim is true, because the 28 Bullet is as captivating and capable as any single-engine offshore boat we've seen in a long time. ●

WORTH NOTING

✓ The 28 Bullet hit 76.7 mph on HP500EFI power—with a full cabin—and was superb in rough water. We see Factory 1 racing potential, perhaps even dominance, in its future.

✓ For a custom-built boat of this caliber, equipped with one of Mercury Racing's hottest motors, we think \$100,000 and change is a fair price, maybe even a bargain. Howard's obsessive attention to construction detail showed in every aspect of the 28 Bullet.