

C O U G A R

2300 EXECUTIVE SSV

PROFILE/HISTORY

Any legitimate shortlist of the custom industry's best-built boats will include the Canadian-built Cougar, an enterprise that has proven through the years that fine quality and customer satisfaction can transcend all marketing and logistical odds. Cougar's isolation from the rest of the performance community has fostered a singular focus among its skilled, boat-building craftsmen: the pursuit of quality.

We revel in it every time we run one of Cougar's magnificent customs through our test process, and our well-honed expectations remain at full alert after our run-through of its standout 23-foot Executive SSV stepper. The 3,460-pound Executive is Cougar's designated full-sized, rough-water family vee, and its credentials were in order. A sharply cut 22-degree pad-vee is a fit platform for the Cougar's deep, comfortable cockpit.

Cougar is a longtime participant in enthusiast-level, performance powerboating, and its adaptation of the step de-



sign is a natural development within a philosophical framework that says, simply enough, that smoothest is usually best. Certainly it holds true where fit and finish are concerned—that's where Cougar distances itself from most of the performance pack. It's also put into play in the new bottom dynamics, which were eased into the Executive's mold in 1996: You can barely tell you're driving a step-bottom.

Fluid drivability is the key-

stone of the Cougar boating experience, and no amount of additional speed is worth its compromise. Thankfully, this most appreciated element of Cougar's personality remains intact with the conversion of the speed-bottom. "Of everything we drove, it felt most like a conventional vee-bottom," wrote test driver Brian Davidson, who put a lively HP500/Bravo One version through the paces.

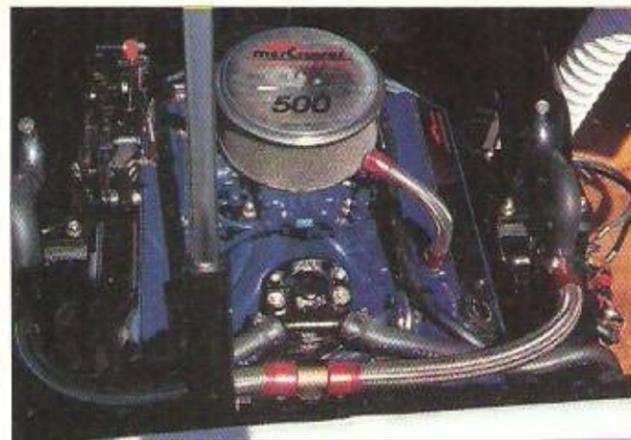
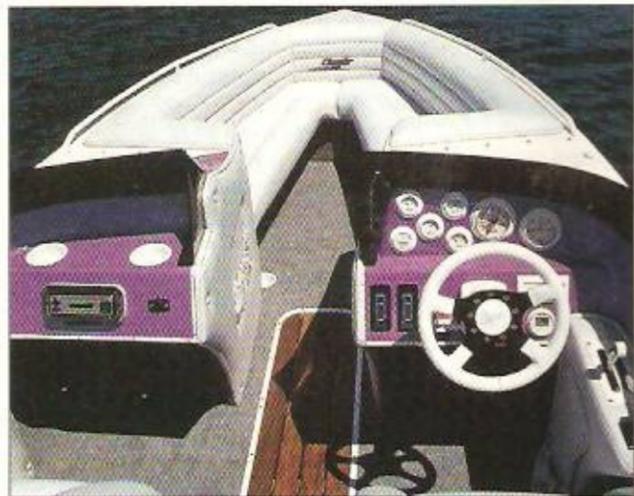
It did, until you eased past vee-bottom no-man's-land—beyond 75 miles an hour—where the slightest bottom flaw can lead the aggressive driver

down a scary path. The Executive retained its regal handling and lost none of its stable countenance as we blasted past 75—a sleeper hot-rod boat that's assuredly destined to find 80 without losing a beat of its reliability.

Keeping company with our tester provided opportunity to take full measure of Cougar's time-tested custom work and its amazing array of standard features. Cougar's vibrant, five-color gelcoat and fiberglass work, as well as the Executive's overall rigging, drew best-possible marks during our prelaunch shakedown. Installation of the trim and white-out ensemble of the mostly Art Altizer hardware was similarly received. Flush-mounted exterior hardware included pop-up deck cleats, billet fuel fills and bezels for the low-profile, stainless bow railing. Stern grab handles were also standard.

WHO AND WHAT IT'S FOR

The Executive surrounds its occupants in maximum luxury per boating foot and gels the family outing with its deft engineering and great comfort.



It's an aquatic showstopper: The detail of its woodwork, engraved interior and unexposed rigging brings the street-rod movement to mind. Cougar's emphasis on elegance and its detailed cosmetics do not overshadow its muscleboating strut, especially as equipped. The HP500 version gave a lock to trouble-free, factory-backed 80-mph status. This package was absolutely formidable.

ON BOARD

The Executive's layout and interior design followed the tone set by the hull's Euro-bred lines and the softened nuances of its fiberglass tooling. The cockpit gained the effect desired when you step up to a 23-footer, and its available displacement was put to excellent use by a sensible, roomy layout. Sizable space separated the broad, densely

padded front bolsters, and a large, deep bench provided comparable comfort for rear passengers. Lumbar support was integrated into all seating. Cougar's interior workmanship, all done in-house, was superb.

A dash of rich, traditional woodwork spices the Cougar's Euro presence, and the company's trademark, flow-coated balsa is a benchmark of its installation. Gray carpet offered elegant accent and was set off by the floor's teak-covered ski locker. Features included in the base Cougar were a 12-volt power receptacle, Clarion sound system, drink holders and an external trim switch.

Controls were conveniently placed, and their integral placement in the armrest fostered fatigue-free use. The two lines of Gaffrig gauges (made for Cougar) were easy to follow while under way. Positioning of the wheel and switches was vintage Cougar, with nothing left to chance.

DRIVABILITY

The Executive wore the HP500 as though MerCruiser dialed it in specifically for Cougar, and even its allotted 470 horsepower did nothing to jade this hull's highly civilized ride. Though the faster bottom intensifies the wheel feel when the Gaffrigs are spiked, the ride remains smooth and controlled. You can feel the small, vee-shaped step at work beneath you, but only sometimes, and only if you're looking for it. Otherwise, the boat feels like an exceptionally clean-riding



straight-vee. Smooth, predictable manners and a stable ride at a high rpm make the Cougar a great choice for the family boater looking for a part-time lake rod.

The 502-derivative HP package proved very user-friendly, and the Cougar moved easily and crisply around the docks, in both directions. Handling drew marks at all speeds, in fact, and we couldn't find a hole in its driving personality.

It planed easily off the line and rode its underside's natural lift into a clean, well-defined stance. The Cougar remained highly responsive to throttle and trim as we moved it through our test course, and it found invisible rails as we ran wide open through our radar beams. Running in the mid-70s, we experienced the same smooth drivability that we found at ski speeds, or while cruising at 50 plus.

We cut the buoys with precision at every chosen speed increment, and we left impressed with the Cougar's ability to corner at virtually any speed. Lazy, loose rolls through the course elicited a dry, flat ride, and the hull dug in hard when we upped the tempo. From behind the wheel, the Executive feels very much like Cougar's smaller boats: It's highly reactive to trim, extremely maneuverable and absolutely predictable.

OUR TAKE

Cougar knows only one way, and its step-bottom Executive version is another stunner. Put enough power to it, and it'll crack the 80-mph

barrier—and few boats will do it in such consummate style. Factor in the legendary Cougar value, and you arrive at a very special recreational experience.

SPECIFICATIONS

Centerline length: 22'3"
Beam: 9'1"
Hull design: Step-bottom pad vee
Engine/drive: MerCruiser HP500
Horsepower @ prop: 470
Drive ratio: 1.50:1
Prop: 26-inch Bravo One four-blade
Base retail price, incl. trailer: \$41,290

Standard features: MerCruiser 7.4L/Bravo One, lighting package, billet vents, grab rails, pop-up deck cleats, Forming wheel, Gaffrig gauges, Clarion stereo system, 12-volt accessory plug, drink holders, bow railing, external trim switch, flow-coated engine compartment, powdercoated hardware.

Options on test boat: HP500 upgrade (\$8,846), Two extra gelcoat colors (\$688), blizzard white-out (\$383), dual batteries (\$394), Bennett dual-ram sport tabs (\$1,184), mechanical trim gauge (\$653), depth gauge (\$300), swim ladder (\$320), Clarion system upgrade (\$1,664), gelcoat fading (\$500).

Price as-tested: \$55,772

Performance

Top speed, radar: 77.0 mph
Builder's estimated top speed in optimum conditions: 80 mph
Maximum rpm: 5,100 rpm
0-30: n/a
0-40: n/a
0-50: n/a
0-60: n/a
Speed at 3,000 rpm: n/a
Speed at 4,000 rpm: n/a

Cougar Boats
Box 772
Salmon Arm, BC
Canada V1E4N8
(250) 832-3603

