

A Step Up

The walk-through bowrider version of Howard's 26' Cat is a beast to be reckoned with.

by Mike Finnegan

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FERNANDO ESCOVAR

No hot-boating experience combines high-speed thrills and safe rough-water handling capability more than a well-designed and executed cat. A good cat will take advantage of available power and float atop the chop, blasting its way into the upper-speed range with controlled precision.

During the high-speed sport-cat industry's infancy, though, many models found high speeds with ease, but were not capable of emitting the same turning and handling characteristics as vee-bottom hulls, a trait which often negated the good vibe of a high-speed run once the boat leaned hard to the outside of a turn. Banking into a turn to avoid a bad situation instantly became a performance characteristic, which many builders scrambled to attain. Howard's 26-foot Cat flaunts every desirable characteristic the high performance cat buyer is after, including excellent handling and turning abilities.

Howard Boats unveiled its 26-foot Cat in 2000 to rave reviews. A year later, it added a redesigned deck to the potent mix to create a substantial and effective bowrider model. The 26-foot feline has earned a solid reputation as a key player in this volatile hot-boating segment and the walk-through bowrider combination simply expands Howard's influence even further. The same agile and high-tech bottom



design, which gives the hard-deck version of the 26 its excellent performance, has proven equally adept at elevating the bowrider to top-level performance as well. As we discovered by throttling across some of Lake Havasu's roughest waters, the 26 Cat has no problem carrying the nose over the chop in either hard-deck or bowrider form.

This fine example of the company's excellent custom-boat-building prowess was armed to the teeth with a battalion of tempting hardware. The owner recently decided to step up from his older jet-boat for the more contemporary and comfortable Cat hull. He didn't completely abandon his roots, though, since the new boat is powered by the same 675-horsepower Teague mill that also powered the jet-boat. The engine is based upon a tall deck World Products Merlin III race cylinder block with splayed billet main bearing caps. An L.A. Enterprises billet crankshaft, Carrillo connecting rods and forged JE pistons make up the bottom end. To actuate the valves, Teague installed a Crane hydraulic roller camshaft and accompanying lifters, Manley pushrods and Crane roller rockers. Edelbrock marine



heads were port-matched to a Brodix intake manifold and the combo is fed fuel from a Holley Dominator carburetor. An MSD 6AL marine ignition and Soft Touch Rev Control lights the combustible mixture of fuel and air within the cylinders, bringing this 565 cid beast to life.

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COMPLETE ENGINE SPECS

Cylinder block: World Products
Merlin III Race Gen IV Chevrolet
(#081111)

Bore: 4.490 inches then finished to
4.50 inches

Deck Height: 10.20 inches

Stroke: 4.50 inches

Piston-to-deck height: .030 inch

Crankshaft: Lunati blower crank-
shaft (#BQ421/650304)

Rods: Lunati billet (#896478)

Pistons: JE forged reverse dish
blower pistons (#181994)

Piston rings: JE Pro Seal moly
(#J10008-4500-5)

Main and rod bearing clearance:
.035 inch

Machine work by: Dougan's Racing
Engines

Dampener: TCI Rattler (#87005)

Flywheel: TCI (399273)

Cylinder Heads: AirFlow Research
315cc CNC-ported Magnum (#2000)

Combustion chamber volume:
110cc

Valve diameter: 2.250-intake/1.880
exhaust

Valve type: Tulip titanium

Camshaft: Comp Cams mechanical
roller (#4877B4878B SR114)

Gross valve lift: intake=
.668/exhaust=.678

Duration at .050 inch: intake=
260/exhaust=266 degrees

Lobe separation: 114 degrees

Lifters: Comp Cams Endure-X roller
lifts (#866-16)

Pushrods: Manton Performance
Products chromoly (#404)

Pushrod length: 9.00/9.60 inches

Rocker arms: Comp Cams alu-
minum 1.73 ratio (#1021-16)

Intake Manifold: Weiand tall deck
polished aluminum manifold

Supercharger: Weiand 8-71 street
supercharger (7198P)

Intercooler: Teague Custom Marine
Superchiller

Valve covers: Comp Cams polished
aluminum spray bar valvecovers
(#248)

Carburetion: Holley 1,000 cfm HP
Fuel Pressure regulator: Holley
adjustable twin port (12-704)

Fuel line kit: Weiand hard lines
(7093)

Carburetor throttle linkage: Weiand
dual carb kit (7166)

Ignition: MSD Pro Billet distributor
(85501)

Spark plug wires: MSD 8.5mm
Super Conductor wires

Spark plugs: Autolite racing
(#AR3933)

Air scoop: Speedway Motors Shot-
gun Bill scoop (#92511907)

Hardware: ARP head bolts, intake
manifold bolts, oil pump mounting
stud

SOURCES

AirFlow Research

Dept. HB
10490 Ilex Ave.
Pacifica, CA 91331
(818) 890-0490

Automotive Racing Products, Inc.

Dept. HB
1863 Eastman Ave.
Ventura, CA 93003
(805) 339-2200
arplasteners.com

Competition Cams Inc.

Dept. HB
3406 Democrat Rd.
Memphis, TN 38118-1541
(901) 795-2400
compcams.com

FelPro Gaskets by Federal Mogul

federalmogul.com

Holley Performance Products

Dept. HB
1801 Russellville Rd.
Bowling Green, KY 42101
(270) 782-2900
holley.com

JE Pistons

Dept. HB
15312 Connector Ln.
Huntington Beach, CA 92649
(714) 898-9763
jepistons.com

Manton Racing Products

Dept. HB
558 Birch St., #4
Lake Elsinore, CA 92530
(951) 245-6565
mantonpushrods.com

MSD Ignition

Dept. HB
1490 Henry Brennan Dr.
El Paso, TX 79936-6805
(915) 857-5200
msdignition.com

TCI Automotive LLC

Dept. HB
151 Industrial Dr.
Ashland, MS 38603
(662) 224-8972
tciauto.com

Westech Performance Group

Dept. HB
11098 Venture Drive, Suite G
Mira Loma, California 91752
(909) 685-4767
westechperformance.com

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It's a seriously powerful and reliable combination that although designed originally for service in front of a high-rpm jet drive, works surprisingly well in front of the Teague Platinum XR drive in this cat. According to Howard, this boat routinely runs 93 mph at 6,200 rpm in any weather condition, which is a bold statement considering the hot climate in which the boat is run.

At any rate, the boat is a slick piece that has been thoroughly upgraded from stock 26 Cat specs. The engine exhales through Teague ST450 exhaust tips and the drive is cooled with a Teague drive shower and maneuvered via a Zieger full hydraulic steering system. The cockpit is outfitted with Livorsi platinum-colored Monster gauges and the pilot and copilot are shielded with optional wind-deflectors mounted to the deck. The engine bay is secured with Dana scissor hinges and an optional Halon fire system waits at the ready beneath the hatch. Howard's 26 Cat has become a crowd favorite over the last four years, and this boat is a good reason why. It combines great looks, exceptional power and lots of class. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

Centerline: 26'
Beam: 102"
Bottom: Cat
Drivetrain: Teague 675HP/Teague XR Bravo
HP @ prop: 675 hp
Overall weight: 4,400 lbs.
Base price: \$72,000
Standard features: MerCruiser 6.2L/Bravo One, seven gelcoat colors, Baltek coring, illuminated rocker switches, anodized hardware, interior lighting, Dana Marine hardware, Dino wheel, Gaffrig gauges, Gaffrig dual lever hand controls, pop-up cleats, electric engine hatch lift, swim steps
Options on test boat: Teague ST450 exhaust tips, Teague Platinum XR drive, Zieger hydraulic steering, Livorsi platinum monster gauges, wind deflectors, halon fire system, triple axle trailer, Teague drive shower
Price as tested: \$114,600
Top speed, radar: 93.3 mph

Howard Custom Boats
28113 Avenue Stanford
Valencia, CA 91355
(661) 257-9275