

HYDROSTREAM

V O Y A G E R X T

Those familiar with the forward progress of outboard-powered performance boating require no introduction to the HydroStream hull series, which has cultivated a fabled reputation among hot boat enthusiasts at play on the lakes of the heartland and eastward. The HydroStream line, which dates back to the early 1970s, featured a dozen or so models ranging from 13 to 23 feet, and several thousand were sold under company founder Howard Pipcorn.

All of them were laid up by hand—most of them vees—with a number of sponson-fortified variations also surfacing. HydroStream's appeal was centered in tech-



nology, and there's no question that many of Pipcorn's bottom designs were well ahead of their time. HydroStream hulls set a sizeable number of APBA speed records, some of which remain intact after years. Consider that the pad-bottomed, Mod-VP underside of our test boat, a 20'2" Voyager, was originally tooled in 1983. Many of them still provide sound, fast

transportation, and one need look only as far as this magazine's own *Outboard Tech* column to gauge the depth of their popularity.

Pipcorn apparently fared less well where finances were concerned, and when his molds surfaced, Jim Contzen, a HydroStream rep in the 1970s, was eager to play his role in the survival of the species. He opened the second-generation HydroStream factory in 1995, opting to locate the business in performance-boating's heartland: California.

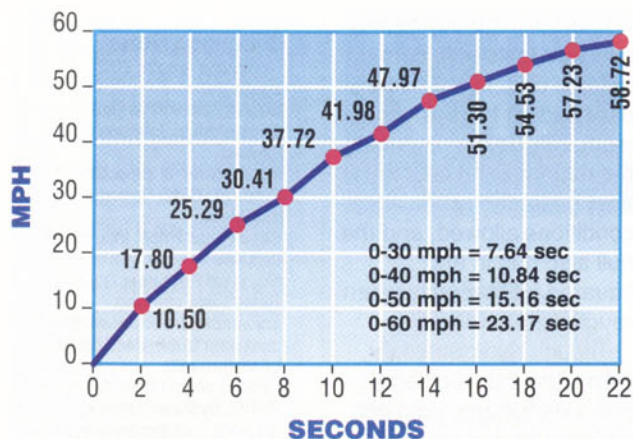
As we filtered the new-generation 20'2" Voyager XT through our test process, two questions loomed in its wake. How would the name's new care-

taker measure up in the spectre of HydroStream's old-money reputation for fast, solid transportation? More to the point: How would this admittedly dated design, tooled in 1983, fare among less-seasoned outboard-powered peers?

THE PACKAGE

Though some have been sold directly from the factory, most HydroStream hulls are rigged and sold at the dealer level. Our test copy showcased the rigging handiwork of The Outboard Motor Shop (Alameda, California)—an OMC haven that drew on every available resource in the quest for a screaming top end wrapped tightly around a reliable, turnkey and manageable





family ski package.

The Voyager evolved from HydroStream's 20-foot Venus vee-hull, which later was revised to form the "XT" version of the hull, with the addition of small outside sponsons, shallow tunnels and a moderately sized delta-pad.

The purity of that original bottom design was exploited to maximum effect with a series of performance enhancements that personify budget muscleboating. The special-edition Johnson 200 Limited outboard was pumped to a rated 225-

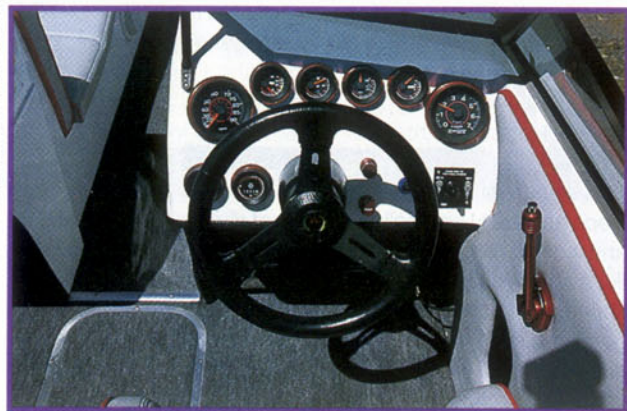
horsepower and fitted with a sleek Bob's Machine Shop lower unit (a \$299 upgrade). It spun a 27-inch OMC Renegade four blade—a wheel selected for its broad performance profile.

Teleflex hydraulic steering (a \$1,495 upgrade) massaged away wheel torque, even at speed, and our drivers raved about its strain-free handling through our cone-course maze at 60 miles an hour.

This responsive package was brought to attention with a Hot-Foot foot-throttle and was set up with a second pedal that housed the trim button. The arrangement required some adjustment of learned behavior, but those drivers on our staff inclined toward maximum available performance liked the setup, which leaves the driver's hands free to do what they were designed to do: steer the boat.

An OMC jack plate (\$795), with a spiffy, dash-mounted indicator, helped us get nice and loose on our radar passes and come reasonably close to the boat's maximum potential speed. We stopped the Stalker at a safe 72.7 mph; HydroStream claims 78 to 80—a plausible range given the benefit of a bit more seat time.

The options list on our test boat also included a center-mounted ski pylon (\$895), mounted directly behind the rear seat and OMC gauges



(HydroStream is probably the only builder in California not to offer *any* dials standard). The instruments are framed with anodized Rex bezels (\$525), and a Kenwood cassette system with a 200-watt amp and four speakers (\$650) rounded out the list of options.

Contzen and crew have taken steps to safeguard HydroStream's tradition without becoming saddled with what has become outdated production techniques. Today's 'Stream is lighter and stronger than yesteryear's, utilizing the same balsa coring but incorporating fiberglass seat bases and stringers in place of wood, reducing the potential for long-term rot. It also incorporates additional transom bracing and has a shallow ski compartment carved into its floorboard. The integration of bi- and tri-directional fiberglass into the production schedule replaces the vintage boats' straight mat and roving. That makes for a somewhat lighter, and certainly stronger, package.

The contemporary HydroStream hit the mark squarely where its glasswork was concerned. The mold has apparently survived the transition in excellent style, and the hull and bottom tooling was straight and apparently free of flaws—a benefit of utilizing original molds, as opposed to splashing a

copy and recreating the mold. HydroStream's gel-coaters made basic use of five colors, included on the base boat package. The graphics were dated by California standards, but their application was clean and competent.

HydroStream makes a significant commitment to passenger comfort by outfitting the Voyager with a nicely done interior that goes well beyond the basics that you'll find on some other outboard-powered lake rockets. The front buckets, which were anchored to a backing plate in a forever-type mount, offered decent comfort, and the rear bench gave plenty of support and depth during high-speed romps. The bow area was like that of any 20-footer: confined and best used while off power. In fact, one side of the front seats was contoured to the general shape of a reclined body—a neat wrinkle. The anodized gauge bezels and shift lever were matched to the piping on the upholstery—another neat wrinkle.

Two cup holders are standard; some things are not. Absent on the base boat were interior lighting, an ice chest and a swim step.

The driver faces a tightly arranged array of dials, some of which are blocked by the wheel (which ones depend upon your height). An anodized shift lever is conveniently mounted to the



driver's right. For some of our drivers, the positioning of the walk-through windshield frame required peering over it or ducking to see through the glass.

In any event, this five-piece assembly was solid, and it didn't give off any rattle, even in rough water at speed. Its mounting was also good and stout, as was the case with all of the hardware on the HydroStream.

Stainless bow- and stern-railing are included on the base boat, along with four deck cleats that were recessed into the hull's lines.

The Voyager's primary storage areas included a floor-mounted ski locker, which was somewhat shallow, and a hinged rear compartment. Additional storage space was eked into the gunnels and beneath the bow seating. All storage compartments were neatly carpeted, and the finish work matched the flawless execution of the rest of the interior floor covering.

PERFORMANCE

Driving the Voyager doesn't require engaging in a wrestling match across the lake, as is the case with

some hot rod outboards. Our test boat rose smoothly onto plane, suffering no bowrise in its steady ascent. It took some time for the 27-inch prop to take a firm bite, as noted in the 'Stream's somewhat sluggish 0-to-30 and 0-to-40 ETs (7.64 and 10.84 seconds). As for our 200-pound pro skier, this setup labored a bit in pulling him out of deep water. Could there be a better low-end prop available? Probably.

Once on-plane and aired out a bit, the 200 Limited picked up momentum and became a smooth, ever-ready source of easily managed power. It was a dream through the buoy course, delivering immediate and crisp response to wheel and trim commands. Its ride was soft, comfortable and stable, and it was easy for the driver to maintain control at all times.

The Voyager's bottom skated over moderately rough chop, and our dri-

ving team made repeated notes as to its soft, comfortable ride. It seemed to easily adapt to its environment; raising the plate set the ride free and got the boat good and loose when conditions allowed, and the hull also dug in and squared off favorably when rough water arose.

Though HydroStream claims that the four blade was their "ski prop" and not intended for top-end consumption, this boat only really began to dance after it was nudged through the midrange. At 4,000 rpm, it cruised along at 40-plus, and the intervention of more throttle only improved its ride and handling. Trimmed out, the HydroStream is a picture of efficiency, balanced securely on its pad, screaming across the water at 70-plus miles an hour, with no trace of chine-walk or porpoise. Aboard, the ride is safe, steady and predictable. When overtrimmed, the Voyager offers plenty of notice before the ride begins to go awry. Those who heed the warning signs and make prudent use of its loose, free ride are assured of the same safe, predictable perfor-



SPECIFICATIONS

Centerline length: 20'2"
Beam: 89"
Bottom: Mod-VP w/pad
Engine/drive: Johnson 200 Limited
Horsepower @ prop: 225
Prop: 27" OMC Renegade four blade
Base Retail Price, incl. trailer: \$23,485
Standard Features: Dual Ride-Guide steering, adjustable driver/passenger seat, rear trunk, deck cleats, bow/stern rails
Options on test boat: Ski pylon (\$895), hydraulic steering (\$1,495), foot-throttle w/trim buttons (\$150), OMC jack plate w/gauge (\$525), Kenwood stereo w/amp (\$650)
Price as tested: \$27,995

Performance

Top speed, radar: 72.7 mph
Builder's estimated top speed in optimum conditions: 78 mph
Maximum rpm: 6,000
0-30 mph: 7.64 seconds
0-40 mph: 10.84 seconds
0-50 mph: 15.16 seconds
0-60 mph: 23.17 seconds
Speed at 3,000 rpm: 28.5 mph
Speed at 4,000 rpm: 41.5 mph
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mance that has been a benchmark of the brand since its inception.

The OMC 200 proved a very worthwhile powering package for this hull, doling out smooth, easy maneuverability at all speeds. It shifted seamlessly and maneuvered easily around the docks, backing effortlessly. There was the normal outboard fumes at sustained, low rpm.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Pipcorn created somewhat of a cult following with his line of fast, efficient, predictable outboard boats, and the new regime has implemented technology that only intensifies the appeal. Today's HydroStream is well-built and highly detailed and, in the hands of an accomplished rigging crew, still a formidable entity on the lake. Our sample Voyager (\$27,995 out the door) was less a revival or nostalgic indulgence than a new chapter of a great hot-boating story. ■