





Full Deck

Performance, build quality and dock appeal—Howard's 28 Sport Deck has it all.

TEST RESULTS

Centerline
28'6"

Beam
8'6"

Hull weight
4,800 pounds

Price as tested
\$133,250

Engine
Mercury Racing HP525EFI

Cubic-inch displacement/hp
502/525

Propeller
Lab-finished Mercury Bravo One 15 1/4" x 28"

Zero to 20 seconds
64 mph

30 to 50 mph
5.8 seconds

Top speed at rpm
82.3 mph at 5,350

Time to plane
6.4 seconds

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No West Coast custom boat roundup would be complete without at least one high-performance deck boat. Based on a stable and efficient catamaran hull, the Howard 28 Sport Deck is among the finest of the breed. Last time we saw one, it ran more than 90 mph on a 700-horsepower engine, was built with painstaking quality and was outfitted with clever features.

This time around, the builder wanted to show us what the fine cat could do with more docile power. That came in the form of a Mercury Racing HP525EFI engine, the mellowest and most popular offering in the broad Mercury Racing line.

With its engine turning 5,350 rpm, the 28 Sport Deck topped out at 82.3 mph. That's not too shabby on reliable stock power, especially for a boat that can seat a crowd.

Of course, most drivers—at least those with functional brain cells—won't run flat-out with a crowd on board. They'll want to cruise, and the 28 Sport Deck can handle that. At 4,000 rpm, the boat ran 60 mph.

With a time to plane of 6.4 seconds and a zero-to-20-second speed of 64 mph, the catamaran wasn't a rocket out of the hole, but it was adequate. It did run from 30 to 50 mph in 5.8 seconds, which was good, but running from 40 to 70 mph took 16.5 seconds. No big deal there, just the limitations of the supplied power. The plus side of that power is its superior reliability.

When it came to handling, the 28 Sport Deck couldn't have been better. Catamarans that lean into turns and carve through are a pleasure to drive, and that was an apt description of our test model. And no boat in this roundup tracked better or danced more easily over choppy water.

Vinylester resin and various layers, weaves and weights of fiberglass were used in the 28 Sport Deck's construc-

tion. Typical for a Howard product, the boat's gelcoat graphics and tooling were flawless. The low, flowing lines of the model made it look more like a sport boat than a deck boat.

As for hardware, the Valencia, Calif., builder installed six Accon Pull-Up cleats, cat-eye navigation lights on the sponsons and stainless-steel handrails along each side of the bow.

Engine compartment rigging, from the evenly spaced stainless-steel cushion clamps for the wiring to the smooth, gelcoat-finished bilge, was immaculate. That, too, is routine stuff for Howard.

Seating included an L-shape lounge and two buckets in the cockpit and a pair of long forward facing lounges ahead of the helm and the co-pilot's station.

When it came to features, the builder focused on quality rather than quantity, though the 28 Sport Deck lacked for nothing. A two-piece sliding acrylic door/gate on the boat's bow minimized the wind-tunnel effect. A draining cooler mounted on tracks slid easily in and out of the observer's console. The starboard-side head locker was simple and uncluttered.

Gunwale padding throughout the boat was exceptional. The sole was covered with snap-in carpet. A grab rail was within arm's length of every seating position.

An easy reach from the driver's bucket, which was mounted on a billet stand, the steering wheel tilted and did not obstruct the view of the Livorsi Marine gauges. Like the gauges, the throttle and shifter mounted on the gunwale were from Livorsi.

Ahead of the co-pilot's position, was the stereo system, a freshwater stainless sink, a 12-volt receptacle and an acrylic wind deflector on top of the dash.

By using catamaran hulls as foundations, West Coast builders have taken the deck-boat form and given it a higher—as in performance—function. They've added outstanding craftsmanship and features. The Howard 28 Sport Deck is among the best of a very heady lot.—MT P

From left: Seating in the cockpit included an L-shape lounge and twin bucket seats. At the bow, Howard installed a freshwater hose for passengers to rinse off their feet. Livorsi Marine gauges were mounted above an IMCO tilt helm.