

BATTLESHIPS ALUMINUM



Five hot aluminum bass rigs square off to see who's best

By John Tiger, Jr.
Photos by Steve Quinlan



When editor Steve Quinlan and I converged on Missouri's Stockton Lake last spring to conduct an aluminum bass-boat shootout, I debated the amount of excitement I'd feel, especially when the hottest of the quintet was only supposed to top out in the 70-mph range. However, I was pleasantly surprised; despite the fact that the top speeds didn't get my adrenaline flowing, the overall performance and quality of these five rigs really got my attention.

CONCEPT TEST

Quinlan's idea was to get at least five of the top aluminum bass-boat builders together on the same day and the same lake, and "run what they brung" (with a 200 hp cap) through our standard battery of *Bass & Walleye Boats* test procedures. Months before our arrival, Quinlan made all the arrangements and we woke up on a windy but warm morning to find five well-equipped, moderately priced rigs at the ready. Our digs at the Orleans Trail Resort & Marina were ideally suited for our tests; our rooms were right next to the marina and launch ramp, so we were ready to rock as soon as we stepped out the door.



■ **Polar Kraft's HP180 Pro provides excellent value, and very good performance when teamed with Yamaha's four-stroke F150. The dash was well laid out with easy-to-read instruments. It was the only boat we tested with central bow rod storage.**



FIRST UP: POLAR KRAFT

The reps from Polar Kraft/Godfrey Marine arrived first, so we hooked our test gear to their Bass America HP 180 Pro and hit the already-choppy waters of Stockton Lake. It seemed like every sailor, tuber and jetskier was out en masse for a day in the sun, but I suppose that's what we get for weekend testing. No matter, while it took us longer, we still found a great variety of calm, choppy, windswept and mixed-up waters to conduct our tests. Our test hull had the only four-stroke of the bunch, a new Yamaha F150 inline-four (I-4) cylinder. We expected the two-stroke V-6 engines to easily outrun this four-banger, but we were wrong.

We found out quickly that our test Polar Kraft did not offer us a dry ride, especially in 6-inch to foot-high wind chop out on the main lake. Regardless of our speed, direction or trim angle, we just got wet; there was no avoiding it. It was a rough ride, too. It seemed every wave would jar our fillings loose if we hit it at more than 25 mph. At least handling was good; even at wide-open throttle (WOT), we could not shake the 180 Pro loose as we stormed the small test bay we selected; chinewalk was basically nonexistent. We did notice a slight porpoising when under 3000 rpm that could not be ironed out, even with the trim fully retracted. At rest, the boat was reasonably stable, but could be made to lean over if an angler stood on the gunwale.

At speed, the Polar was a stable and good-running hull when rigged with the Yamaha. We

clocked an even 59 mph with the F150 four-stroke spinning a 23-inch-pitch Mercury Tempest prop at a highest-of-test 5630 rpm. Imagine, the only four-stroke in the test, and it ran the highest rpm of all five engines! Planing was quick, but not the quickest; we hit 30 mph from a dead stop in 6.1 seconds, beating only the Tracker in this segment. With our FloScan fuel meter hooked up, we watched the lean Yamaha sip at the little 24-gallon fuel supply (smallest tank in the test). Its four-stroke Yammie helped the Polar Kraft snare top honors for "Quietest Ride."

Our test boat was rigged well and had a better-than-average fit and finish. We noticed some hanging carpet under the decks when examining the storage boxes, but other than that, the rigging and attention to detail was very strong. The interior setup and layout was typical for this type of rig — very functional, but plain. The storage areas are excellent for this size rig, and will serve most anglers well. Our overall impression is that this rig is well put together and will last a long time. At a price of \$26,430 (as tested with a Yamaha F-150 four-stroke), this package is a great value for anglers who primarily boat in calmer waters.



Polar Kraft Bass America HP 180 Pro

Base Price:	\$26,430
Price as Tested:	\$26,700
Top Speed:	59.0 mph
0-to-30 mph:	6.1 seconds
Construction:	Welded aluminum
Console Type:	Single
Length:	18' 4"
Beam:	7' 4"
Hull Weight:	1272 lbs.
Rigged Weight:	1495 lbs.
Trailer Weight:	2195 lbs.
Fuel Capacity:	24 gals.
Livewell Capacity:	18 gals.
Maximum Horsepower:	150
Warranty:	5-year structural w/ lifetime on hull, transom welds and outer skin

Standard Equipment: Instrument package; no-feedback steering; quick-release windshield; 12-volt receptacle; 24-volt trolling-motor harness w/ tray; bow trim switch; fold-down fishing seats; drainable molded coolers; rod holders; rod straps; high-gloss urethane paint; all stainless fasteners; Nextwave (plug-and-play) wiring system

Engine Tested:	Yamaha F150
Horsepower:	150
Type:	I-4 EFI 4-stroke
Displacement:	2.7L (162.8 cid)
Weight (published):	466 lbs.
Recommended WOT RPM:	5000-6000
Gear Ratio:	2.0:1
Propeller:	141/2x23" Mercury Tempest Plus 3-blade
Jackplate:	Rapid Jack manual 6" setback
Propshaft height (to pad):	.5" below pad

TEST RESULTS

Engine (rpm)	Speed (mph)	Fuel (gph)	MPG (mpg)	Range ¹ (miles)
1000	5.1	0.7	7.6	165
1500	6.5	1.2	5.5	119
2000	7.6	2.2	3.5	75
2500²	23.5	3.2	7.4	160
3000	30.3	4.4	6.9	149
3500	36.1	5.5	6.5	141
4000	41.2	6.7	6.1	132
4500	48.8	8.2	5.9	128
5000	54.7	11.9	4.6	99
5500	57.2	13.3	4.3	93
5630 (WOT)	59.0	13.8	4.3	92

¹ Based on 90% fuel capacity

² Optimum cruise speed

Polar Kraft

Dept. BWB
4500 Middlebury St.
Elkhart, IN 46516
574/522-8381
godfreymarine.com



Lowe 180W Stinger

Base Price:	\$18,165
Price as Tested:	\$23,082
Top Speed:	54.7 mph
0-to-30 mph:	4.6 seconds
Construction:	Welded aluminum
Console Type:	Single
Length:	17' 10"
Beam:	7' 4 1/2"
Hull Weight:	1000 lbs.
Rigged Weight:	1452 lbs.
Trailered Weight:	1883 lbs.
Fuel Capacity:	31 gals.
Livewell Capacity:	24.8 gals.
Maximum Horsepower:	150
Warranty:	10-year depreciable hull w/ lifetime on riveted seams and welds

Standard Equipment: Painted bunk trailer w/ swingaway tongue; chrome-bezel plug-and-play instruments; 12-volt receptacle; navigation and courtesy lights; automatic bilge pump; (4) deluxe seats; driver's seat slider; FW71FB Digital MotorGuide trolling motor; Navman 4430 fishfinder; aerated livewell w/ timer and integrated baitwell; port and starboard livewells w/ timers; bow center rod locker; (2) stern storage lockers w/ removable tackle trays

Engine Tested:	Mercury OptiMax 150
Horsepower:	150
Type:	V-6 DFI 2-stroke
Displacement:	2.5L (153.0 cid)
Weight (published):	431 lbs.
Recommended WOT RPM:	5250-5750
Gear Ratio:	1.87:1
Propeller:	14 1/2x23" Mercury Tempest Plus 3-blade
Jackplate:	None
Propshaft height (to pad):	5 1/2" below pad

TEST RESULTS

Engine (rpm)	Speed (mph)	Fuel (gph)	Range ¹ (mpg)	Range ¹ (miles)
1000	5.1	0.7	7.0	195
1500	6.4	1.4	4.5	126
2000	7.7	2.2	3.4	96
2500²	24.6	3.1	7.9	221
3000	31.7	4.2	7.5	209
3500	38.3	5.8	6.6	184
4000	43.4	7.2	6.0	168
4500	50.0	10.8	4.6	129
5000	54.3	15.0	3.6	101
5050 (WOT)	54.7	14.9	3.7	102

¹ Based on 90% fuel capacity
² Optimum cruise speed

Lowe Boats
 Dept. BWB
 2900 Industrial Drive
 Lebanon, MO 65536
 417/532-9101
 lowe.com

LOWE RIDER

Our Lowe tester came equipped with a new Mercury OptiMax 150 two-stroke DFI engine. With this powerplant, we hit a best of 54.7 mph at a very low 5050 rpm, indicating that our rig needed some more set-up and propping time. That was not reflected in our 0-to-30 mph acceleration times, however. The Lowe/Merc combo easily smoked all competitors with an astounding 4.6-second average time. Engine height (or more accurately, lack of) caused the low top speed and rpm but helped the punch. The Merc was mounted with the propshaft 5 1/2 inches below the bottom of the boat. This affected handling, too. At top speed, the Lowe was difficult to control as it wandered and hunted approaching 54 mph. With more jack height, the Merc could have twisted its 23-inch-pitch Tempest three-blade at a more reasonable 5500 rpm or so, and we would have seen a better turn of speed as a result.

We also noticed some flexing at speed when we crossed waves and boat wakes. Fuel economy was truly excellent; in fact, the Lowe achieved the Best Cruise (highest fuel mileage of all boats tested). At 2500 rpm and 24.6 mph, the Lowe/Merc combo was barely drawing fuel through the lines at a very miserly 7.9 mpg.



■ *Lowe's 180W Stinger was a decent performer with its Mercury 150 OptiMax, but it was rigged conservatively, which hurt top-end speed and handling. Holeshoot was the best of the bunch at 4.6 seconds. The dash didn't flex at all despite an abundance of plastic fascia. Folding seats provided good support in rough water.*

Ridewise, the Lowe worked very well when we cruised out into the open, choppy waters of Stockton Lake. In a foot of chop, we never got wet nor did we bounce around much. Handling at midrange speeds was very good; the boat carved nice, tight turns with no bounce or skip. It was only when we cranked up the throttle that the low engine height began to negatively affect the hull's handling characteristics. We're sure that with the motor a couple of inches higher, the handling eccentricities would be minimized.

Construction was on par in most areas, with a few items that needed attention. For example, the storage lids flexed noticeably when we stood on them, indicating the need for a bit more reinforcement or a bit less breakfast on our part. The dash had a few sharp edges underneath, which my knees would occasionally hit in rough water. The dash also flexed noticeably when I grabbed the wheel and pulled myself out of my seat. Those seats, by the way, were very comfortable and well stitched with very attractive vinyl. Storage capacity was excellent, with three livewells and multiple dry-storage boxes.

This tester needed a little rigging attention. The tach, trim and fuel gauges didn't work at all, and we noticed quite a few dangling wires under the dash and at the transom under the hatches. Wires were routed with little thought to order, as were hoses and cables. Our boat had no trolling-motor battery as well. Lastly, we noticed some hanging carpet edges under the deck and in the storage boxes. Overall, this is a nice boat, and with a little more attention to detail, it would be a top contender for any angler's hard-earned bucks.





■ *The Xpress was the hot rod of our group, besting 70 mph with the incredibly strong Evinrude E-Tec 200 H.O. Under-deck rigging quality was par for the course. Check the massive transom knees on this hull — that big 'Rude doesn't flex this boat at all. Storage was abundant, yet typical for a hull this size. Overall quality was very good, and the attention to detail was very evident.*



XPRESS TRAIN

This was the “Fastest.” With a smokin’ hot Evinrude E-Tec 200 H.O. on its transom, the Xpress X19 hit a best-of-test 70.8 mph at 5250 rpm turning a steep 28-inch-pitch Raker propeller. That tall blade didn’t hurt holeshoot, proving how much low-end snort the E-Tec has. We reached 30 mph in a cat-quick 5.5 seconds — good for third in the standings. Although we recorded a 70-plus mph clocking, it seemed there was more speed to be had from this rig. But, by the time we ran off the Xpress’ numbers, the pleasure boaters were clogging up the test track in record numbers, and it was all we could do to string together a few good passes. Under better conditions, I’m certain 73 mph or more would be easily attainable.

Fuel economy with the big E-Tec is somewhat competitive with the rest of the DFI outboards, but not better by any means. Our average 4.2 mpg and best cruise of 5.0 mpg at 2500 rpm (29.7 mph) was a last-place showing. Don’t forget, though, that this was a 200 competing mostly against 150s (except, of course, for the Merc 200 OptiMax on the Triton, which only eked out three-tenths of a mpg better). My only complaint is the small 30-gallon fuel tank; combined with the 200 horses of the E-Tec, the Xpress had a comparatively low range of approximately 130 miles at best cruise speeds — and much less at full bore.

Handlingwise, this combo was stellar. Top-speed manners were very predictable, and the Xpress hull carved turns and sliced rough water as good as, if not better than, all the other boats we tested. That’s saying a lot, as it was a good 5 mph faster than its closest challenger. In the rough and at top speed, the Xpress showed its pedigree as a high-performance

hull. We heard no rattles and enjoyed a nice, dry ride across the wave tops at speeds above 35 mph, even in the roughest part of the lake.

Construction and attention to detail on our test rig was very good. We found little to complain about; wiring and rigging neatness was very good, as was the seat stitching, carpet edges, and installation of dash, gauges and accessories. Under the dash and rear rigging access, we saw good, solid rigging — no hanging wires or cables, and a sense of order and purpose. Construction of this rig is all business — a fully welded assembly with a high-performance pad-V bottom team up to give a fast as well as solid performance.

The Xpress even looked the part of a performance boat. Although there was no mistaking it for a fiberglass rig like the Tracker, it looked like a high-performance lake rocket. Its stealthy look didn’t help with photos, however, as this rig showed up “dark” until we were able to light up the side with some late-afternoon sunlight. The big E-Tec provided the perfect match for this hull, and gave a rousing performance that showed us how much fun an aluminum rig can be. We would have no problem running this rig in just about any conditions, in any company. Valuewise, the as-tested price of \$33,995 is a bit stiff, but in exchange you get a real high-performance rig that can run with most ‘glass hulls.



Xpress X19 “TS” LE Tournament Series

Base Price:\$18,995
Price as Tested:\$33,995
Top Speed:70.8 mph
0-to-30 mph:5.5 seconds
Construction:Welded aluminum
Console Type:Single
Length:19'
Beam:7' 11"
Hull Weight:1225 lbs.
Rigged Weight:1391 lbs.
Trailer Weight:2008 lbs.
Fuel Capacity:30 gals.
Livewell Capacity:28 gals.
Maximum Horsepower:200
Warranty: 5-year with lifetime transferable on hull and transom welds

Standard Equipment: Auto bilge pump; auto-recirculating livewell w/ pumpout; three-bank charger; insulated cooler; MotorGuide TR82 trolling motor; aluminum trailer; Lowrance X51 depthfinders in bow and dash; (3) lockable storage/tackleboxes; (2) hydraulic Pro Poles w/ butt seats; hydraulic lid arms; lighted livewell and storage boxes; hydraulic tilt steering; 6" setback manual jackplate

Optional Equipment: Trim switches on steering wheel; Hot Foot throttle; Lowrance X125 flasher; 10" setback Slidemaster jackplate; hydraulic tilt steering

Engine Tested:Evinrude E-Tec 200 H.O.
Horsepower:200
Type:V-6 DFI 2-stroke
Displacement:3.3L (200 cid)
Weight (published):509 lbs.
Recommended WOT RPM:4500-5800
Gear Ratio:1.86:1
Propeller:141/2x28" BRP Raker II
Jackplate:Slidemaster manual 10" setback
Propshaft height (to pad):2" below pad

TEST RESULTS

Engine (rpm)	Speed (mph)	Fuel (gph)	MPG (mpg)	Range ¹ (miles)
1000	5.7	0.9	6.5	177
1500	7.5	3.2	2.3	63
2000	15.4	4.9	3.2	86
2500²	29.7	6.0	5.0	134
3000	36.3	7.9	4.6	125
3500	43.6	9.8	4.5	120
4000	52.3	12.3	4.3	115
4500	62.7	16.3	3.8	104
5000	68.9	18.8	3.7	99
5250 (WOT)	70.8	19.2	3.7	100

¹ Based on 90% fuel capacity
² Optimum cruise speed

Xpress Boats

Dept. BWB
 199 Extrusion Place
 Hot Springs, AR 71901
 501/262-5300
 xpressboats.com



Triton V197 Magnum DC

Base Price:	\$31,854
Price as Tested:	\$33,354
Top Speed:	65.5 mph
0-to-30 mph:	5.3 seconds
Construction:	Welded aluminum
Console Type:	Dual
Length:	19' 4"
Beam:	7' 6 1/2"
Hull Weight:	1430 lbs.
Rigged Weight:	1927 lbs.
Trailered Weight:	2637 lbs.
Fuel Capacity:	44 gals.
Livewell Capacity:	26 gals.
Maximum Horsepower:	200
Warranty:	5-year transferable hull w/ 10-year transferable (\$100 fee) on hull and transom welds

Standard Equipment: Bow storage box; bow tackle-tray storage; fire extinguisher; modular consoles; divided aerated livewell; bilge pump; 8-gauge trolling-motor wiring harness; MotorGuide 24-volt FW71 trolling motor; Lowrance depthfinder; rod box; (2) rear tackle organizers; (8) Plano 3700 tackle trays; cooler box step; recirculating livewell w/ pumpout; trailer w/ disc brakes

Optional Equipment: Mercury 200 OptiMax; dual-axle, color-matched trailer w/ disc brakes

Engine Tested:	Mercury OptiMax 200
Horsepower:	200
Type:	V-6 DFI 2-stroke
Displacement:	3.0L (185.9 cid)
Weight (published):	497 lbs.
Recommended WOT RPM:	5000-5750
Gear Ratio:	1.75:1
Propeller:	14 1/2x25" Tempest Plus 3-blade
Jackplate:	Pro Hi-Jacker manual, 6" setback
Propshaft height (to pad):	3 1/4" below pad

TEST RESULTS

Engine (rpm)	Speed (mph)	Fuel (gph)	MPG (mpg)	Range ¹ (miles)
1000	5.7	1.0	5.6	222
1500	7.5	2.6	2.9	115
2000	9.9	4.0	2.5	97
2500	28.4	5.1	5.6	223
3000	32.9	5.6	5.8	231
3500²	39.6	6.8	5.9	232
4000	45.0	9.9	4.6	180
4500	51.0	12.6	4.0	160
5000	58.3	12.8	4.6	181
5470 (WOT)	65.5	17.7	3.7	146

¹ Based on 90% fuel capacity
² Optimum cruise speed

Triton Boats
 Dept. BWB
 15 Bluegrass Drive
 Ashland City, TN 37015
 615/792-6767
 tritonboats.com

TOP-RATE TRITON

This Triton is a genuine, all-around solid boat. It wasn't the fastest, despite having a Mercury 200 OptiMax for power (we hit a best of 65.5 mph at 5470 rpm while turning a 25-inch-pitch Tempest propeller). Setup probably hurt the Triton's top speed somewhat. This boat's awesome 0-to-30 mph holeshot (5.3 seconds, good for second place) was due to conservative engine height and propping. The Merc was positioned on the 6-inch setback Pro Hi-Jacker manual plate with its propshaft a full 3 1/4-inches below the Triton's pad. With a taller blade and elevated engine height, the Triton would have challenged the Xpress/Evinrude for top-speed honors without giving up much in the punch department.

It didn't have the best fuel economy, either; it barely bested the E-Tec 200 H.O. for fourth place with an average 4.5 mpg and best cruise of 5.8 mpg at 3000 rpm and 32.9 mph. So if the numbers don't make it a winner, what does?

This is a clear-cut case of ride quality, fit and finish, attention to detail, construction quality and deck layout contributing to this rig's excellent overall rating. This was the only rig fitted with a foot throttle and Teleflex Pro Trim controls, and they were nice to have. Out on the water, the Triton's ride bested all the other similar-designs (Polar, Xpress and Lowe), as it was butter-smooth and desert-dry, even in the rough. In the calm water, the conservative setup helped to provide a porpoise-free romp up

to its 65 mph top end. The rig exhibited no chinewalk or oscillation at speed. Turning at any speed was smooth and predictable. At rest, the Triton was very stable no matter where we put our weight on the deck.

At the dock, we checked the Triton over from top to bottom. It passed muster easily. Rigging detail under the dash was truly excellent, while at the stern, we did notice a few loose wires and hoses — not bad, but it could have been better. Other than that, very few flaws were evident. For example, a smidgen of carpet glue was smeared on the side of the console and a few of the carpet seams were not glued down properly. However, these were minor details that could have been easily fixed by a good dealer or through better quality control at the plant. There were no sharp edges to catch unsuspecting anglers, and the seats were very comfortable with excellent vinyl and stitch quality.

The construction of this hull was really top shelf, and it showed when we were out on the water. No flex was evident whatsoever, and the hull responded to cross waves and rough stuff with a resounding, solid "thump-thump-thump." The transom is anchored to the hull and stringers with five massive knee braces, and the rubrail was substantial and solid.

Little niceties abounded on this Triton. We listened to the great-sounding radio/CD player after testing was done, and were impressed to see the assortment of storage compartments located in and around the fore and aft decks. A great little cooler sits between the consoles. Tackle storage was best-of-test, with no less than 13 tackle-tray storage areas. The dash was very well laid out and detailed with soft-touch switches. Overall, for \$33,354, this Triton provides a very strong value.



■ *With all its gauges easily visible and with an overall feel of a much higher-priced rig, Triton's V197 had perhaps the nicest dash of the boats tested. Storage was the best of the bunch. This boat was clearly laid out for the professional angler. It lost some top end due to a conservative setup, but that also made handling very sweet and easy.*





■ *Tracker clearly makes a standout boat in its Avalanche. Its stretch-formed aluminum hull is very tough to beat for overall looks, quality and utility. While others claim to look like 'glass hulls, the Tracker is the only one that truly does. Storage space was rated near the top of our pile, and performance — while not the fastest or the quickest — was very smooth and pleasing.*



TRACKING AT THE TOP

At the ramp, the Tracker is the closest thing to fiberglass that an aluminum hull can be. Its very unique, stretch-formed and welded hull gives it a smooth, highly finished look that really rivals the best fiberglass hulls. Unless you look closely, it's difficult to tell that it's aluminum.

Designwise, the Tracker Avalanche is a cross between a multispecies fishing boat, a bass boat and a runabout, making it very versatile for a family angler. It isn't the fastest, it isn't the stingiest with fuel and it isn't the quickest. However, its ride, overall utility, attention to detail and quality are top-notch.

With a conventional (nonpad) hull and heavier weight, the Avalanche will never be the fastest boat on the lake. However, with a Mercury 150 OptiMax, we hit a solid, very controllable 60.4 mph at 5340 rpm turning a 23-inch-pitch Mercury Tempest propeller. We clocked 0-to-30 mph acceleration at 6.4 seconds, slowest of the test — but keep in mind that in our history of bass-boat tests, 6.4 seconds is a strong time indeed. Under 6 seconds is truly excellent, 6 to 7 is very good, and over 7 is pretty sluggish. The Tracker's time is quite acceptable.

Handling and stability at rest and at speed were the best of this test. The Avalanche simply does what you want it to do, when you want to do it. Turns can be carved with ultimate precision without fear of spinouts or skips at almost any speed short of WOT. Rough-water ride was stellar, and we stayed completely dry despite the whitecaps on the main lake. The only drawback to handling can be attributed to the standard dual-cable, rack-and-pinion steering, which provided lots of torque feed-

back at the helm. We'd spend the bucks for the optional Teleflex SeaStar Pro hydraulic setup. On this boat, it should be standard. At least the steering wheel provided a nice, thick, solid grip. At rest, the Avalanche's wide-body hull really helps keep it even keeled when two anglers are standing on the same gunwale.

Inspectionwise, we were really pleased with the Tracker. The rigging under the dash and at the stern is the way rigging on all boats should be — clean, purposeful and tight. The gauges were the most accurate we've seen in a while. Although they placed driver and passengers a bit "high" in the boat, the seats were very comfortable. Storage compartments rated well in terms of number and capacity. Construction was nothing short of excellent; weld seams were nearly invisible in most cases, and what we could see was sturdy and well executed. The lids for the livewells and storage compartments featured excellent gusseting and did not flex. There was no rod storage retrieval system for the rod locker (it's optional). Overall, we found very little to squawk at; a few loose carpet edges, a few poorly cut carpet corners and the driver's drink holder placed a bit out of reach. In the overall scheme, however, these are minor annoyances. For the as-tested price of \$26,865, this Avalanche is truly a bargain performer.



Tracker Avalanche SC

Base Price:	\$20,295
Price as Tested:	\$26,865
Top Speed:	60.4 mph
0-to-30 mph:	6.4 seconds
Construction:	Formed/welded aluminum
Console Type:	Single
Length:	18' 2"
Beam:	8'
Hull Weight:	1505 lbs.
Rigged Weight:	1936 lbs.
Trailer Weight:	2706 lbs.
Fuel Capacity:	40 gals.
Livewell Capacity:	45 gals.
Maximum Horsepower:	175
Warranty:	5-year structural w/ lifetime external welds (transferable within first 5 years)

Standard Equipment: Lowrance X47 flasher; color-matched trailer w/ swingaway tongue; EZ lube hubs; swivel jack; MotorGuide 24-volt trolling motor; full instrumentation; locking rod storage; bow panel w/ trim switch; 1000-gph bilge pump; courtesy lights; Interstate batteries; transom saver; (2) 500-gph recirculating livewell pumps; (2) 750-gph livewell fill pumps w/ timers; remote livewell drains

Optional Equipment: Mercury 150 OptiMax; Mercury Tempest Plus propeller

Engine Tested:	Mercury OptiMax 150
Horsepower:	150
Type:	V-6 DFI 2-stroke
Displacement:	2.5L (153.0 cid)
Weight (published):	431 lbs.
Recommended WOT RPM:	5250-5750
Gear Ratio:	1.87:1
Propeller:	14 1/2 x 23" Mercury Tempest Plus 3-blade
Jackplate:	None
Propshaft height (to pad):	2" below pad

TEST RESULTS

Engine (rpm)	Speed (mph)	Fuel (gph)	MPG (mpg)	Range ¹ (miles)
1000	5.5	0.8	7.2	258
1500	6.5	1.6	4.1	148
2000	7.3	3.1	2.4	86
2500	22.6	3.6	6.3	225
3000	32.5	4.6	7.1	254
3500²	36.5	4.9	7.5	270
4000	42.4	7.6	5.6	201
4500	48.8	10.7	4.5	164
5000	55.3	11.1	5.0	179
5340 (WOT)	60.4	13.8	4.4	158

¹ Based on 90% fuel capacity
² Optimum cruise speed

Tracker Boats
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AND THE WINNER IS...

Overall, if we were to choose a boat from this roundup as our own, we'd choose the Tracker. As noted, its all-around versatility, excellent fit and finish, looks, overall quality, modest price and good speed and handling makes it the best overall package. We'd jump the power up to the max-rated 175, however, to get top speed above 65 mph.

The Xpress clearly won the "Fastest" and "Best Overall Ride" titles, and was right up near the top in many other measures including rough-water ride, stability at rest, handling, fit and finish, and detail and rigging. This package would be our choice if top speed were our main consideration (and it often is). We loved its look and performance, as well as the menacing snarl of the E-Tec 200 H.O. it had on its transom.

The Triton tied Xpress for second in overall ratings. With a slight improvement in setup, it would easily challenge the Tracker for top honors overall, and the Xpress for top speed. The Triton gets excellent ratings in many categories, second only to the Tracker in rigging detail, stability at rest, fit and finish, and range.

The Polar Kraft was the quietest boat we tested and second only to Lowe in optimum fuel economy. In the other measurements, it

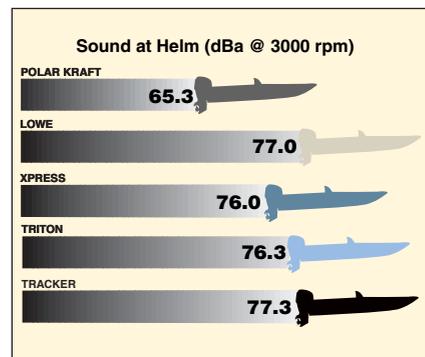
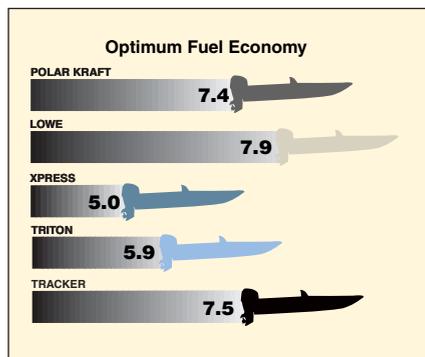
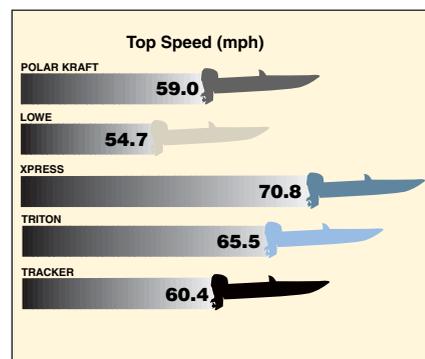
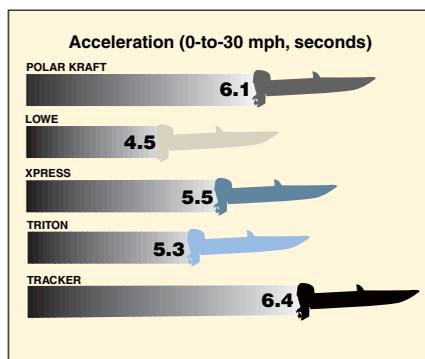
was a midpack performer. Ditto for Lowe. It took home top honors for fuel economy as well as best acceleration, but points were taken away in too many other categories for it to rank at the top of this group.

It's important to note that all these rigs were of very good to excellent quality, when rated as overall packages. Sure, all had their little flaws — some more than others — but we were impressed with these examples of today's aluminum fishing hulls. We'd love to take another similar grouping and focus on the high-end performance capabilities, just

to see where they might stack up when compared to their fiberglass counterparts. Now that's a test for future consideration. **BWB**

TEST CONDITIONS:

Air Temperature: 76.5F
Water Temperature: 80F
Wind Speed: 5 to 15 mph
Water Conditions: Slight wind chop to 12" waves



HERE'S HOW THEY FARED (POINTS TOTALS)

OBJECTIVE CATEGORIES

BOAT PACKAGE	ACCELERATION	SPEED	FUEL ECONOMY	RANGE	SOUND LEVEL	PRICE
Lowe 180W/Mercury OptiMax 150	★★★★☆	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Polar Kraft HP180 Pro/Yamaha F150	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★
Tracker Avalanche SC/Mercury OptiMax 150	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★
Triton V197/Mercury OptiMax 200	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Xpress X19/Evinrude E-Tec 200 H.O.	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★

SUBJECTIVE CATEGORIES

BOAT PACKAGE	HANDLING	FIT/FINISH	STABILITY @ REST	ROUGH-WATER RIDE	OVERALL RIDE	DETAIL & RIGGING	POINTS TOTAL
Lowe 180W/Mercury OptiMax 150	★★★	★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★	45
Polar Kraft HP180 Pro/Yamaha F150	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	46
Tracker Avalanche SC/Mercury OptiMax 150	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	52.5
Triton V197/Mercury OptiMax 200	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	50
Xpress X19/Evinrude E-Tec 200 H.O.	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	50