



## HydroStream Vegas XT/Mercury200

*High performance doesn't have to be wild and uncontrollable*

**T**o say that HydroStream boats are unusual in their appearance would be an understatement. Their distinctive styling is created by Howard Pipkorn, a long-standing maven of high performance. Pipkorn's styling treatments and bottom designs also show him to be quite a maverick, since HydroStream boats have always been unconventional rather than just an interpretation of another fast boat or a relish of existing performance products.

Unfortunately, we've not had many opportunities to experience HydroStream boats, but every time we get a chance behind the wheel we come away with a feeling of exhilaration. This Vegas XT provided the same feeling, and more.

We met HydroStream's Florida sales representative, Bill Kinney, at Lake Marie, Illinois, where he patiently sat white-knuckled in the passenger seat as we pushed his beautiful Vegas skiboat to

its high-performance limits. Bill is a self-professed speed nut and, as such, is uncomfortable as a passenger. We understand his plight though. How would you react if three relatively unknown guys who purported to be "boat testers," spent the day blasting across the lake at speeds in excess of 70 mph in your boat?

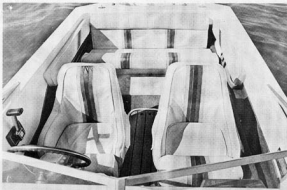
The main difference in HydroStream boats centers around the original philosophy that went into the bottom design of the Vegas. HydroStream wanted a very quick boat in the 20-foot range that practically anyone could drive fast and do so without any fiddling around. And they wanted a boat without any bad habits. Did they realize their goal? In a word, yes. Perhaps Bill's coolness, as each tester took turns making 77-mph runs on the radar gun, was actually incredible confidence in the boat, knowing full well that it could handle just about anything this group could dish out.

This Vegas just downright handled beautifully in all circumstances. It was very easy to get going to speeds approaching 80 mph and to do so without having to spend time dialing in the trim and fighting the wheel. It went over

bumps and wakes, at speed, with very little bobble or flying. Even with the engine trimmed out to the max and jacked up high on the transom, all it took to keep the horses tame was a little left-hand pressure on the wheel to counteract the surprisingly minimal torque. The boat virtually jumps up on a plane and runs fast and free on any heading and wind condition that we encountered. We've driven a bunch of very fast boats over the years but this one was by far the easiest to drive at high speeds. We recorded radar runs of 77.9 and 75.3 mph with two people in the boat and 79.4 and 78.0 mph with only one person.

We were very impressed with the way the hull worked. Like so many of the HydroStream hulls, though, it defies description. Basically, it is a twin-tunnel configuration with a flat pad section to the center hull and with several other exotic strakes, steps, setbacks and a notched transom thrown in for fun.

The topsides are not nearly as bizarre as the bottom design and not nearly as radical as some of the other models in the line. It is also one of the few boats in the HydroStream lineup that does not have a



*Interior arrangement on the Vegas features a pair of buckets and a couch across the stern. There is a ski locker in the deck.*



*Not only does the hull virtually defy description, but some of the components, like swim platform, are equally unique.*



*Vegas' helm is clean and simple. A handy console, located under the dash, houses a glove box and drink holders.*

the trim switches were not relocated to the steering wheel, a la outboard raceboats, so that the driver can always keep both hands on the wheel.

Pushing the Vegas XT is a Mercury 200-horsepower Black Max mounted to an electro-hydraulic jacking plate by Marine Engineering. The Max turns a 28-inch custom stainless chopper. Kinney uses the boat for general blasting around in the Southeast, demonstrating the boat's potential to prospective customers; but he additionally enjoys water skiing. The jacking plate lets him adjust engine height to the kind of activity called for—low on the transom for low-end pulling power or high on the transom for top-end speed.

The exterior treatment of the boat is handsome, featuring gelcoat hull graphics and stripes, a low, sweptback, framed windshield and an attractive base color on the hull. The interior treatment has matching stripes on the upholstery and contrasting carpeting.

Performance takes many forms in boating these days but we think one would be hard-pressed to find a much better way to discover the joys of speed and exhilaration on the water than this HydroStream Vegas XT. Going fast is one thing, but doing so in an easy, safe and sane manner makes the experience all the more enjoyable and an experience worth repeating. This is a boat that is forgiving, extremely spirited, very fast and one that will make virtually any driver feel at ease behind the wheel.—Jim Youngs

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metalfake gelcoat finish, although it is available as an option. The Vegas has a long needlenose foredeck and a small cockpit with seating for five in a pair of buckets and a bench seat across the stern. We appreciated the overall simplicity of the boat's interior. It has very few upholstered panels or wood and the carpeting is a simple short-pile treatment. There is a ski locker in the cockpit sole and ample storage under the foredeck. Also, there is a small console under the center of the dash that houses a glove box and a couple of drink holders.

The boat's dash is quite simple with just a minimal amount of instruments: Medallion speedometer, tachometer and fuel and water-pressure gauges. The speedo is Medallion's 90-mph model, but Kinney uses a Keller water pickup mounted on the transom, considered by many high-performance buffs as the best. For better control and safety the boat also has a foot throttle. We were somewhat surprised that

