

## Pontoon Triplets—Honda, Mercury & Yamaha

There is just something about the sunrise over Lake Wawasee in Indiana that lures me out of the comforts of my bed at 4:30 in the morning, just so I can catch a glimpse. The orange, red and yellow colors alone clearly outweigh any enjoyment a few extra hours of sleep might get me.

On the morning I was set to test three identical Harris FloteBote pontoons with three different outboard engines, as a photographer I envisioned what it would look like to see these boats dancing in the early morning light. It meant that I'd have to talk the engine reps, photographer, drivers and the manufacturers into getting out of bed and getting to Lake Wawasee early, but I really sold them on how beautiful this sunrise was going to be.

As I started making my way to the lake to meet everyone, a sudden panic came over me as I noticed a little fog in the area as I got closer to Syracuse. For being July, I was more than just surprised by what I was seeing, but I continued to cling to the hope that surely it would just blow over.

You know that look you get when you show up to a boat test at 5 a.m. and the fog is so thick that you can't see 20 feet in front of you and you realize that you've all wasted a chance to sleep in? Well, I know that look because I was feeling it from the crew.

A few optimists in the group like photographer Jeff Isom had my back as we talked about how great it would look when the fog burned off. So through that thick fog we slowly crept out into the lake to get into position so we'd be ready. After about 30 or so minutes it was obvious that this fog was going nowhere. We docked at the Oakwood Inn to wait the craziness out from the shore as the fog appeared to actually be getting worse.

The next thing I know we're all sitting down to brunch at 10 a.m. at the Oakwood Inn with a perfect window seat of a fogged-over lake. The good news is that we finally did get a chance to do our test, even if the day was off to a rough start.

### The Boats

**Harris FloteBote headquarters are just down the road in Fort Wayne, Ind., and talk began a few months earlier about the possibility of testing three 225-horsepower engines on its pontoon boats. As power and performance continue to become more and more common in the pontoon segment of the boating industry, the 225hp outboard seemed like a good fit for what some consumers might be looking for.**

**The boat selected for the test was the brand new 2009 Harris FloteBote Grand Mariner 240. This is just one of the many new pontoon models for this manufacturer. All three boats were nearly identical, but each had different options including the Mercury version of the Grand Mariner 240 that included an entertainment center, complete with a stainless steel refrigerator, storage drawers and accent lighting—including lighted cup holders, rope lighting and a lighted rubrail—that actually looked really neat in that early morning fog (not that I'm a glass-half-full kind of guy or anything).**

### The Results

Honda did what Honda engines do best: it sipped fuel at our test. We were only able to compare fuel numbers with the Mercury Verado since an official Yamaha technician wasn't available for our test. There was nearly a mile per gallon difference at a cruising RPM of 3000 between the two engines in Honda's favor and at full throttle there was over a four mile per gallon difference. So the advantage on fuel, without having the Yamaha numbers to compare, goes to Honda. The secret for Honda is its Lean Burn Feedback Control that utilizes a linear air-fuel sensor, along with the engine command module, to automatically adjust the air-fuel mix according to speed and load—maximizing power throughout the rpm range and providing 20 percent greater fuel economy in the cruise mode from 2000 to 4500 rpm.

All engines had an impressive start, but for our zero to 20 miles per hour test, the Yamaha had a slight advantage with its average time of 4.71 seconds, followed closely by Mercury with its 4.95 time. The Honda's zero to 20 time was 5.27 seconds, giving Yamaha the advantage.

It's Yamaha's variable camshaft timing on the new F225 that makes the difference. The ECM (Engine Control Module) varies camshaft timing based on engine rpms, maximizing intake and exhaust efficiency. The result? Optimal combustion, greater volumetric efficiency and a full 16 percent gain in torque in the 2000-3500 rpm range, where you really need it.

### Full Throttle

It's all about the top-end speed, right? At least that's the first number the engine reps were looking for when I'd return back to the docks after completing each test. It's not fair to give the advantage of one outboard over another when two of them basically finished with near identical numbers. Honda hit a top speed of 43.7 miles per hour, while Mercury at full throttle came in at 43.5 miles per hour. So in this case, with Harris FloteBote rep Mike Neher driving all three boats, it's fair to say these two engines are very similar when comparing top-end speed. Yamaha finished with a close 42.2 mark, just 1.5 mph shy of Honda.

As far as noise level, all three engines were very consistent, although the DB-A sound meter reading for the Mercury Verado at idle is worth noting. Mercury engineers have gone to the extra effort to make sure its engines run as quiet as possible. Mercury calls it the Advanced MidSection and it uses perimeter mounts, which surround the powerhead to improve the vibration isolation from the boat.

The final part of the evaluation is something that can't be backed by numbers and that's the feel of the controls. Harris FloteBote builds a great pontoon, but it's amazing how each one handled a little bit differently. With the SmartCraft digital throttle and shift on the Verado you can feel a huge difference, which makes working the controls very easy. And as far as effortless steering, this system goes beyond traditional hydraulic systems by incorporating an electric pump to pressurize the steering system. This eliminates undesirable steering torque, which can lead to fatigue compared to cable control systems. With this fingertip-like steering, the advantage is in Mercury's favor on this one.

### Conclusion

I went into this test hoping there would be some dramatic findings that would come from running three different engines on three identical pontoons. I didn't know which engine would do the best, but I figured one would dominate and stand out compared to the others and that would make for a great story. If only it were that simple.

Each did well and no engine dominated the test. All three engine manufacturers build a dependable product so you can feel comfortable with your decision. Fuel, power, ease of steering, etc.—it really comes down to what is most important to you. The numbers don't lie, these are three great engines. I feel I've proved that you really can't go wrong with either one of these 225hp engines when it comes to finding a successful high power pontoon engine. For more information on the Harris FloteBote line call 260-432-4555 or visit [www.harriskayot.com](http://www.harriskayot.com).

