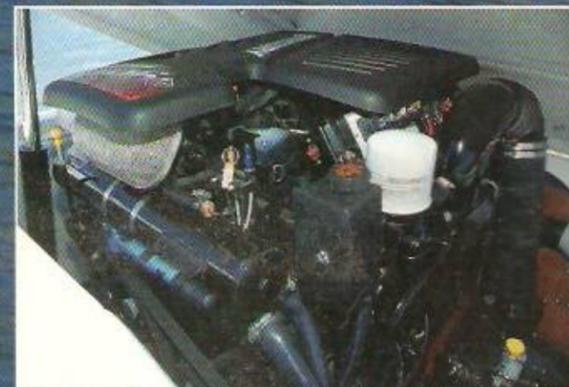
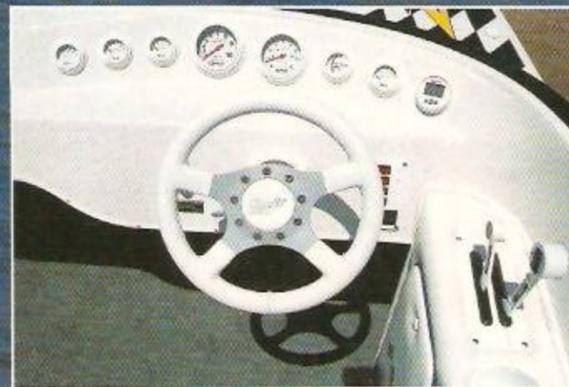
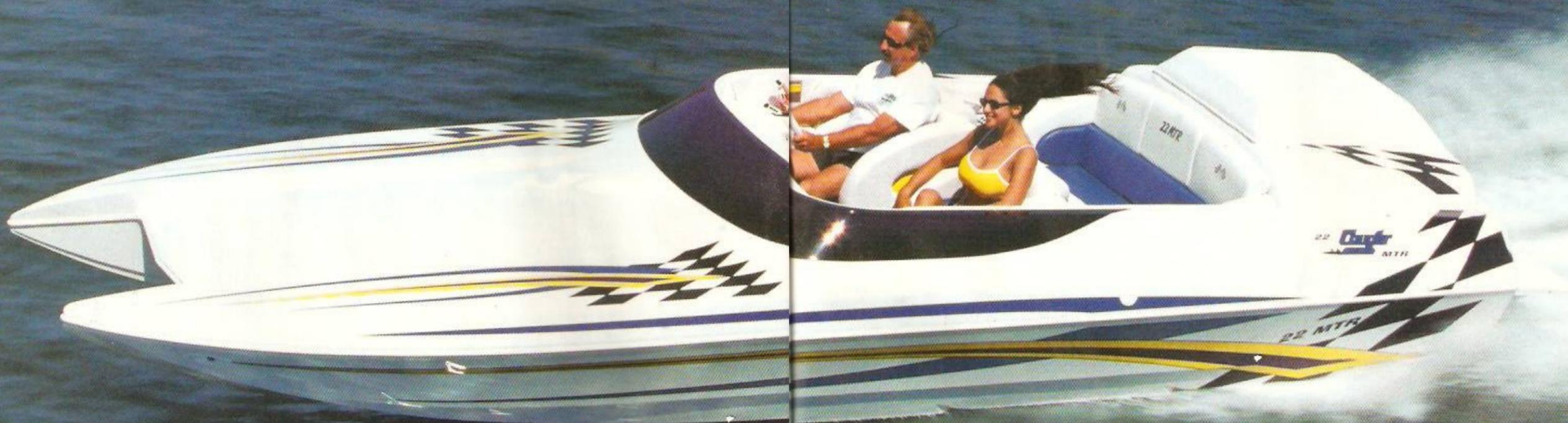


# COUGAR

2 2 M T R



Cougar's 22MTR modified tunnel is a contemporary hot rod, a power-friendly platform that has developed a reputation as a solid, turnkey, point-and-shoot driving experience since its release last summer.

Released just two years ago, the 22MTR is one of four high-performance Cougar tunnels (along with the 21-, 23-

and 27-footer), and it now consumes about a third of their overall sales. It has been embraced by outboard and outdrive disciples with equal exuberance—sales are evenly split between the two—and has become a platform of choice for triple-digit ambitions.

It was only a matter of time before the hull was introduced to MerCruiser's

latest go-fast crate darling, the 375-horse 496 Magnum; the timing couldn't have been more fortuitous, given our entry-level theme. The marriage creates a stable and utterly reliable 80-mile-an-hour sports boat for around 50 grand, after the 496 upgrade (\$3,632) from the unthinkable, base 6.2L. The 496 delivers enough power to tap into

Cougar's very potent and highly drive-able bottom technology.

They couch this 2,900-pound lake carnivore in impressive family trim that includes a comfortable five-place interior, rigging that includes a full array of quality, color-matched hardware and a full complement of standard conveniences. When not engaged in upper-rpm antics, the

Cougar willingly assumes the role of stylish family touring machine.

## WHAT YOU GET FOR YOUR MONEY

The fully balsa-cored MTR is a strong, light and tight platform, with an inherently advantageous power-to-weight potential. The hull holds up under hard-core use,

and the quality construction is thoroughly evident from the driver's perspective. Our team praised the boat's solid, rattle-free feel at speed.

The tooling is well-defined and detailed, and the glasswork passed muster under the closest inspection. Cougar's clean mix of black, blue, purple and yellow gel-CONTINUED ON PAGE 90

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coat complemented our MTR's lines, and the execution earned top marks from our inspection team. The engine compartment is finished off with a time-intensive flow-coating process that highlights the cool look of the skin's natural balsa mat and stringers and which accents the underside and gunnel areas with gelcoat to match the boat. It makes for one of the best-looking engine hatches in the industry.

Cougar sources its hardware from a variety of outlets, including Eddie Marine. Our setup was upgraded with a white-out package (\$417) that includes powdercoating all of the external hardware, bow lights, transom lights, gauges and bezels, steering column, controls, gas fills, vents, grab handles and assorted other pieces.

Pop-up cleats (\$224) and dual swim steps (\$762) rounded out the Cougar's cost options. The hardware selection and execution and the boat's overall finish work and detail reflected the company's proud tradition.

Powdercoated rail bases are standard, but carpeted pedestals such as the ones on our boat are a no-cost option and were selected because of the additional storage incorporated beneath them. The buckets provided excellent support.

All potential driver-to-hull contact points, including the integrated driver's armrest, are softened with upholstered padding, reinforcing the Cougar's high-end feel. Inset accent panels are cut into the backs of the thick buckets. The rear bench was comfortable and roomy and showed off more great stitch work, logo embroidery and high-density body support. Grab handles and cup holders are within reach of all aboard and, for the rear passengers, are smoothly engineered into the backs of the front buckets.

An efficiently planned driver's area provides comfortable access to standard-issue dual-lever Gaffrig controls and an Eddie Marine switch panel with a full bank of functional rockers. The dash is huge and easily accommodates a legible arrangement of Gaffrig gauges in powdercoated bezels. A billet extension steering and tilt Formuling wheel with engraved hub are also standards.

The underdeck area is devoted to finished, carpeted storage that extends to the sponsons. A large ski locker provides more controlled, secure gear stowage. The engine hatch is contoured to accept the height of the inboard engines, precluding its use as a sunning area.

## PERFORMANCE

Our Cougar was set up with a lab-finished 30-inch Mercury four-blade, geared to deliver maximum impact where it counts on a performance tunnel: through the midrange and into high-elevation rpm. Pour on the power, and the Cougar does the rest effortlessly: It was a scorcher through the midrange, and it repeated a clean and stable 81-mph top end without giving up any of its secure, sticky stance. We ran out of legs at 80 mph, long before we could test the limitations of this hull's high-speed handling.

The 496-powered Cougar was spectacularly efficient at cruise rpm and higher, when the hull cleaned out and locked into its cushioned plane. At a super-economical 3,000 rpm, we cruised at a remarkable 50 miles an hour. A check at 4,000 rpm registered 68.8 mph, a statistic that encapsulates much of the central appeal of the proper tunnel-boat setup.

Also, the Cougar accelerated beautifully between 30 and 60 mph and racked up some very muscular numbers in that realm. The 496/Cougar will run with the hand-built hot-rod motorboats once it grabs a set. We went from 30 to 60 in

## SPECIFICATIONS

Test conditions: Moderate  
Centerline: 22'  
Beam: 94'  
Bottom: Modified tunnel  
Engine/Drive: MerCruiser 496 Magnum/Bravo  
HP @ prop: 375  
Ratio: 1.5:1  
Prop: Mercury 30" four-blade  
Overall weight: 2,980 lbs.  
Base Price: \$46,289  
Standard Features: MerCruiser 6.2L/Bravo, five gelcoat colors, powdercoated hardware, Gaffrig gauges w/bezels, billet steering extension and engraved hub, Formuling tilt wheel, grab handles, cup holders, flow-coated and color-keyed engine, flush bow and transom lights, mooring tarp, Gaffrig dual-lever controls, electric hatch lift, lockable front storage area, powdercoated battery box  
Options on test boat: 496 Magnum upgrade (\$3,632), white-out package (\$417), pop-up cleats (\$224), dual swim step (\$762)  
Price as tested: \$51,384  
Top Speed, radar: 81.7 mph  
Mfg. est. speed: 80 mph  
0-30: 8.01 seconds  
0-40: 10.16 seconds  
0-50: 12.61 seconds  
0-60: 15.54 seconds  
Speed at 3,000 rpm: 49.4 mph  
Speed at 4,000 rpm: 68.9 mph  
Speed at 5,000 rpm: n/a

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7.5 seconds, a half second quicker than from idle to 30.

Though a low-profile tunnel boat wouldn't be our first choice when Havasu turns rough, the MTR cruised over moderate chop with impressive ease and stayed dry. The hull even seemed to like it as we engaged a rhythmic 60-mph cruise across a dozen miles of surface bumps. This boat is fun to drive, and there's enough behind the 496 engine package to fend off boredom.

This setup is not without some trade-off, all at low rpm. We picked up some bowrise at planing, and once we throttled through it and leveled off, the MTR moved through patterned porpoise at around 2,000 and slightly above. It did some minor hip-hop through slow-arc turns.

## TEST-TEAM TALK

**Driver 1:** Excellent placement of controls and gauges—a driver's boat. Tilt steering with extension hub offsets close proximity of dash to your knees. Bowrise off the line, probably due to the weight of the 496. This setup will porpoise in the turns at low speed, unlike previous MTRs we tested. Ride at cruise was excellent, carried well at high rpm.

**Driver 2:** Good performance for the power. Has a tendency to porpoise in the turns. At about 40 mph, that condition disappears altogether, and you get a nice, smooth, stable ride. Hull was built for horsepower. Very comfortable to drive at 80 mph. Responsive to trim. Nice job on the craftsmanship.

**Driver 3:** Unique in feel and look. Outstanding gelcoat. Runs over good-sized rollers and drives right through. Bare bones up front, basic storage. Great interior execution and rich look in the engine hatch with the gelcoat and flow-coated wood.

## POWERING OPTIONS

You'll want to put at least 350 horsepower behind the stern-drive MTR effort, which on first blush might make the 377-inch Scorpion an appealing proposition. On the other hand, running 69 miles an hour at 4,000 rpm is very stout stuff, and the small block will never match this setup's proven, mammoth acceleration through the midrange. Plus, there's a lot to be said for routine 80-mph performance from what is essentially the bulked-up version of MerCruiser's base big block. For about the same money as the 496, you can rig one up with a 300 Pro-Max outboard, which will deliver another ten mph, according to Cougar. ■