



HOT BOAT FEBRUARY 1997

Howard 22' Bowrider

One of the toughest challenges any boat manufacturer faces is upgrading and improving an already ear perfect model. This was exactly the kind of dilemma confronting Howard Custom Boats owner, Gene Willen, when he agonized over making changes to his very successful 22 Bowrider that was named our Boat of the Year in 1993.

Although sometimes the old saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," is sage advice, Willen decided to take the chance and attempt to make several significant alterations to the hull's running surface and the interior cockpit styling. As we found out, Howard's gamble paid big dividends.

Although there's considerable experimentation with stepped-vee hulls now under way, Howard resisted that temptation and instead utilized more conventional performance modifications to its 22-degree, vee-bottom family sport bowrider.

The first change was to add a notched transom. This indentation measures 24 inches wide by eight inches long and six inches deep. This is a common design feature on performance bass boats which allows the drive unit to be located closer (higher) to the surface of the water, thus, reducing drag. Because of the notch, the flow of water off the bottom of the boat angles sharply upward, creating both positive lift and feeding water to the elevated drive unit without incurring propeller ventilation (slip). The results are faster holeshots, improved high-speed ride attitude and greater top end.

The second change Howard made was to add a flat (delta) area to the forward portion of the keel, just aft of where the bow forefoot makes contact with the water when on-plane. This delta section starts as only one inch wide and continues aft about 12 inches, creating a flat pad and a lace where the boat can turn on at normal cruising speeds (25 to 45 mph). The function of the forward delta is to create a definite pivot point for better cornering and to reduce the amount of banking (lean) as the turn increases in sharpness.

THE PACKAGE

Howard has upgraded its upholstery for 1997. The twin forward bucket seats for driver and co-pilot have been reconfigured, with a more angled backrest and improved lower-back lumbar support. The bowrider area seating also has eliminated the conventional "straight back" style in favor of a more ergonomically correct position. Definitely, the overall comfort factor has been elevated. You've also got to appreciate the more stylish double-stitching that eliminates the beading to cover seams. And although some boat interiors put too much emphasis on drink holders and tiny-molded glove boxes, Howard has done an excellent job in

upgrading its overall utility value by integrating cup holders and more built-in storage compartments throughout the cockpit.

A couple of other noteworthy changes to the 22 Bowrider model includes a redesigned windshield deck area and a new one-piece, full-length swim platform. The deck modification involves the placement angle of the windshield. It's now more swept-back, enhancing the side profile of the hull, making it look even more sleek. Although our test version 22 Bowrider was still fitted with the common two-piece swim steps on either side of the stern drive, Howard has made the new one-piece swim platform a standard for 1997. Not only does it provide greater room and comfort for skiers and swimmers to board and debark, but there's also an added safety factor to consider when the platform covers the top of the exposed stern-drive unit. As before, the one-piece platform is made from a fiberglass mold and is color matched to the hull.

Since its inception back in 1959, Howard Custom Boats has not wavered from its philosophy of building extremely high-quality custom boats. Probably the best evidence of this fact is the two weeks of mold-cure time given each and every boat built. According to Willen, this two week period is optimum for creating a "straight" boat. It also doesn't hurt that Howard uses nothing but the finest in fiberglass lamination materials, including AME 4000 resins, Knytex 1708 bi-directional knitted fabric, Knytex 3408 tri-directional knitted fabric, plus Baltek foam-core reinforcement. And for those who think that wood no longer has a role in boat construction, think again. For stiffness and hull rigidity, nothing beat four full-length kiln-dried Douglas Fir stringers glassed into the bottom.

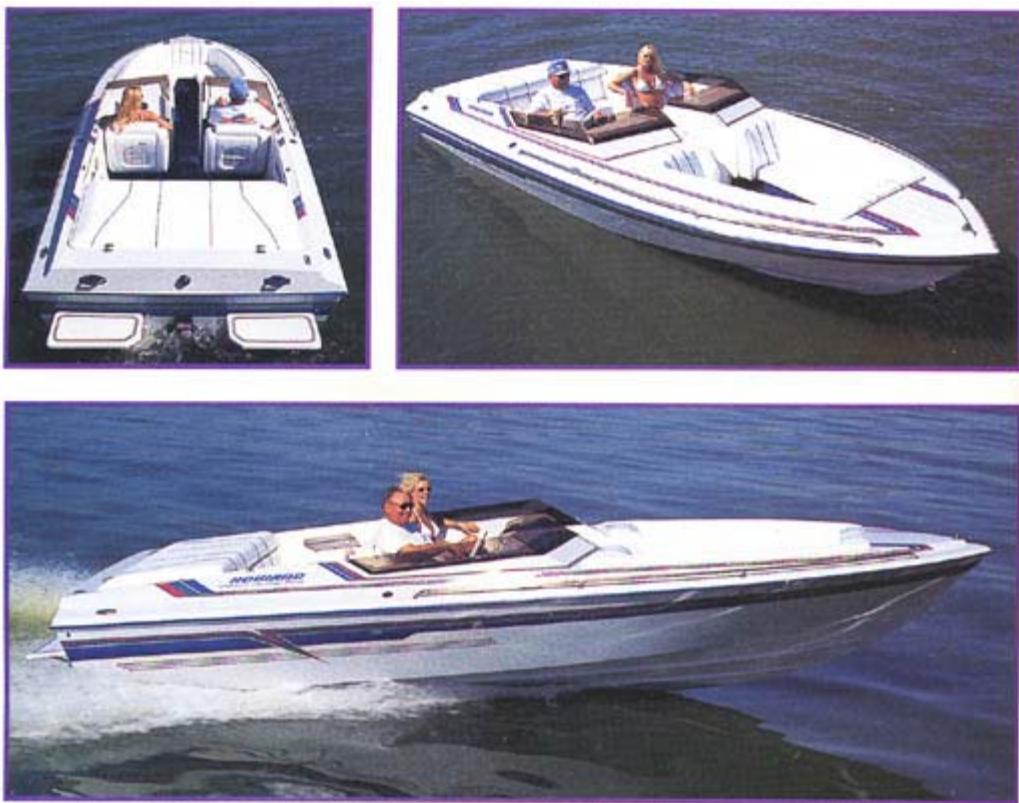
Unlike some bowrider models that are simply cut-out versions of their closed-deck cousins, Howard builds the 22 Bowrider with a special deck mold that incorporates the open-bow compartment. This one-piece structure improves the overall fit and finish of the bowrider, plus it provides additional strength. As for the quality and craftsmanship of our test model Howard, it was representative of the type of boat Howard consistently builds: virtually flawless.

As might be expected from a boat of this caliber, Howard provides a long and very complete equipment list. From a boat of this caliber, Howard provides a long and very complete equipment list. First, you get the custom seven-color gelcoat selection. Then, those little custom extras like color-matched anodized hardware, a Formula steering wheel, all stainless-steel hardware and fasteners, a full complement of VDO gauges (speedo, tach, bolt meter, fuel gauge, water temp, oil pressure and trim gauge) and single-lever hand controls are all part of the standard package. You'll also appreciate Howard's selection of custom, color-coordinated, genuine Naugahyde interiors with plush marine-grade carpet. And there's even a Mercury stainless-steel propeller included in the base price, along with a MerCruiser 7.4L/Bravo One stern drive.

Our test model 22 Bowrider was equipped with a MerCruiser 454 MPI package that features the multiport fuel injection. The engine upgrade which represents about an 85 horsepower bump (from 300 to 385 hp), is costly (approximately \$6,000), so you need to think carefully about how much the latest in engine technology is really worth to you.

If you're into serious tunes, Howard is happy to accommodate you with your choice of stereo cassette or CD system. Our test model came with a high-performance Sony stereo and ten-disc CD changer, including four speakers with a sub-woofer and crossover. That little option sings a tune of about \$1,500.

You can also run wild in the optional equipment category, adding almost anything your boating heart desires. Most popular optional items includes a convertible bimini top with a stainless-steel frame and a dual-battery setup with a Perko battery switch. If you've ever run low on battery power in a boat, you'll automatically appreciate the necessity of a backup battery onboard. You can also spend a few extra dollars for a set of Bennett dual-ram trim tabs, but unless you're planning on carrying some extra heave loads of passengers or frequently encounter unusually rough water, this 22 Bowrider didn't seem to need the help.



PERFORMANCE

So how successful was Howard in their attempt to improve o already outstanding performance? Excellent. In 1993, the 22 Bowrider, powered by a carbureted 502 MerCruiser (390 horsepower) Bravo One package, was radared at a very respectable 64 mph. The new Howard version easily made full-throttle passes at 68.5 mph with a MerCruiser 454 MPI (385 horsepower) under the engine hatch, a full 4.5 mile an hour improvement, with slightly less available horsepower. Credit this gain to the notched transom, allowing the drive unit to be placed from 1" to 3" inches higher than with the stock, stern configuration. Our test team also noted that the '97 version of the 22 Bowrider was much more trim responsive than before. Because of the design extra lift factor, not nearly as much positive (out) trim was needed to make the hull take a perfect high-speed set. And even better was the fact that just a stock three-blade 23-inch Mirage (stainless steel) propeller was necessary to get the job done.

Looking at the acceleration stats, it takes just over ten seconds to hit 30 mph, but 50 mph come up only eight seconds later, demonstrating good midrange response. If you're going to do a lot skiing or

wakeboarding, you might want to opt for a smaller-pitch four-blade prop to give you a little more dig at low end.

The Howard 22 Bowrider has always been a good turning hull; now it's simply outstanding. Instead of feeling heavy or sluggish in a turn, the 22 Bowrider acts like it's riding on top of the water; it is extremely responsive, ready to change direction-left or right-at the slightest movement of the steering wheel. No propeller ventilation was noted, even after repeated, hard, tight power circles. All you have to do is drop the drive until slightly, allow the bow to make contact with the water and then crank the wheel, and you're immediately making a turn. And although this particular 22 Bowrider was equipped with a set of Bennett dual-ram trim tabs, they weren't really needed. Hull lean was minimal with no tendency for slip or slide.

What shouldn't be forgotten, however, is the fact that the Howard 22 Bowrider is genuinely a deep-vee hull. It hasn't changed its relatively generous amount of freeboard, which will keep you and your passengers dry on a rough, windy afternoon 'nor will it pound your sine. This is a very comfortable riding boat whether you're seated in the forward bowrider compartment or the main cockpit. It also doesn't hurt the ride-ability that Howard is ultra generous when it comes to putting plenty of padding in the seats.

THE BOTTOM LINE

At a suggested retail price of \$49,190 (equipped with the MerCruiser 454 MPI package and other listed options), the Howard 22 Bowrider is one of the more pricey custom boats on the market. However, if you place a considerable value on exceptional quality, outstanding performance and the ability to deal with a boat manufacturer on a true one-to-one basis, the dollars are well worth it. The Howard 22 Bowrider was our choice as Boat of the Year in 1993, and it's even better for 1997. You be the judge.

SPECIFICATIONS

Centerline length: 22'4"

Beam: 96"

Bottom: deep-vee

Engine/drive: MerCruiser 454 Magnum MPI/Bravo One

Horsepower @ prop: 385

Ratio: 1.50:1

Prop: Mirage 23" three blade

Base Retail Price, incl. trailer: \$39,995

Standard Features:

four full-length, kiln-dried vertical grain stringers, marine-grade plywood, seven-color custom gelcoat, all stainless-steel hardware and fasteners, heavy-duty marine battery w/battery box, anodized grabhandles w/vents anodized fuel fills, s/s bowrails, two-piece windshield, bilge pump, blower, nav. lights, Formulating steering wheel, anodized ski tow, full VDO instrumentation, single-lever hand controls, power steering, power trim, Mercury stainless propeller, anodized gauge bezels, anodized aluminum rubrail w/rubber insert, built-in storage compartments, swim steps, custom color-coordinated Naugahyde interiors w/narrow grade carpet, 7.4 liter-MerCruiser (I/O models).

Options on test boat:

385 hp MerCruiser 454 Magnum MPI (\$6,000), Sony stereo w/amp and CD changer plus speakers & subwoofers/crossover (\$1,500), Bennett dual-ram trim tabs (\$650), dual batteries w/Perko switch (\$395), bimini top w/stainless frame (\$650)

Price as tested: \$49,190

Performance:

Top speed, radar: 68 mph

Builder's estimated to speed in optimum conditions: 68 mph

Maximum rpm: 5,000

0-30 mph: 11.92 seconds

0-40 mph: 14.64 seconds

0-50 mph: 18.39 seconds

0-60 mph: 25.83 seconds

Speed at 3,000 rpm: 31.9 mph
Speed at 4,000 rpm: 48.1 mph

