

27MTR

Cougar

The pride of custom powerboating's north, Cougar Custom Boats has blazed an unconventional pathway to prominence, beginning with their Canadian heritage and unfolding through the years in a deep line that speaks clearly of their disdain for the company of the performance boating pack.

Far from the influences of their Havasu and Southern California's boat-building peers, Cougar occupies a self-created vacuum in which proven, high performance tunnel-boat technology merges with a time-intensive, very aesthetically inclined set of production blueprints.

Nowhere does this prescription play out more appealingly than within the sinewy 27MTR, Cougar's latest and most dramatic tooling yet and the most recent to run through our annual test shakedown. Cougar's appearance at our Florida tests, rather than at Havasu's, was a departure that had everything to do with scheduling and nothing to do with geography—but played out well considering this hull's designated, open-water realm.

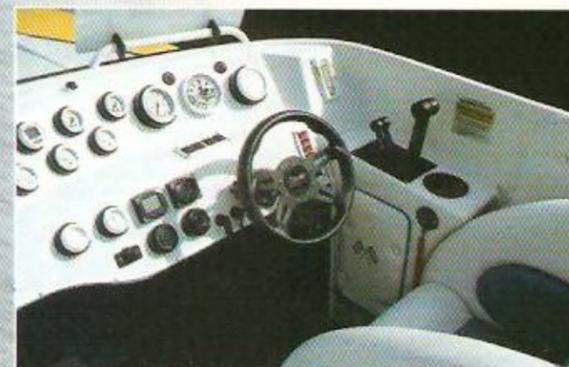
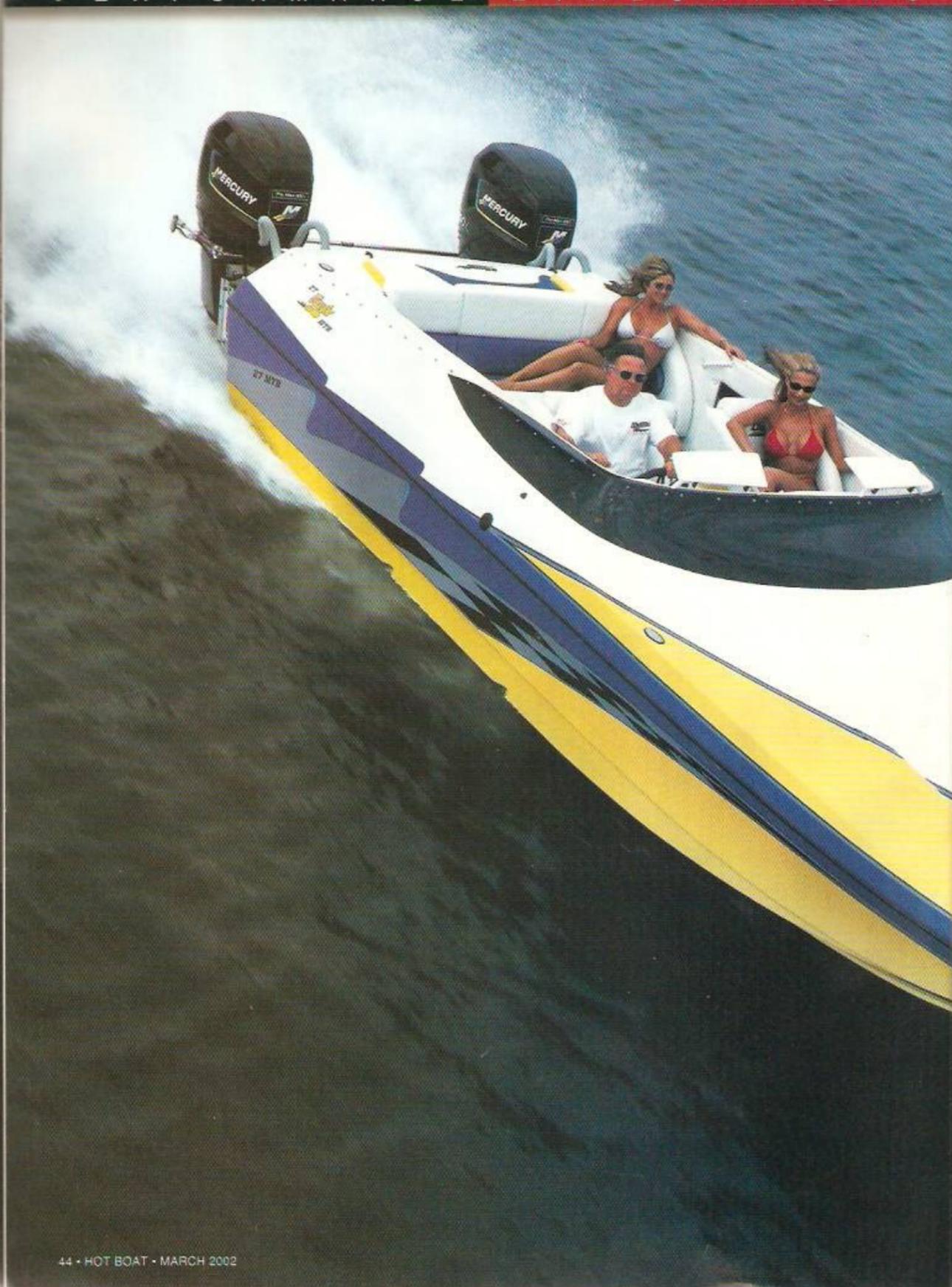
The newly sculpted 27-footer occupies the top rung on a five-boat ladder that comprises the MTR (Modified Tunnel Racer) lineup, a series that shares a history of fiercely refined performance. That heritage radiated to the core of the twin, Pro-Max 300X outboard screamer that made the eager acquaintance of our performance driving teams.

THE SETUP

Say what you will about the relative merits of the big-dog blower boat, but in the afterglow of tests on boats like this one, there is no question of the twin outboard version's claim to champion efficiency and worry-free performance at extreme levels. We chased the

healthy, 6,500-rpm rail of the state-of-the-art, 310-horse outboards to the brink of 100 miles an hour in a flurry of controlled, even-handed passes, then brought the tempo down in an effortless sequence of maneuvers that confirmed the same ever-present ▶





drivability that defines the Cougar badge. And we did it in the secure knowledge of a full year's factory coverage of our impressive, bone stock power reserve.

The twin-300 Cougar fostered a deep appeal on yet another level. It represented the fusion of a variety of technology, a blend of varying, individual components that Cougar streamed toward a common cause.

Hull-mounted lower-water pickups, rigged up with Aero-Quip aluminum fittings and stainless hose, assured worry-free, full travel of the powdercoated, Bob's Machine billet engine lifts. Synchronized lift was applied with Teleflex Pro-Trim lever off the steering column, and the engines also jacked instantly and independently with dash-mounted rocker switches. Dual trim was meted off a switch loaded into the Gaffrig throttle control, again with single dash override. Mercury's highly evolved Smart-Craft

panel was integrated into a bank of standard-issue Gaffrigs, digitally tracking and signaling rpm, speed, fuel levels, projected range and air and water temperature. Easily identifiable warning lights were front and center, made to monitor quickly while at speed.

Gaffrig's finely tuned, liquid-filled, tattletale speedometer and tach were worked into the mix, along with a depth gauge, and all were prominent within a visually pleasing dash layout. Art Altizer bezels circle the dials, another classic Cougar touch. The Bob's lift indicators



were formed by a horseshoe arrangement of six LED dots, and mechanical displays indicated trim position. A large, powdercoated switch panel featured the Cougar's rocker functions. Dual-lever Gaffrig controls are standard and invited fatigue-free operation with their natural, comfortable positioning.

The counter-rotating 300s added a \$10,721 bump over base on the outboard boat, which offers a very healthy starter package: twin, 280-horse 2.5s. Full-hydraulic Marine Machine steering is standard, and it generated a thoroughly sensitive yet evenly restrained touch through the Formuling wheel. Adding the extra power also commanded

a prop upgrade, to 14x30" Mercury three-blade Lightning ET props (\$889), which helped the Cougar deliver nothing short of a spectacular pull through the midrange and deep into high gear. Dual batteries and electric hatch opener are also standard.

The 27-footer utilizes full balsa coring, weighs 3,950 pounds rigged with the twin Mercs and runs on a bottom that uses a unique, protrusive center-pod design that hangs one-half inch below the out-sides. It is this design, Cougar says, that is responsible for the boat's accelerated planing tendencies and nil bowrise.

The 27-footer balances wind-splitting aerodynamics, enhanced by a full array of powdercoated, flushed-in hardware (pop-up cleats, bow light,

transom light sleeve, fuel fills, etc.), with sufficient freeboard and cockpit depth to brave open water. Eddie Marine hardware prevails outside, lending practical backup to a thoroughly engaging harmony of yellow, blue, gray and black. The complex fade work and involved graphics design prompted a \$3,400 upgrade over Cougar's standard, five-color paint job, an up-step that prompted strong approval from our test inspectors.

Our 27-footer was further decked out with color-matched, fiberglass motor cowlings (\$459) that addressed the padded sun deck and a single-piece fiberglass swim step (\$465) that was gelcoat matched and which fit neatly ▶

between the twin-outboard installation. A wide range of options elevated this Cougar's out-the-door price to \$121,399.

We noted that the Cougar's two-inch transom was well suited to handle the stress of our outboard power and that the setup greatly enhanced our boat's practical abilities to haul gear and passengers. The 27's cockpit is roomy anyway; it becomes absolutely cavernous when executed in conjunction with outboard power.

Black, powdercoated trim molding dressed our hull's seam lines and interior and showed the same unwavering attention to detail as the remainder of the boat's installation.

ONBOARD

One of Cougar's long-standing trademarks is their work beneath the engine cowling, and the off loading of the engines from within it provides full viewing exposure of the flow-coated, show-level well. A high-gloss, flow-coated backdrop is beautifully contrasted with a gelcoated, color accent, in our case Sea Blue, and further dressed out with some of the most meticulous imaginable trim work, wiring and ancillary hardware mounting.

All of this is standard fare on every Cougar, but this one went yet another step further by extending the exposed flooring and gelcoat to the forward bulkhead, a \$1,250 option that should not be bypassed.

Our optional snap-in carpeting (\$280) wisely left some of the flooring exposed in an extremely large, wide cockpit environment that features abundant passenger space within its buckets-and-a-bench layout. "The inside of the boat is really as nice as the outside," one of our drivers remarked.

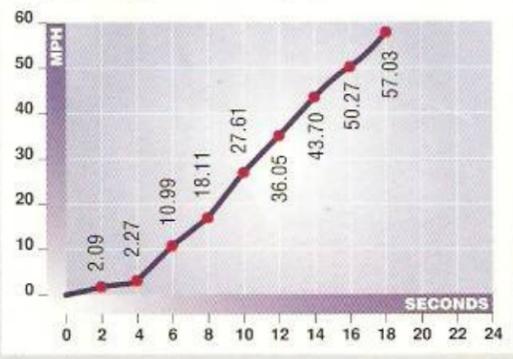
Cougar builds their interiors in-house, and they adhere to the same high-quality standards set in the construction of the hull itself. The front bucket seats are reversible, and they wedge forward passengers in snugly, while providing superior support. Four can sidle into

SPECIFICATIONS

Test conditions: Moderate to rough Centerline: 26'10" Beam: 101" Bottom: Modified tunnel Drive train: Twin Mercury Pro-Max 300X outboards HP @ prop: 310 ea. Overall weight: 3,950 lbs. Base price: \$102,190 Standard features: Twin Mercury 2.5 EFIs, Bob's Machine engine lift w/LED gauges, mechanical trim gauges, hull-mounted lower-water pickups, steering-column lift switch, engine warning lights, five gelcoat colors, powdercoated drink holders, mooring tarp, power trim w/ remote stern switch, Gaffrig gauges w/ powdercoated bezels, Gaffrig controls, Formuling wheel w/ engraved hub, flush-mounted bow lights, pop-up cleats, flush fills, Mercury lab-finished props, electric engine hatch, reversible front seats, flow-coated engine compartment, Marine Machine hydraulic steering, bilge engine brackets, dual batteries w/ heavy-duty boxes, triple axle trailer.

Options on test boat: Mercury twinPro-Max 300X upgrade (\$10,721), gelcoat graphics upgrade (\$3,402), 31-inch Mercury three-blade Cleaver upgrade (\$689), balsa cockpit flooring extension (\$1,250), front bow pad (\$465), depth gauge (\$464), color-matched motor cowls (\$459), single swim step and handle (\$449), snap-in cockpit carpet (\$280), liquid-filled speedo and tattletale (\$220), storage door logo (\$185) Price as tested: \$121,399 Top speed, radar: 98.9 mph Mtg. est. speed: 100 0-30: 10.56 seconds 0-40: 13.12 seconds 0-50: 15.90 seconds 0-60: n/a Speed @ 3,000 rpm: 25.5 mph Speed @ 4,000 rpm: 55.7 mph

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



the rear bench, which is deeply set and on par with the forward seats for comfort. Wind deflectors (\$425) provided protection, and powdercoated drink holders were accessible throughout the cockpit.

Interestingly, Cougar makes no pretense of cabin life within the inherently limited confines of the low-profile, 27-foot tunnel. They've padded the expanse belowdecks, and it's feasible to crawl within and lie down, but it's in reality a nicely finished storage cavern.

PERFORMANCE

The 27MTR is an example of performance powerboating in its most advanced form, a well-built and wonderfully engineered thrill machine that delivers a rare balance of scream-

ing speed and quiet practicality. The fuel-injected 300s conspire with a very effective and highly versatile underside to create a certified hot rod, couched in the conveniences and feel of a luxury cruiser.

We took some time rolling the big 30-inch three-blade Cleavers onto plane, but when they caught a bite, they hooked up hard and firm. From 35 to 75 mph, the acceleration came in pure, undiluted form, and the hull took on a clean, aerated stance and an assuring grip. The outboards hammered hard through the midrange, and the feel was clean and crisp. Throttling through it, we found no trace of porpoise, and the hull showed superior lateral stability as we put it through the paces. This Cougar is inher-

ently agile, highly controlled and a very fun boat to drive; we loved it at speed.

This setup was also very well equipped for life in the family lane. We found it maneuverable around the docks and through traffic and easy to drive. It was sensitive to but forgiving of trim and jack tuning and carried passenger weight extremely well. We cruised at 56 miles an hour with a joglike 4,000 rpm, and our driving teams found 95 plus to be very accessible and controlled. The Marine Machine steering kept us in close touch, sapping torque from the wheel at speed and keeping us in close touch with the boat's handling pulse. This boat handled spectacularly, showing only traces of the outside lean that is inherent in the tunnel breed.

We took full advantage of prevailing conditions on our Ft. Myers test track, guiding the Cougar into the nastiest of the wind-whipped churn that we could find. It responded by flattening the swells, finding a rhythm and a path and passing on a ride that was better than we had a right to, given the conditions. We were impressed with this boat's solid feel in the rough and surprised by the limited spray generated within

DRIVERS' HUDDLE

"Cougar prevails as one of performance boating's finest hulls, with one of its classiest installations.... Seat height is naturally high in the boat.... True custom work is a matter of course for Cougar.... Gorgeous flow-coated flooring—one of the few engine hatches that isn't a veiling job, but an extension of the custom art.... Spectacular wiring.... Sorely missing: front and rear passenger foot supports, with which to snug in at speed.... Standard triple-axle trailer, built by Cougar, is a standout steed.... One of our 300s was stricken with a bit of an attitude, dying occasionally under the weighted strain of the oversized 30s.... There was a 400-rpm split (6,600 to 7,000) between our double-Xs...."