

2011 PERFORMANCE REVIEW: DAVE'S CUSTOM BOATS M31 WIDEBODY BY MATT TRULIO

STELLAR IMPRESSION

Powered by twin Mercury Racing 1350 engines, the DCB M31 Widebody exceeded our wildest expectations.

In 16 years of testing boats with this magazine, I don't remember any model being more highly anticipated than the Dave's Custom Boats M31 Widebody catamaran we ran in February on Lake Havasu on the Arizona-California border.

There were plenty of reasons for the pre-test buzz, most notably that the M31 was the first boat we've tested with Mercury Racing's turbocharged 1350 engines. On power alone, the boat was intriguing. That the engines reportedly had taken the cat to 177 mph did nothing to kill the buzz.

So it's safe to say that the expectations of our Test Team members were high. It's also safe to say the DCB M31 exceeded them in every way.

To be blunt, nothing less would have been acceptable for a 31-foot cat with a \$700,000-plus sticker, though to be fair, roughly half of that was wrapped up in the twin 1,350-hp engines with M8 drives. Also to be fair, the owner spared no expense when it came to construction and amenity options that took the cat from its base price of \$280,000 with twin MerCruiser 496 Mag HO engines. A pair of Mercury Racing HP700SCi engines, for example, would add \$144,000 to the list price. A pretty penny, for sure, but the point is you can get an M31 Widebody for much less than this one.

Although now that we've tested one fully loaded, we'd find it awfully hard to "take a step down."

PERFORMANCE

We won't keep you in suspense: With the twin-turbocharged, quad-overhead cam engines turning 6,800 rpm, the M31 reached 170.5 mph. Why the drop-off in top-end from the reported 177 mph? Simple—for our tests the builder propped the boat for acceleration with Mercury 17" x 39" five-blade Pro-Finish CNC 18.5-degree rake propellers on the M8 drives, which had 1.3:1 gear reductions.

And acceleration there was. As in massive—as in nail the throttles at 150 mph and still get pinned back in your seat.



With a top speed beyond 170 mph, the wildly impressive M31 Widebody catamaran from Dave's Custom Boats featured bucket seating for six in the meticulous cockpit, which was protected by a distortion-free windshield.

Just look at the numbers. From a standing start, the M31 reached 103 mph in 15 seconds and 130 mph in 20 seconds. True, the 5- and 10-second standing-start speeds weren't mind-blowing, but that was more a matter of the props finding bite than the engines making power and torque.

The midrange numbers were pleasantly ridiculous. Blasting from 40 to 70 mph took 3.9 seconds. Rocketing from 70 to 100 mph took 4.4 seconds. Just for kicks, we threw in a 25-to-125-mph acceleration test. That took all of 12.2 seconds. It was enough to blow away *Powerboat* test driver John Tomlinson, who isn't exactly unaccustomed to exceptional performance boats.

"This boat is awesome—it's an absolutely great machine," Tomlinson said. "And it has 'stupid' acceleration. It felt like one of Dave Scott's race boats."

But that kind of acceleration would have been literally stupid in anything less than a remarkably stable platform, and that's just what the M31 proved to be. Even at top speed, it felt connected to the water and solid.

It never wandered—quad-ram hydraulic steering from IMCO Marine helped—or felt light. That said, the boat was in the capable hands of professional test drivers.

"It's not hard to drive, actually," said Bob Teague, *Powerboat's* lead test driver. "It's a little windy today, maybe 15-mph gusts. We went with it. We went into it. We went across it. And the boat really does handle well."

The boat—more accurately its 1,350-hp engines—also inhaled fuel. At 100 mph, it got a reasonable 1 mpg. But at wide-open throttle it burned 145 gallons of fuel an hour—per engine.

"That's a lot of gas," Teague quipped. "But at least you'll get there quickly and have time to put gas in it."

WORKMANSHIP

Sparing no expense, the buyer ordered the M31 with lamination options including carbon fiber and Kevlar, carbon-fiber stiffeners and Penske composite board in the layout. The owner also ordered an upgraded gelcoat graphics package. To protect his »

What We Liked: The M31 Widebody's massive, back-in-your-seat acceleration thanks to the turbocharged Mercury Racing 1,350-hp engines. It seemed endless at all speeds.

What We'd Like to See: Better access to the sides of the engines for service. We're not sure if the crew at Dave's Custom Boats could pull it off, but it would be worth a try.