

COUGAR

Cougar's MTR is a fast, feel-good, high-adrenaline sport hull that thrives under throttle, making it willing prey for Mercury's 2.5 EFI Sport outboard and its prop-rated 280 horsepower. It's a stable playmate at high speed and passes a secure feel through the wheel and seats with the throttle mashed. It's Cougar's most blatant hot-rod boat, and the showy mixture of flow-coated interior parquet balsa and stringer wood, rich color-saturated gelcoat graphics, and high-end interior look and feel combine for a classic high-performance experience. That sensation is reinforced from the instant you spark the 2.5, which was set up to rip and roar. On our way to a 93.1-mph radar spike, the Cougar

threw plenty of fun, stable hot laps our drivers' way. It also proved worthy of family consumption, with easy starting and shifting, an easy idle, and good low-speed control and manageability.

WHO IT'S BUILT FOR

The 2.5-powered Cougar will surge from a clean 50-mph ride into an aggressive 80-plus-mph sprint in a few heartbeats and serves up plenty of fun in between. It's aimed at the performance-oriented lake boater with a love for fast, stable sport boating. The 2.5 and the low-profile MTR platform have definite chemistry, and the combination begs to be indulged. Back off the pedal a bit, and the boat dutifully moves into family cruise mode; it also hit with



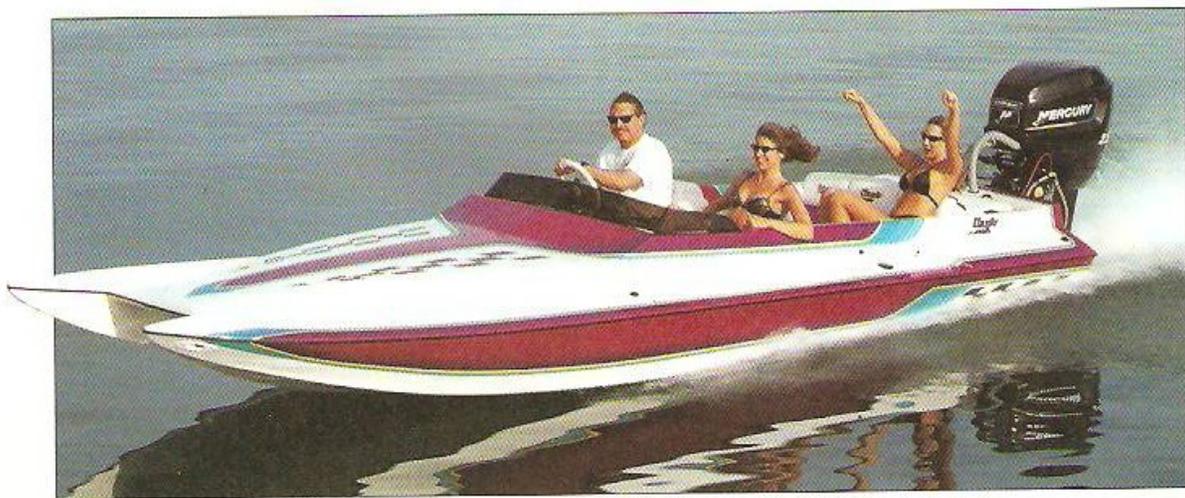
some authority off the line. The outboard setup instantly doubles the Cougar's storage capacity by opening up the rear quarters, making the 21-foot tunnel suddenly practi-

cal. For the speed involved, it's relatively moderate in price (\$46,000 and change, as tested), is set up to require minimal maintenance (except mixing your own fuel) and throws

off a full 7,500 rpm in which to indulge (we peaked at 7,000).

THE MUSCLE FACTOR

The 2.5 Sport seems born and bred for this application, and the Cougar's tunnel underside—with its dropped center keel—made the most of its expansive power curve. It's pretty and somewhat practical, but at its core, it's a hot rod, and it feels like one from the low vantage point of its embroidered seats. The 2.5 hung off a beautifully crafted lift by Bob's Machine. A custom-made Cougar low-water pickup enhanced cooling and reliability. Steering was Teleflex No-Feedback hydraulic. Running the Cougar into the upper 80s proved a matter of merely aiming the forks, cramping your leg downward into the soul of the foot pedal, and working the side-by-side, wheel-bracketed toggles that meshed the jack plate and trim into optimum balance. While it was certainly attainable, hitting 93 ate up a lot more water. The 30-inch Lightning ET three-blade, spun through 1.62:1 gearing, yielded a nice balance of acceleration and high-speed strut. It's a nice



21' MTR TUNNEL/ MERCURY 2.5 SPORT

setup, with low headache potential, for the lake boater who finds a friend in the wind in his face.

THE NUMBERS

Top speed: 93.1 mph
0-30: 7.25 seconds
0-40: 10.25 seconds
0-50: 14.23 seconds
0-60: 22.84 seconds

WALK AROUND

Our Cougar introduced waves of liquidlike raspberry and black checkers throughout an intense seven-color execution that was melded beautifully with its interior. A smooth raspberry fade and clean pin-line bordering showed off Cougar's range in the spray booth. Cougar has introduced bolder, more aggressive interior color use this year, and this boat served notice. The hull's low stance shows off more of the interior, and Cougar makes the most of it here with raspberry floor accents (a sweet contrast with the richness of the wood), solid-color panels in the buckets and rear bench seat, more checkerboarding, stylish embroidery and raspberry gelcoat, deck to dash. Cougar's fiberglass work was fine-grade, and trim installation was clean. Exterior hardware included deck cleats, flush-mount fuel fills, built-in side vents and rear grab handles.

INSIDE LOOK

You sit nice and low in the Cougar, and in classic style, the floor mirrors the contour of the boat's bottom. The interior look and feel match the boat's potential for throttle rocking. All seating was comfortable and solid. Primary storage space is below deck and in the hinged rear deck hatch, which is finished off in typical standout Cougar style. The foot throttle worked in smooth sync with the Teleflex trim and jack levers that sprouted off the column, a very nice touch.

HOT LAP

Ease the pedal south, and the Cougar rolls over with a fluid surge and begins to wind out with little hesitation or slip. The boat packs air quickly and passes on a secure feel from behind the wheel as it picks up speed. It turns responsively at all speeds. It likes plate and trim as it picks up the pace. Its ride at speed is one of the MTR's strong suits, and the handling and ride at 80 are bliss.

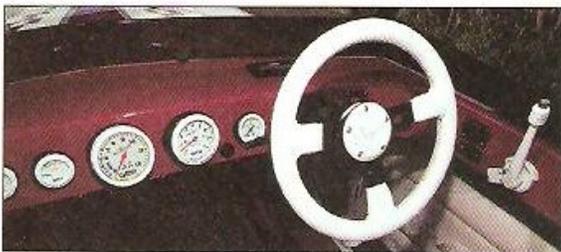
TEAM NOTES EXCERPTS

Steering stiffened considerably at speed...bulkhead fittings, transom hydraulics and stainless bracket work were superb...spacious dash with lots of room for everything...some bolt heads used in the plate installation were mismatched, a surprise...there were small gaps in the fit of the gimbled windshield to the glass...the flow-coated wood floors (with paint accents), once again, elicited enthusiastic raves from everyone who boarded the boat...contrary to the norm, this is one low-profile outboard with not a rattle or vibration to be found at 90 miles per hour...very, very stable at high speed.

SPECIFICATIONS

Test conditions: Smooth/moderate
Centerline: 21'
Beam: 89"
Bottom: Tunnel
Engine: Mercury Racing 2.5 EFI Sport
Ratio: 1.62:1
Prop: 30-inch Mercury Lightning ET three-blade
Overall weight: 1,700 lbs.

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PRICES, FEATURES AND OPTIONS



BASE BOAT

Price: \$40,154
Standard Features: 225 Pro-Max outboard, fuel switch, water pressure gauge, Gaffrig tach and speedo, flush-mount fuel fills, back-lit gauges, HD aluminum ski post, custom floor-mount foot throttle, billet shift lever w/neutral safety, fingertip trim control, color-matched inside floor coating, billet powdercoated hardware, mooring tarp, HD battery box, lab-finished stainless prop, Cougar low-water pickup, five gelcoat colors, grab handles, gauge bezels.

BOAT AS TESTED

Price: \$46,066
Options: 2.5 Pro-Max upgrade (\$1,778), Teleflex No-Feedback steering (\$983), graphics upgrade (\$343), Bob's Machine hydraulic motor lift (\$1,344), mechanical trim gauge (\$695), color-matched motor cowl (\$211), pop-up deck cleats (\$215).