



CARVING KNIFE

You won't find a better-handling deck boat than Howard's new 28-footer.

FOR THE MOMENT, AT LEAST, CUSTOM-BUILT HIGH-performance deck boats are a West Coast phenomenon. You rarely see them east of the Colorado River, their waterway of origin. For any number of reasons, seasonal boating chief among them, custom deck boats haven't caught on in the Midwest or on the East Coast.

There are exceptions, of course, but for the most part a deck boat east of the mighty Colorado is a production-built, 50-mph-ride that a true performance nut wouldn't be caught dead in.

That could change, and relatively soon. The latest crop of custom decksters is big—make that huge—on performance, built to exacting detail and loaded with features. And here's the kicker: They don't look like deck boats.

Howard Custom Boats' 28 Sport Deck is a perfect

example. From the side, it looks like a sport catamaran, which it is from the rubrail down. But the model's deck is all wide-open spaces, copious seating and clever features. Best of all, it handles as well or better than any sport cat on the market.

PERFORMANCE

The hull of the 28 Sport Deck incorporated single-step sponsons and a center pod. Power, in the form of a 700-hp fuel-injected engine, came from Taylor Performance Inc. To handle the power, the builder opted for an IMCO Xtreme Advantage SC drive with a 1.5:1 gear reduction and a Mercury Maximus 15 1/4" x 26" five-blade stainless-steel propeller.



From left: Howard's new deck boat featured more than abundant seating. A console to port offered a stainless-steel sink and a cooler that could be hidden in a compartment. A table with cupholders allowed for dining around the L-shape rear bench. For power, the buyer went with a custom 700-horsepower mill from Taylor Performance.

With the engine turning 6,000 rpm, the 28 Sport Deck topped out at 91.3 mph. That's certainly fast enough for any boat that can handle up to 12 passengers. The cat also accelerated from a standing start, as well as in the midrange, with spirit. It came on plane in 6.1 seconds, and less than 14 seconds later it was running 70 mph. Running from 30 to 50 mph took 5 seconds and running from 40 to 60 mph took 6.5 seconds.

Handling manners were superb. Across the board, from slalom turns at 30, 40 and 50 mph to circle turns at cruising and full speeds, the 28 Sport Deck earned our highest marks.

"The bar has been raised for deck-boat handling," said our lead test driver at the end of his evaluations of the 28 Sport Deck. "It's the best-handling deck boat I've driven, period."

Regardless of speed, the 28 Sport Deck stayed on track. With the throttle slammed forward, it accelerated in a straight line. With the throttle yanked back, it decelerated in a straight line. It tiptoed over cross-chop and pontoon boat wakes, and it was imperious to gusty crosswinds.

"A deck boat with a Corvette attitude, that's what it is," our lead test driver added.

WORKMANSHIP

Despite having some tricky angles to negotiate at the stern of the 28 Sport Deck, Howard did a strong job installing the boat's anodized aluminum rubrail. Some silicone was required in the installation, but gaps were small and few and far between. Mold work on the hull and deck was custom quality, and the boat's in-gelcoat graphics were clear and bright.

With the exception of the boat's transom and stringer system, no wood was used in the boat's construction. Lamination materials included vinylester resin and Knytex knitted bi- and tri-directional fiberglass. The boat's sole and fuel tanks were installed while the hull was still in the mold.

Hardware consisted primarily of Accon Pull-Up cleats in pewter bezels, cat-eye navigation lights and a pull-down ladder on the swim platform. In addition to stainless-steel grab handles on the gunwales in the open bow, there were easily reached anodized grab handles on the seat bases.

Raising and lowering on two screw jacks, the engine hatch was constructed of fiberglass and finished on the underside with carpet. Howard used L-angles and Mercury mounts through-bolted to the stringers to

secure the 588-cubic-inch power plant.

No detail was left unaddressed in the rigging. Billet boxes held the batteries in place. Stainless-steel cushion clamps supported the wire looms, which were sheathed in protective conduit. All fuel lines were hidden from view and the smooth bilge was finished in gelcoat and Duratec.

INTERIOR

About the only "standard" element of the 28 Sport Deck was its seating, which consisted of a pair of forward-facing lounges, bucket seats for the driver and co-pilot and an L-shape lounge in the cockpit. Beyond that there were a number of pleasantly surprising features.


The port console ahead of the observer's seat, for example, served as the entertainment console with a sink, stainless-steel cupholder and a 12-volt receptacle. Inside the console, we found a sweet, track-mounted cooler that not only slid out for easy access, but drained overboard.

From the foot-wash station on the slated open bow—accessible via a snappy two-piece sliding acrylic door—to the blender stowage and operation station hidden in the port gunwale of the cockpit, Howard didn't miss a chance to include a clever amenity in the 28 Sport Deck.

Per the breed, the boat had abundant stowage. Both the driver and co-pilot consoles had space for gear. The observer's console also could serve as a head locker/changing room. We found stowage compartments under almost every bottom cushion in the boat, as well as a pair of in-sole locker snap-in carpet sections on their lids. The same high-quality snap-in carpet was used throughout the boat.

The builder kept things appropriately upscale at the helm. The steering wheel, which had an IMCO logo in its hub, tilted and did not obstruct the driver's view of the Auto Meter Pro-Comp Marine gauges. Color-matched to the pewter rims and bezels of the gauges, the throttle and shifter were from Livorsi Marine.

OVERALL

You have to love a deck boat that delivers the exhilarating performance and the sleek, sexy looks of a top-shelf sport catamaran. That's a fair description of the Howard 28 Sport Deck. Don't bet against this one bridging the deck boat gap between East and West. It's that good. 



TEST RESULTS

HOWARD 28 SPORT DECK

TEST CONDITIONS

| | |
|------------------|------------|
| Temperature | 97 degrees |
| Humidity | 23 percent |
| Wind speed | 5 to 6 mph |
| Water conditions | Flat |
| Elevation | 450 feet |

HULL INFORMATION

| | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Deadrise at transom | 22 degrees |
| Centerline | 28'6" |
| Beam | 8'6" |
| Hull weight | 4,800 pounds |

PRICING INFORMATION

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Base retail with MerCruiser 496 Mag HO engine | \$99,995 |
| Price as tested | \$139,995 |

ENGINE & PROPELLER

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Engine | TPI 700 EFI |
| Cylinder type | V-8 |
| Cubic-inch displacement/horsepower | 588/700 |
| Lower-unit gear ratio | 1.5:1 |
| Propeller | Mercury Maximus 15 1/4" x 26" |

OPTIONS ON TEST BOAT

Upgrade to TPI Performance Package (\$40,000).

ACCELERATION

| | |
|------------|--------|
| 5 seconds | 24 mph |
| 10 seconds | 45 mph |
| 15 seconds | 61 mph |
| 20 seconds | 70 mph |

MIDRANGE ACCELERATION

| | |
|-----------|--------------|
| 30-50 mph | 5 seconds |
| 40-60 mph | 6.5 seconds |
| 40-70 mph | 11.5 seconds |

RPM VS. MPH

| | |
|------|--------|
| 1000 | 6 mph |
| 1500 | 8 mph |
| 2000 | 10 mph |
| 2500 | 22 mph |
| 3000 | 31 mph |
| 3500 | 39 mph |
| 4000 | 54 mph |
| 4500 | 66 mph |
| 5000 | 73 mph |
| 5500 | 83 mph |

TOP SPEED AT RPM

| | |
|-------|-------------------|
| Radar | 91.3 mph at 6,000 |
| GPS | 90.8 mph |

PLANING

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| Time to plane | 6.1 seconds |
| Minimum planing speed | 22 mph |

FUEL ECONOMY

| | |
|-----------|----|
| At 25 mph | NA |
|-----------|----|

FUEL CAPACITY

| | |
|--|------------|
| | 80 gallons |
|--|------------|

TEST CONDUCTED AT

| | |
|--|---------------|
| | Parker, Ariz. |
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MANUFACTURER

Howard Custom Boats, Dept. PB, 28113 Avenue Stanford, Valencia, CA 91355, 661-257-9275, www.howardboats.com.