

2001  
BOAT ODYSSEY

# COUGAR 22' MTR TUNNEL



**W**ithin the widely varied context of the power-sports enthusiast, the big-inch out-

board-powered performance tunnel boat is unequaled in its ability to thrill on command. There isn't a recreational machine in motor sports that can match the muscled-up tunnel's creative use of top-heavy power-to-weight.

All too often, however, that adrenaline-driven fun arrives at the expense of the practical powerboating experience. Load up a 1,300-pound bare hull with more than 500 horsepower, jam the throttle to the fiberglass, and the last thing that comes to mind is working a family day on the lake into the equation.

Enter Cougar's 22-foot MTR tunnel, which was designed with the express purpose of shattering the notion that extreme-level (read triple-digit) performance and manageable, low-impact family boating must be mutually exclusive.

While it's true that no performance powerboat can be all things to all people, Cougar designed and tooled the 22-foot MTR with the goal of creating a dual-purpose, throttle-intensive hot boat that balances one of the fastest bottoms in boating today with a distinctive family side.

PERFORMANCE  
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Released just last year, the MTR counterbalances an innovative, air-trapping speed platform with a healthy measure of freeboard, a roomy and comfortable passenger-seating section and production values that measure up to the rest of Cougar's award-winning family-boating lineup.

Let's think it's the water-bound equivalent of a compromised family performance sedan, factor this snippet of information into your thought processes: Fueled up with more than 50 gallons of fuel and loaded with 500-plus pounds of human cargo, our dual, bone-stock Mercury 2.5-litre V-6-powered MTR whistled by our radar pistol at 101.6 mph, on a 100-plus-degree Havasu afternoon. And that was with the stock ECM plugged into the powerhead of the easy-starting, smooth-idling, 280-horse Merc motors.

An especially impressive aside was the fact that each of our drivers was hammering comfortably down our designated speed alley at 95-plus within just a few minutes of arching into the comfort of the front buckets.

## THE PACKAGE

**W**hile the MTR derives its personality from a host of amenities and Cougar's unmistakable custom workmanship, its heart and soul beat below the waterline. The hull measures just shy of a true 22 feet at the centerline. While its moderately-sized tunnels enhance the hull's stability, Cougar relies on relieving its sponsons—both the two outer ones and the raised center sponson—to reduce drag and build more speed into the running surface. The outer sponsons are cut relatively sharply, with 15 degrees deadrise, and two steps relieve the running surface. The 12-degree centerpod is also stepped twice.

One team driver called the MTR "possibly the most civilized twin-outboard tunnel I've ever driven," with good cause. Though Cougar loaded the test machine for big bear, with a combined 560 prop-rated horsepower hanging off the back of heavy-duty, powdercoated Bob's Machine motor lifts, they also tempered the package with the necessary rigging and setup to make it a comfortable, relatively worry-free recreational driver. Supportive knee braces not only dressed the installation, but gave the setback brackets plenty of support. The decision to leave the stock ECMS in place contributed to this boat's consistent, easy-starting, hassle-free idle and shifting—attributes that have been lacking in some of the high-powered, dual-outboard rockers we've tested. Mayfair full hydraulic steering, stabilized by a heavy-duty, .316 stainless tie bar, lent a controlled, torque-resistant feel to the wheel at speed—it's standard on the dual-outboard MTR. External stainless-steel water pickups insured proper cooling while running high and hard, and the engines were plumbed with stainless lines. The big V-6s were propped with 15x32-inch Merc three-blade Cleavers, and we promptly spun the motors well over six grand (they're rated at 7,700 max).



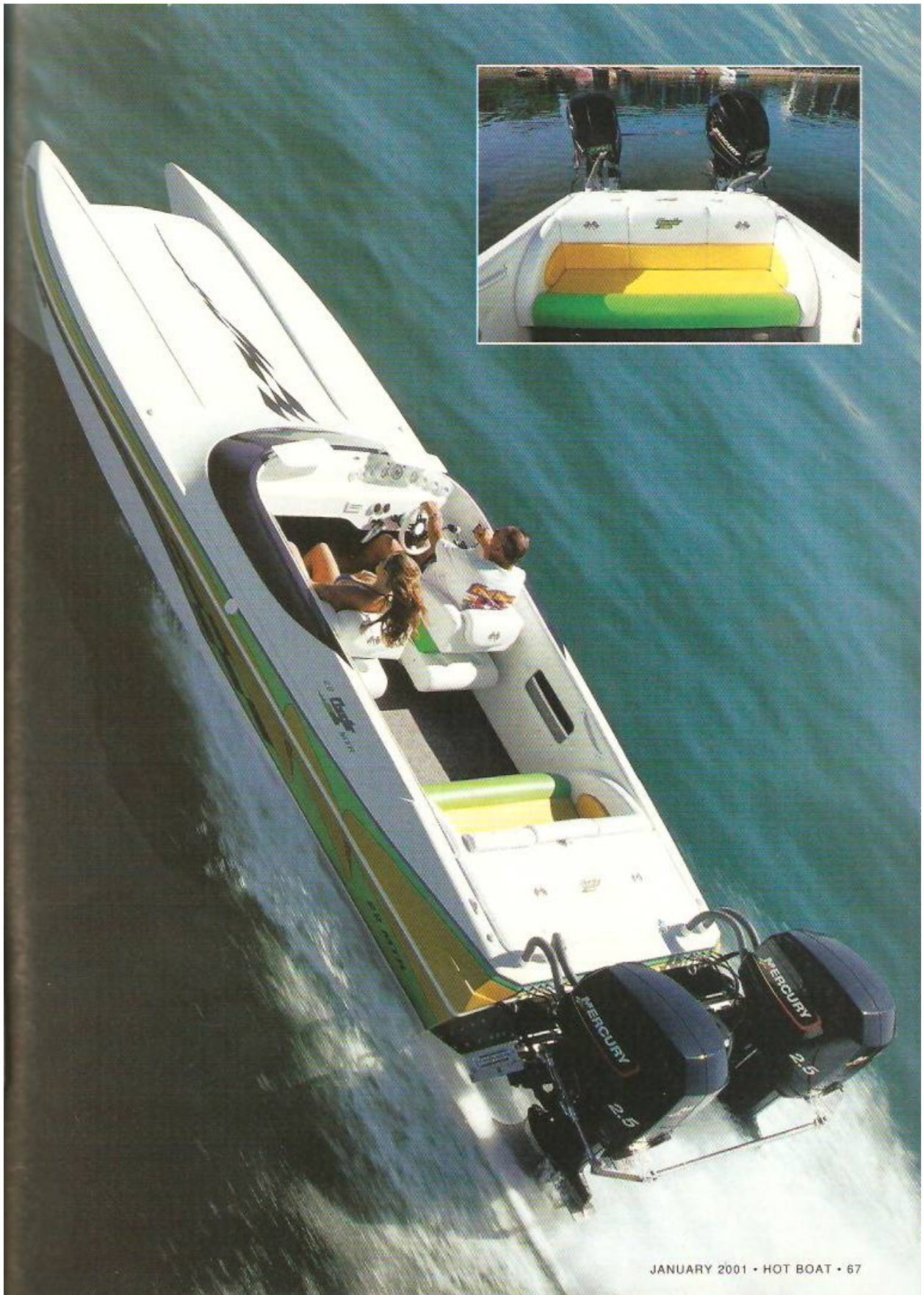
**Cougar is to be commended on the quality of its interior execution, done completely in-house.**

Independent Gaffrig dual-lever throttle controls were conveniently mounted in an integral panel, alongside dual shifter sticks. The engines trimmed off a synchronized, throttle-mounted switch and tuned individually off dash-mounted toggle levers. Meanwhile, adjustment of the transom jacks was prompted by a small, conveniently placed mechanism off the steering column. The bottom line is that any aspect of this boat's controls could be tuned without taking your hands off the wheel, a huge bonus for someone with limited boating experience. A Gaffrig mechanical trim indicator gauge signaled more height, and an illuminated lift-plate gauge indicated jack height. In all, it was a very slick setup.

Dual Gaffrig gauges are standard and were upgraded to white-face dials with matched, angled Altizer bezels, part of a white-out upgrade that covered most of the interior and exterior hardware. Rear vents, flush-mount fuel fills, bow light hardware, transom lighting housings and trim molding and inserts were all whited out and blended nicely into the boat. Eddie Marine pull-up cleats are standard.

A billet steering extension and engraved hub accented the standard-issue, Forumling wheel. Gauges were easy to read at speed, and controls were nicely positioned. Seat bases were done in white powdercoated pedestal railing, and the front seats swiveled. The buckets were nice and large, with good lumbar support, and retained comfort at speed and through rough water. Likewise the large, rear bench seat, which accommodated three passengers in good comfort. Grab bars were anchored into the gunnels.

Cougar is to be commended on the quality of its interior execution, done completely in-house. The comfort, finish work and



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accent stitching—which entailed the Cougar logo and checkered graphics, along with large, color panel accents—all earned top marks from our team. The area below deck was nicely finished and suitable for protective storage. Interior trim molding was anodized to match the installation. Interior lighting is standard, along with four cup holders, two of which were built into the backs of the front bucket seats. A large, locking bow locker is standard. There is no ice chest built into the interior.

"Cougar just seems to get better every time we see one," noted one of our launch-ramp inspectors, expressing a sentiment that was very much in line with that of everyone who boarded the MTR.

The flow-coated rear-deck hatch and bilge, another Cougar signature feature that never fails to dazzle, was mounted with dual batteries (with lockable isolator switch) and powdercoated hold-downs. The hatch was manually operated.

Cougar is in a holding pattern at the top of their game where fiberglass and gelcoat are concerned. The MTR's tooling is obviously top-notch, nicely detailed and beautifully finished. Five gelcoat colors skinned this boat in consummate Cougar styling. A small, center-mounted swim step invited rear boarding.

## PERFORMANCE

Generally speaking, there are trade-offs to be considered in owning a major-league top-end stud machine, not the least of which are poor low-speed manageability, hard cold starts and loading up during extended idle. Cougar has wisely backed off a bit from total ground zero, and our 100-plus mph MTR proved as drivable on the bottom end as a stock, mild-mannered ski machine. The addition of the trim and jack indicators, selection of hand throttles rather than the metal pedal traditionally favored in this breed, and the positioning of the throttle-mounted trim and wheel-mounted jack adjustment all contributed to this boat's driver-friendly nature.

With the jacks all the way down and the motors trimmed into negative territory, the Cougar planed extremely quickly—it was, in fact, one of the quickest holeshooters of the meet. The throttle kicked hard, with minimal bowrise and very little cavi-

tation, and the boat took a nice set as we put it through its paces.

This tunnel hull proved very responsive to jack elevation, which really loosened up the ride, but it wasn't overly sensitive. It picked up speed nicely as we trimmed the motors, and at a very mild 4,000 rpm, we cruised at well over 50 miles an hour. Try as we might, we couldn't find a hole in the MTR's performance profile. There were no flat spots, nor was there any porpoising as we eased the boat into the midrange and beyond.

The MTR proved extremely responsive to throttle and ride tuning as we increased the tempo, and at 60 mph and beyond, it proved an exceptionally fun boat to drive. There's enough freeboard to put some glass between the occupants and the water, but it's a low enough profile design to accentuate the sensation of hard acceleration. It also wastes no time in breeding confidence behind the wheel, a feeling that's justified. As we pressed the Cougar further, the boat retained its clean, predictable ride and straight tracking. It has a natural tendency to feel loose and light when you pick up speed, but the hull retained its flat, sticky stance.

The MTR is a natural, high-speed driving machine, and it's nothing short of remarkable between 70 and 100 miles an hour. This platform is without question one of the best on the water at extreme speeds, and it takes very little time to feel very comfortable running very fast. There's a reassuring stability at high speed to go along with its natural, light feel. "This is a spectacular high-performance outboard boat," summed up one of our drivers.

We also noted the boat's solid feel and rattle-free ride as we wound it out. While conditions precluded our running the boat through rough water, it did handle six-inch to foot-high chop with little difficulty. Though the Cougar wasn't designed to separate the dew from the cones at high speed, the MTR turned moderately well.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

The 100-plus mile an hour 22-foot MTR is one of the most impressive in a boatyard full of high-quality Cougar models. The twin V-6 motors make a great package, as this one was set up.

## SPECIFICATIONS

Test conditions: Smooth, hot

Centerline: 21'10"

Beam: 92"

Bottom: Stepped tunnel w/running pad

Engines: Twin Mercury 2.5L V-6 outboards

HP @ prop: 280 ea.

Ratio: 1.87:1

Props: Mercury 15x32" three-blade

Cleavers

Overall weight: n/a

Base Price: \$73,774

Standard Features: Mercury 225 Pro

Max, hydraulic steering, five gelcoat

colors, flow-coated engine compart-

ment, powdercoated rear vents, pow-

dercoated, flush-mount fuel fills, power

steering, Gaffrig gauges, powdercoated

bezels, billet steering extension

w/engraved hub, Formuling wheel, grab

handles, cup holders, mooring tarp,

Gaffrig dual lever controls, electric

hatch lift, locking front storage area,

powdercoated battery hold-down

Options on test boat: Twin 2.5EFI

upgrade (\$3,856), deck fade (\$546),

white-out package (\$751), custom

trim/lift indicators (\$2,234), liquid-filled

speed (\$112), Tattle-Tale speedo (\$94)

Price as tested: \$81,367

Top Speed, radar: 101.6 mph

Mfg. est. speed: 104 mph

0-30: 7.45 seconds

0-40: 9.35 seconds

0-50: 11.56 seconds

0-60: 16.10 seconds

Speed at 3,000 rpm: 32.9 mph

Speed at 4,000 rpm: 52.1 mph

Speed at 5,000 rpm: 69.4 mph

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