



RARE FORM

From performance to build quality, the Howard 28 Sport Deck was simply exceptional.

WE'VE SAID IT BEFORE BUT IT BEARS repeating: The deck boat segment is the most competitive part of the West Coast custom market. To stand out in the custom deck-boat world, the model in question has to deliver sport-catamaran-like performance and be built with maniacal attention to detail. It has to be comfortable and filled with useful features. And subjective as this may be, it has to look great.

All of that and more could be said about the spectacular 28 Sport Deck from Howard Custom Boats. This 100-plus-mph beauty handled precisely, was constructed artfully and offered a bounty of sweet features such as a rearview video system and a 5,000-watt, \$10,000 stereo system.

And even with those features, as well as a Teague Custom Marine 900 EFI engine, the boat came in at \$177,495. In the custom deck-boat realm, you can pay a whole lot more for a whole lot less.

PERFORMANCE

It was obvious from the 28 Sport Deck that

Howard has perfected its notched hull and the single-step center pod between the sponsons. The 28 Sport Deck didn't carve turns like a sport cat—it carved them like a V-bottom. The 28-footer was nothing short of surgical in turns and tracking, and its stability was absolute.

That's a good thing, because with the big-block engine turning 5,700 rpm, the boat reached 103.7 mph. At 4,500 rpm, it cruised easily at almost 80 mph.

Managing the power from the 900-horsepower supercharged engine was an IMCO Marine Xtreme Advantage SC drive with a 1.5:1 reduction. A 36"-inch pitch Bravo One four-blade propeller put the power to the water.

Our test drivers loved the boat's ability to get moving even more. After coming on plane in 4.5 seconds, the cat "got right with the program," in the words of lead test driver Bob Teague. It hit 82 mph in 20 seconds from a standing start.

In midrange acceleration drills, the 28 Sport Deck put on a show. It shot from 30 to 50 mph in 3.7 seconds, 40 to 60 mph in 4.5 seconds and 40 to 70 mph in 7.4 seconds.

WORKMANSHIP

"Arrow straight"—those were the words our lead inspector used to describe the 28 Sport Deck's flawless tooling. Complementing the smooth mold work were precise gelcoat graphics with a bright shine. A sleek strip of brushed aluminum served as the boat's rubrail and was an ideal match for the silver in the color scheme.

To build the hull and deck, Howard used vinylester resin and knitted bi- and tridirectional fiberglass. The hull and deck were cored with a combination of BALTEK balsa and DIAB foam.

Included in the boat's hardware were six retractable cleats, navigation lights, a ski-tow and a boarding ladder. The front section of the bow was slotted for drainage, which will come in handy when people board the boat after a swim or from the beach. That way, when they use the retractable shower stored in the gunwale, water won't puddle in the bow.

The engine hatch consisted of the back section of the L-shape rear bench and the sun pad. When it raised on two screw jacks, a good





TEST RESULTS: HOWARD 28 SPORT DECK

TEST CONDITIONS

Temperature/humidity	72 degrees/38 percent
Wind speed/water conditions	2 to 3 mph/flat

HULL INFORMATION

Deadrise at transom	22 degrees
Centerline/beam	28'6"/8'6"
Hull weight	4,800 pounds

PRICING INFORMATION

Base retail with MerCruiser 496 Mag engine	\$105,000
Price as tested	\$177,495

ENGINE & PROPELLER

Engine	Teague Custom Marine 900 EFI
Cylinder type	V-8
Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	540/900
Lower-unit gear ratio	1.5:1
Propeller	Lab-finished Mercury Bravo One 15 1/4" x 36"

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to Teague Custom Marine 900 EFI engine and IMCO Marine Xtreme Advantage SC drive (\$55,000), 5,000-watt custom stereo with 18 speakers (\$10,000), Garmin color GPS chartplotter (\$1,500), bimini top (\$1,200), Sony rearview TV camera (\$1,200), removable billet ski pole (\$995), lab-finished propeller (\$900), bow and stern shower (\$800), wind deflectors (\$450) and ISOTTA steering wheel (\$450).

ACCELERATION

5 seconds	25 mph
10 seconds	48 mph
15 seconds	68 mph
20 seconds	82 mph

MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

30-50 mph	3.7 seconds
40-60 mph	4.5 seconds
40-70 mph	7.4 seconds

RPM VS. MPH

1000	6 mph
1500	8 mph
2000	10 mph
2500	22 mph
3000	39 mph
3500	54 mph
4000	67 mph
4500	79 mph
5000	93 mph
5500	99 mph

TOP SPEED AT RPM

Radar	103.6 mph at 5,700
GPS	103.7 mph

PLANING

Time to plane	4.5 seconds
Minimum planing speed	21 mph

FUEL ECONOMY

At 30 mph	NA
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FUEL CAPACITY

	80 gallons
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TEST CONDUCTED AT (ELEVATION) Parker, Ariz. (450 feet)

MANUFACTURER

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WHAT WE LOVED: Practically everything, from the useful features to the outstanding craftsmanship and performance.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Not much, this was a nearly perfect boat. If anything, wind protection could be better.

portion of the furniture went with it. To make the engine installation sanitary, the builder used a fiberglass cover to conceal the through-bolted L-angles that held the fuel-injected big-block to the stringers.

Batteries were housed in billet boxes, evenly spaced cushion clamps supported the wiring and—in a slick move demonstrating the builder's uncanny attention to detail—the oil cooler was powder-painted to match the boat's graphics.

INTERIOR

Howard created a two-piece acrylic "gate" on the bow of the 28 Sport Deck. When closed, the gate provided wind protection for bow passengers on either of the contoured forward-facing lounges. To help those passengers stay put, the builder designed the bottom cushions with a turned-in lip on their edges. Under those cushions were spacious, carpeted stowage lockers. For additional stowage up front, there was an in-sole locker.

The starboard-side console ahead of the helm held a dinette table in a dedicated bracket. Creating a specific spot for stowing the table preserved the open space in the locker and kept it uncluttered. Marine-grade carpet covered the locker sole—snap-in Berber carpet was used for the open areas in the bow and cockpit.

In the console to port, there was a cooler mounted on a sliding track for easy access. If that weren't cool enough, the cooler was set up with a line that drained excess water out the side of the boat.

Two bucket seats and an L-shape lounge comprised the cockpit seating. The co-pilot's seat sat on a pedestal that was a portion of the sole liner, while the driver's bucket was mounted on a billet base. Accoutrements at the co-pilot's station included the faceplate for the stereo, a grab handle, a flip-up wind deflector and a glove box.

Only appropriate for a boat of this caliber, the throttle and shifter at the helm were from Latham Marine and the steering wheel, which tilted, was from ISOTTA. All of the Livorsi Marine instruments had carbon-fiber-pattern faces, which matched the carbon-fiber motif of the upholstery. In addition to the standard gauges, the dash was outfitted with a Garmin GPS. Like the co-pilot's dash, the driver's dash had a flip-up wind deflector.

OVERALL

The 28 Sport Deck was clearly created by a builder at the top of its game. We weren't sure what we liked best about it. Outstanding performance? Outrageous craftsmanship? Useful features? All of the above. Custom deck boats just don't get any better. **P**

Clockwise from top left: Latham Marine supplied the tilt helm and the throttle-and-shifter unit. For power, Howard went with a 900-horsepower Teague Custom Marine engine. Snap-in Berber carpet covered the entire sole of the deck boat. With 18 speakers throughout, the 28 Sport Deck's stereo system was over-the-top.

