

# Raising the Decks

STORY BY JOHN TIGER, JR.  
PHOTOS BY MIKE FULLER

WITH MERCURY RACING'S OPTIMAX  
300XS FOR POWER, BULLET'S NEW 21XRD  
IS LONG ON SPEED AND EASY ON FUEL



**W**hen Paul Nichols stepped out of the tow vehicle and shook my hand at the John's Lake public ramp, it was a clear sign that the Bullet folks came to play hardball at our Florida test site. After all, this was their latest hull, equipped with one of Mercury's biggest outboards, set up and ready to be driven by Nichols, who has long been regarded as a Bullet ace. The Bullet 21XRD rig he backed into the calm central Florida waters was a tried-and-true hull mated to a new, slightly raised deck, with a re-positioned cockpit for better balance, handling and fishability.

### THEY CAME TO PLAY

Nichols, as usual, didn't bother with his setup once he arrived for the test. He backed the XRD off the trailer and fired up the big Mercury 300XS. I jumped in, zipped up my Lifeline vest, and held on as Paul blistered the straightaways on John's Lake to the tune of 101.4 mph on radar and GPS. Bullet fans might recall that we ran a similar combo in March 2007 ("Big, Bad and Beautiful") while testing the Mercury 300XS (with a different deck, driver and propeller), and saw only 96.1 mph. The extra 5 mph, I'm sure, comes from seat time and setup.

The 100-plus top end came easily, though John's Lake doesn't offer quite the length to really stretch this rig. With longer runs, another mile or two of speed is easy to imagine. When rigged with the 300XS, Bullet's 21-footer is an intriguing combination. It has ferociously aggressive acceleration, stout top speed, yet it isn't difficult to drive nor does it burn a lot of fuel—even when leaning hard on the foot throttle.

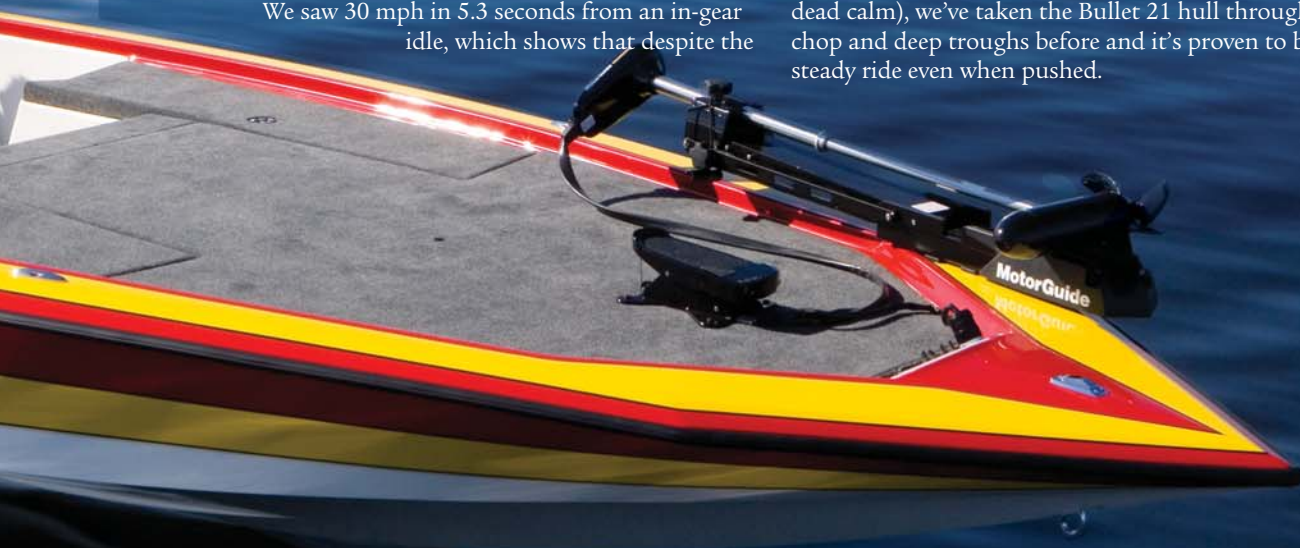
We saw 30 mph in 5.3 seconds from an in-gear idle, which shows that despite the

steep 32-inch-pitch prop bolted to its propshaft, and the tall 1.62:1 gear ratio installed in the Sport Master lower unit, the big XS has plenty of low-end torque to launch the long Bullet onto plane in a hurry. The quickness also comes from the Bullet's long keel and wide pad, which helps the rig lay down flat and scoot after it climbs over the hump and out of the hole.

Midrange cruise romps are also quick; from 40 mph we punched up to 60 in a cat-quick 4.4 seconds. Again, considering the tall prop and gears, and the fact that this is not a race-weight boat, these are strong numbers.

If the speed and acceleration results aren't convincing enough, the mileage numbers are sure to cause many to take a second or third look. At a barely turning 2500 rpm and 29.7 mph, we recorded a stingy 4.4 gph—which computes to 6.7 mpg. When we dropped the hammer a little and brought the engine to 4000 rpm (almost 60 mph), we still only burned 12 gph, which is 5 mpg. Mercury's 300XS is remarkable when you consider the power and torque it puts out, and its ability to carry a hull like the Bullet so far on a gallon of fuel.

Like all the other Bullets we've tested, the XRD handles like a slot car, although its longer keel and heavier engine are evident in tight turns and hard-over maneuvers. I think, for the immediate future, we're just going to have to face the fact that outboards are going to remain a bit heavier and bulkier than their predecessors of a half-decade ago, and that boat handling will tend to suffer slightly as a result. Though we didn't have any rough stuff to pound through (throughout the test, the lake surface remained dead calm), we've taken the Bullet 21 hull through stiff chop and deep troughs before and it's proven to be a good, steady ride even when pushed.





### WHAT'S NEW

For the XRD, Bullet tooled a new deck for its 21-foot, 10-inch hull. The new deck features fore and aft casting platforms that have been raised 2 inches for easier angling and maneuvering around the decks when fishing. The driver's console has also been raised 2 inches, and moved forward 2 inches to accommodate larger drivers

and give more room under and around the steering station.

The rest of the boat is the same as the 21XD, with the same rod and storage boxes, as well as the same livewells and stern access hatch. The dash layout is also the same, featuring the Bullet race-inspired instrument layout and high-performance swept-back console.

To create more driving room on the 21XRD, compared to previous models, Bullet engineers raised the console a couple of inches.

Our test boat featured a non-metalflake, four-color gel finish, which is out of character for Bullet and the rest of the bass boat industry. Its sleek lines have no need of metalflake panels or stripes to set it off, however, and the resulting multi-color gel scheme is clean and tidy. According to Nichols, it also saves about 50 pounds from the layout, because the solid gel is much lighter than a flake/clearcoat combination.

The gel lines were straight and clean, with no overspray, jagged edges or other evident flaws. Ditto for the beefy, black vinyl rubrail assembly. It was installed with no dips or sags, and without any globs of silicone underneath. The leather-look gelcoat finish on the interior surfaces is a nice touch that's done in the mold. Ditto for the new recessed trolling motor pedal housing. That's an in-mold option.

Bullets are built with wood reinforcement (transom, formers,





**Above:** Though not included with our test boat, a recessed well for the trolling motor foot throttle is an option.

**Left:** The single console leaves plenty of room for rod storage, with lockers located to port and starboard.

stringer and floor) encapsulated with hand-laid fiberglass and Kevlar to keep moisture out. The under-deck surfaces are gelled with a splatter-coat finish.

## SERIOUS LAYOUT

This Bullet is a true high performance hull and a serious fishing platform. The forward casting deck is spacious and uncluttered. In fact, the 21XRD raised deck extends back into the cockpit 10 inches farther than the 21XD's deck. That makes the forward casting platform positively huge, without taking away from the aft platform. Ours was a single console model, so the portside rod box is longer than the one to starboard. The center step up also opens wide to reveal a large under-deck carpeted storage locker.

The cockpit is all business. A foot throttle resides under the single driver's console, and Teleflex SeaStar Pro hydraulic steering and trim controls help keep the Mercury outboard in line. The cushion-grip custom steering wheel feels thick and solid. There's little in the way of wind protection for the driver, and absolutely none for the passenger, so this is, without a doubt, a purist's rig.

While 100-mph winds buffet your face, at least you'll be comfortable and held fast in the twin bucket seats. They're the right height, are body-contoured and do a great job of creating a secure feeling, even at speed. Between the buckets is a built-in insulated cooler, capped off by a centered padded seat for the

occasional third person.

Behind the cockpit is a double-door 30-gallon livewell, with dry storage lockers to either side. Finally, the aft lid opens forward to allow access to the oil reservoir, batteries, charger and livewell/bilge pumps.

The rigging is neat and clean, and executed better than most. Ditto for the under dash work—Bullet's rigging department does a nice job.

## SPEED ON A BUDGET

Despite the custom nature of this package and its extreme performance capabilities, the 21XRD's price is reasonable. Out the door, this rig is just more than \$50K, even equipped with a custom Boatmate tandem-axle trailer with surge brakes, stainless-steel fenders and swingaway tongue.

The standard equipment list is extensive; it includes custom touches such as a 14-inch setback manual Rapid Jack jackplate, four-color gelcoat, pop-up cleats, Mercury SmartCraft instrumentation, and that high-zoot lightning Pro ET four-blade lab-finished propeller.

The 300XS is the perfect complement to this hull. The as-rigged package has no trouble handling the brutish outboard, and actually begs for more as the throttle is applied. Those with a need to run the table should take a close look at this combo. It's one of the best performance buys available. **BWB**

*John Tiger, Jr., is Senior Technical Field Editor and a key freelance contributor to BWB magazine.*

## Bullet 21XRD

<b>Base Price:</b>	<b>\$51,900</b>
<b>Price As Tested:</b>	<b>\$51,900</b>
<b>Top Speed:</b>	<b>101.4 mph</b>
<b>0-to-30 mph:</b>	<b>4.9 seconds</b>
<b>Construction:</b>	Fiberglass composites, balsa and wood coring
<b>Console Type:</b>	Single side
<b>Length:</b>	20' 10"
<b>Beam:</b>	7' 7"
<b>Hull Weight:</b>	1285 lbs.
<b>Rigged Weight:</b>	2180 lbs.
<b>Trailer Weight:</b>	3260 lbs.
<b>Fuel Capacity:</b>	36 gals.
<b>Livewell Capacity:</b>	30 gals.
<b>Maximum Horsepower:</b>	Unlimited

**Standard Equipment as Tested:** Teleflex SeaStar Pro hydraulic steering, deluxe dash package with Mercury SmartCraft, removable running lights, tackle storage system, foot throttle and column tilt/trim controls

<b>Engine Tested:</b>	Mercury 300XS OptiMax
<b>Type:</b>	V-6 2-stroke DFI
<b>Displacement:</b>	3.2L (193 cid)
<b>Weight (per mfg.):</b>	505 lbs.
<b>Recommended WOT RPM:</b>	5400-6000
<b>Gear Ratio:</b>	1.62:1
<b>Propeller:</b>	14 $\frac{1}{2}$ x32" Mercury Racing Lightning Pro ET Plus four-blade over-hub round-ear (lab finished)
<b>Jackplate:</b>	Rapid Jack manual
<b>Setback:</b>	14"

## WEATHER CONDITIONS:

<b>Air Temperature:</b>	60.7F
<b>Water Temperature:</b>	68F
<b>Wind:</b>	Mild
<b>Water Conditions:</b>	Calm

## TEST RESULTS

Engine (rpm)	Speed (mph)	Fuel (gph)	Fuel (mpg)	Range <sup>1</sup> (miles)
1000	5.2	1.7	3.1	99
1500	6.4	2.9	2.2	72
2000	9.9	4.1	2.4	78
<b>2500<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>220</b>
3000	40.1	6.9	5.8	188
3500	49.4	9.7	5.1	165
4000	59.7	11.9	5.0	162
4500	67.8	14.9	4.6	149
5000	78.5	16.4	4.8	156
5500	87.6	20.2	4.3	139
6000	96.5	24.5	3.9	126
6250(WOT)	101.4	26.1	3.9	126

<sup>1</sup> Based on 90% fuel capacity

<sup>2</sup> Optimum cruise speed

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