

UNRIVALED ROCKET

In every aspect, Howard's 28 Bullet is as good as a sport boat gets.

There's a whole slew of 28-foot-long stepped V-bottoms that are rock solid and reassuring at 80 mph. But as the speed rises to 90 mph, the fleet thins—and gets thinner still at 100 mph. It's easy to forget, especially given the outrageous speeds of bigger V-bottom these days, that 100 mph is a lot of speed and a 28-footer is not a lot of boat.

Leading this elite, rarified pack is Howard's 28 Bullet, a boat we've come to know well in the past three years. The first time we tested the stepped-hull, flat-deck beauty, it was outfitted with a turbocharged engine pumping out about 1,000 horsepower. In our next go-round, the builder sent the boat with a Mercury Racing HP52SEFI engine, and it still left us dazzled. This time, the builder went with big power again and sent a 28 Bullet powered by a 1,100-plus-hp, 555-cubic-inch supercharged engine from Taylor Performance.

To handle the engine's serious wallop, the builder dialed it into a Max Machine Works drive with an IMCO lower unit and a 1.35:1 gear ratio. A Bravo One 31"-pitch four-blade stainless propeller delivered the power to the water.

And there were gobs of power to be delivered. The boat reached 97 mph in 20 seconds from a standing start, blasted from 40 to 70 mph in 4.3 seconds and topped out at 110.1 mph with the engine at 6,100 rpm. But it was how the boat felt at that speed—stable, connected and completely under control—that blew the minds of our test drivers.

"I'm thinking this is the best-handling 110-mph 28-foot V-bottom boat that I've ever driv-

en," said our lead test driver after putting the 28 Bullet through a battery of agility tests, all of which it aced. "It's amazing."

With the engine turning 4,500 rpm, the 28 Bullet cruised at 86.1 mph. At that speed, it felt almost docile.

Outside of using composite materials in the 28 Bullet's layup, Howard did nothing out of the ordinary—at least what's ordinary for the finicky West Coast custom builder—when constructing the model. The composite lamination schedule reportedly saved 400 pounds from the boat, taking it down to a svelte 4,400-pound dry weight.

Like the other 28 Bullets we evaluated, our test model boasted immaculate tooling and excellent in-gelcoat graphics. A seamlessly installed aluminum rubrail protected the pretty package at the docks. Engine compartment rigging was done to the same exacting standards. You don't often find a bilge polished to a mirror-smooth, two-tone finish, but that's relatively standard fare for Howard.

A combination of Livorsi Marine gauges, as well as a Livorsi throttle and shifter, were at the helm. In addition, the command center had a Garmin GPS unit and Bluewater Performance mechanical trim indicators for the drive and tabs. The functional, neatly finished cabin was accessible via an acrylic door that slid smoothly in an aluminum track.

You'd think by now we'd be tired of testing the 28 Bullet. But Howard's 28-footer is the best of its breed at this writing, and that kind of excellence never gets boring. It's an unforgettable ride.—MT

Test Results

Centerline	28'	Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower	555/1105
Beam	8'4"	Propeller	Mercury Bravo One 15 1/4" x 31"
Hull weight	4,400 pounds	Zero to 20 seconds	97 mph
Price as tested	\$180,000	Top speed at rpm	110.1 mph at 6100
Engine	Taylor Performance 1100 SC EFI	Contact	661-257-9275, www.howardboats.com



From left: The complement of gauges was from Livorsi Marine and a Garmin GPS unit was set up high on the dash. Windscreens also could be adjusted to deflect the wind. In the engine compartment, Howard's rigging was among the best for custom builders on the West Coast. The driver and observer bucket seats were on billet stands with footrests.





The best handling single engine V-bottom this year was the Howard 28 Bullet with massive power, which took an awesome set above 110 mph. I like cats, but

this year the recognition goes to the most improved V. Do I have to pick? Single engine: unquestionably the Howard. —**BT**



OK, because all boats represent a compromise of one form or another, it would be difficult to choose one, so I'll break it down to a few categories: sport

boat, V-bottom and catamaran. Since we tested only one sport boat in this roundup, the Howard 28 Bullet is an easy choice—because it is so choice. Even if this roundup were all sport boats, I'd probably still take the Howard. You have to drive it to believe how good it is. —**BB**



But a V-bottom, Howard's 28 Bullet, stole the show. For this test, Howard went with a custom 1,110-hp engine under the hatch. At 110-plus-mph, the

ride was steady, reassuring and comfortable. Do I have a soft spot for the 28 Bullet? Yes. Does it deserve to be there? Absolutely.—**MT**