

HOT BOAT OCTOBER 1996

Magazine Articles Testing Summaries

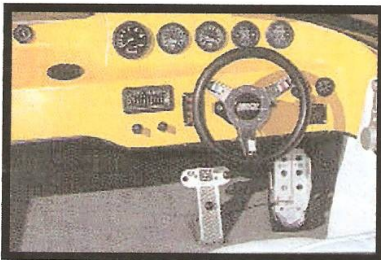
long.)

First things first: The Cougar MTR is extraordinarily fast. Hot Boat has evaluated over 400 boats over the last 10 years and this performance gem blew our doors off with a blistering radar pass of 114.10 mph. This is a hull that is not afraid to let things get moving in a hurry. The owner of the boat—who was a bit leery of anybody else pushing his boat to the limit, even our test crew—said he could live with that number. (Gee, thanks...we could have lived clocking triple digits like those all day



This is the second year of life for the MTR. Like the Stoker tunnel, reviewed on page 48, this boat has undergone a change in power configuration since our last encounter with it. But while the Stoker traded in its Evinrude outboard for an I/O (with minuscule change in top-end performance), the Cougar has exchanged its MerCruiser 525SC stern drive for a pair of Merc 2.5 EFLs. It's quite a different boat now, to say the least. No twin outboard could be das sified as a beginner's boat, and this one could be described as a hard-core performance monster. It's an aggressive piece of machinery and, as we were pleased to find, relatively easy to drive for a boat of this style.

This tunnel is Cougar's own design, constructed with its own molds and tooling. The company has offered a 25 tunnel since 1988; it snared our Cat of the Year award in 1989. The bottom of the 23 is modeled after the new concept. Cougar has incorporated Euro-styling into its rounded windows, rounded tail, edges and structure lines. Compared to other 23-foot tunnels, the cockpit is quite large; it seats four passengers across the back bench and two up front.



The boat boasts an almost perfect installation. The brush-type Mach steering wheel has two trim switches for the engines, while an individual up/down button runs the Cougar's two jack plates at the same time. A synchronized switch controls the engines, so both engines trim in and out simultaneously. Our tester also featured an In Control foot throttle with split foot pedals; the driver can use both at the same time or nurse one along a little more than the other. (Some models are also equipped with nitrous oxide, but not ours.)

The interior is fairly basic: drink holders and grab handles, two bucket seats, a full rear bench and quite a bit of room under the front deck. The boat is very wide, with lots of cockpit space (thanks to the outboard engines, which allow the bench seats to be placed very far aft).

The Cougar is an exceptional performer. It takes its plane quickly, with little to no ventilation. Once it comes over the top, it rockets out. The large props (32x15) on the boat may prevent it from being as quick out of the hole as possible, but at the midrange, the Cougar becomes a rocket ship. We brought the jack plates about halfway up and left them there for cruising speeds. When we felt like going faster, we brought the plates all the way to the top and trimmed out slightly. As for top speed, our wind-blown chop; we might have done better when the camera wasn't looking.

Although we noticed some vibration in the dash at higher speeds, this could be beefed-up by the manufacturer

<http://www.cougarboats.com/rev-02.htm>

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fairly easily. (We also recommend that Cougar add a 'dead man' switch for safety.) The Cougar handles like a true champion, with zero cavitation in tight turns, no porpoise, excellent stability and soft reentry. Even nearing 100 mph, we felt comfortable driving the boat, although we stress that this is a craft for an operator with experience; an average driver will not be able to operate it safely at high speeds. But for the performance-savvy boater, the Cougar is one exhilarating ride.

--Brett Bayne