



From left: Seating toward the back of the 28 Sport Deck included bucket seats and an L-shape lounge. The boat reached almost 90 mph with the 600-horsepower engine. The builder installed a tilt helm from IMCO Marine.

PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Howard's 28 Sport Deck and Mercury Racing's HP600SCi engine are a popular duo.



Since introducing the 28 Sport Deck last year, the catamaran has quickly become the best-selling boat in Howard Custom Boats' lineup. Although the company builds dynamite sport boats, it comes as no surprise that the deck boat tops the sales chart.

That's because the 28 Sport Deck is a stylish, well-built catamaran with stellar performance and handling. Our test model was equipped with Mercury Racing's HP600SCi power plant and a Bravo One XR drive, spinning a lab-finished 29"-pitch Maximus propeller. According to company owner Gene Willen, the drive and engine package has been a popular choice among 28 Sport Deck buyers.

It's easy to see why as the deck boat excelled with the big-block power. From still in the water, the 28-footer reached 47 mph in 10 seconds and 72 mph in 20 seconds. Midrange numbers were just as strong as the Howard shot from 30 to 50 mph in 5.2 seconds and needed 6.8 seconds to run from 40 to 60 mph.

The boat hit 89 mph on the Stalker radar gun, but test drivers Bob Teague and John Tomlinson believed it would have run a couple of miles per hour faster if not for a strong side wind on the Colorado River during the test day.

When it came to handling, both test drivers praised the 28 Sport Deck. The boat rode comfortably over rollers and simply excelled in slalom turns. "I like the way this boat turns," Tomlinson said. "It just carves in the turns. It doesn't hop or skip."

Fuel economy wasn't bad, either. Cruising at 70 mph, the engine package got better than 2.1 mpg. At higher speeds, the fuel economy dropped, although not significantly.

Performance and fuel economy are important for many buyers but so are interior features. From the side, the 28 footer looks like a sport catamaran, but one glance from the bow and it's pure deck boat.

Howard created two long facing lounges up front with angled backrests. The bow's sole was finished in nonskid and slats made it easy for water and sand to drain when washing off feet. The builder installed high-quality, snap-in carpet on the rest of the cockpit sole.

Access from the stern couldn't be any easier. Howard incorporated a boarding ladder on the built-in swim platform and a starboard-side walk-through.

The boat was designed with individual bucket seats for the driver and co-pilot, along with an L-shape bench. Adjustable acrylic windscreens did a good job reducing the wind for those sitting in the bucket seats.

IMCO Marine supplied the tilt helm and full hydraulic steering for the 28 Sport Deck, while the gauges and the throttle and shifter were from Livorsi Marine. For stowage, large lockers in front of the driver and observer spots could handle larger items.

With top-flight performance and exquisite build quality, it's no wonder the 28 Sport Deck from Howard is a popular choice.—**GM**

THE BASICS

ENGINE	MERCURY RACING HP600SCi
PROPELLER	LAB-FINISHED MERCURY MAXIMUS 15 1/4" X 29"
TOP SPEED	89 MPH AT 5,400 RPM
PRICE AS TESTED	\$153,000
CONTACT	661-257-9275, WWW.HOWARDBOATS.COM

Additional test results on page 106.