

MODIFIED MAULER COUGAR 22' mtr

Cougar Custom Boats pierces the millennium with a fast, refined, family lake rod.

By Kevin Spaise

Hot Boat Magazine November/December 1999



1st IMPRESSION. Stand back, take in an eyeful of Cougar Custom boats' first tooling of the new millennium, and behold where the high-performance tunnel has taken us. The freshly tooled 22-foot MTR is one of an expanding new fleet of driver-friendly family boats with afterburners built into their hull designs. This emerging armada has found even more wind beneath its wings via MerCruiser's ongoing parade of fire-hot, production stern-drive packages.

This latest Cougar's credentials offer insight to an impressive barometer of how far this emerging hybrid - half faithful family friend, half evil twin - has come.

First, the MTR went to work on our team's softer side, displaying a level of comfort and luxury that was once reserved for the slow lane. It is alive with the exquisite production work and relentless obsession with detail that have become a benchmark of the line.

Then it hammered us alongside the head with its hard, fluid leave off the line, soothing cruise capabilities and family-friendly speed on the beig end.

The combination was stirring to say the least. This package is an exemplary ambassador of a blossoming era: the true, five-passenger Bravo hot rod. True to its heritage, this sleep modified tunnel can also be had with big-inch outboards (one scoop or two) worn deep in the transom.

THE PACKAGE

Cougar's running platform draws energy from every available creative reservoir. Its sponsons are cut in a sharp 22-degree-vee entry, ammunition against rough water that immediately softens the ride. The sponsons also call upon step-bottom technology for drag reduction, and they're aerated in three cuts. Cougar relies on a small pad (the transom tapers to a flat, three-inch running surface). The mix works as designed; the resulting ride is highly responsive, extremely secure, unfailingly stable and, most of all, fast.



The design savvy is shamelessly exploited by the muscular HP500 EFI, MerCruiser's reigning stud bullet, and the 470 horsepower that is ground from its 502 inches and 5,200 rpm. WPM single external ram hydraulic steering (\$2,912) was wisely factored into the mix. Additional options included a mechanical trim gauge (\$654), white-out interior and hardware dress package (\$364), and an upgrade to Gaffrig's liquid-filled, Cougar-personalized speedo (\$105).

Cougar shaped a larger than usual measure of heft and height to the MTR to ensure the

brand's continued proliferation in rough, northern waters and to provide the family boater with an additional level of confidence and comfort as the shore blurs by. Our evaluators were heard to mumble many words preceded with an "over" prefix: overbuilt...overkill...you get the idea.

Cougar simplifies the process of option shopping by slamming every boat with an impressive pile of conveniences and features, and their base package is built way beyond industry norm. Gaffrig dual-lever controls are perfectly plotted in a clean, padded gunnel console, and the major blizzard of a white-out package covers the dual-shift lever, bezels, vents, trim pieces and a load of hardware. The ensemble racks up the style points, and cougar's interior feel is a huge part of the line's surging popularity.



Gaffrig dials are highly visible and float in white Althizer bezels; the manual trim indicator is tucked just above. The dash leans to the clean, conservative side.

Standards also include interior grab handles, engraved steering hub and Formling wheel, matching interior and exterior trim molding, and drink holders, front and rear.

Our MTR's standard electric engine hatch mechanism unveiled the fine detail that defines cougar's standard rigging practices. The work is set off against a color-matched, flow-coated engine compartment that eschews the more common practice of splatter-coating for the more time-consuming, cleaner approach. The hatch appeal of the fuel-injected HP, with its hip color work and polished, stainless thru-transom exhaust, is unequalled in today's

array of unblown motors.

Five passengers can romp and stretch comfortably in the two swivel bucket seats and deep, comfortable rear bench. The seats were extremely comfortable at all speeds and in all conditions, and our drivers lauded the relative positioning of driver, gauges, controls and the horizon. Passengers were very comfortable at speed, and comfort in this style of boat. Cougar may offer a bit more freeboard than the norm in this size class, but the ride still lays low, close to the water, where sensations of acceleration intensify. There's also a good amount of space between the front buckets and plenty of leg space aft. Storage includes a vast area below deck, carpeted up to the bulkhead and finished off beyond with gelcoat and an access door.

A full array of primo billet pieces dress the MTR. White billet vents were frenched into the passenger's side of the hatch cover, a slick touch. Four pop-up cleats, flush fuel fills, vents and other hardware are powdercoated to suit.

PERFORMANCE

Shove the Gaffrig stick to the glass and the Cougar's response is a hard, flat leave, the very model of an efficient plane. Our Gaffrig tach reacted with an instant leap from 2,000 to 4,000, and the setup's tremendous torque in this range was a source of ongoing driver glee. The cougar begins to earn its hot-rod status as soon as you unleash it, and the 85 miles per hour we later found was icing on a very tasty cake.

This unique hull design, a culmination of lessons learned through cougar's years of production, coaxes swift, controlled lift from its series of steps and shows off an impressive consistency that rules the ride all the way up the ladder. Even at a 4-mph putt, when this breed tends to be lazy, the ride was nice and free. The responsive feels melded into a low, flat stance as the speedo needle flung starboard.

We fared very well in knifing through the day's roughest Colorado River chop, which made little impact topside; sound, solid construction assured a rattle-free, tight ride. The MTR ran respectably hard in rough water. We cut through and across a nasty surface at 65-plus, and the underside made the journey routine. Push the platform too hard and you'll ease it into a slight, sponson-to-sponson walk, as tunnels tend to do when sent seeking the edge.

The EFI package was beautifully fit for family boating concerns, as well as for the throttle-happy among us. The Bravo shifted cleanly, starting was effortless, and hull response in reverse and at low rpm was relatively crisp.

THE BOTTOM LINE

<http://www.cougarboats.com/rev-16.htm>

1/17/2006

Look for the new MTR to make a hard impact on the custom, stern-drive hot-rod market and to expand its role as an extreme double-outboard ride and a single-screw., big-inch outboard slammer. The concept of a fast reliable hot rod is one that flourishes beneath Cougar's savvy production and soaring standards. The 22-footer is another proud addition to a proud line.

SPECIFICATIONS

- Centerline length: 21' 10"
- Beam: 93"
- Bottom: Modified, stepped tunnel
- Engine/drive: MerCruiser HP 500 EFI/Bravo One
- Horsepower @ prop:470
- Drive ratio: 1.5:1
- Prop: 30' Bravo four-blade
- Base Retail price: \$40,522.00
- Standard features: 7.4L MerCruiser/Bravo One, Gaffrig dual-lever controls, 12V power outlet, powdercoated hardware, through-bolted motor mounts, external trim switch, color-keyed flood-coated engine compartment, interior grab handles, billet vents, engraved steering hub w/Formuling wheel, cougar gauges, flush pop-up cleats, stainless exhaust, color-keyed molding, drink holders, five gelcoat colors, electric hatch lift, swivel seats
- Performance: Top speed, radar: 86.7 mph
- Maximum rpm: 5,200

