

tested Starcraft Limited 226 RE CR



photos by Dillon Donnelly

Evolution's Excellence

Starcraft Limited 226 RE CR

BY ALAN JONES

In the Darwinian view of evolution, only the strong survive and this theory couldn't be more appropriate for boat companies. A boat brand such as Starcraft must be doing something right to be in business for more than 100 years. One thing is clear; after testing the Limited 226 RE CR pontoon, the company must have lasted this long by listening to what customers want.

Unique Factor

As is the case with most pontoon boats, how you equip it shows its

personality. The feature that best sets the Limited 226 RE CR apart from the crowd is the optional sidewalk bistro-style umbrella for the bow table. When furled in its cover, the tall market umbrella looks like a sailboat mast, but when deployed it casts a wide swath of shade, and it is a budget-friendlier alternative than a second Bimini top.

The Starcraft 226's main distinguishing feature in the cockpit is the classy tuck and roll style of upholstery that's delightfully free of the decorative piping that can be annoying to sit on. Another stylish feature is the 1-inch powder-coated rails

with gates that are through-bolted and fasten securely for safety and no rattling. Also of note is the huge flip-up changing room (the CR in the boat model's name), which is a vast improvement over older 226 models that had phone booth-sized rooms.

Performance

Our test boat is set up for leisurely luxury cruising and is powered by Mercury's 90 EFI FourStroke, an in-line four-cylinder dual overhead cam outboard that delivers quiet, fuel-efficient power. It features a bore and stroke of 82 mm x 82 mm, which is called a "square" engine in gearhead

parlance. This is notable, because one of the traits of this configuration is typically a very linear power curve with good low-end torque as demonstrated in our performance tests. We got out of the hole with very little bowrise and accelerated smoothly to plane in 5.8 seconds. At 3000 rpm we were on plane at 14.6 mph, which proved to be the optimum cruising velocity and registered only 74 dBA on the sound meter. Top speed was 22.8 mph, which is pretty consistent for a two-tube setup with 25-inch-diameter logs.

Although the Mercury FourStroke 90 is designed to reach 5000-6000 rpm, we seemed to be over-propped, because the Mercury reached a lower than normal 4800 rpm at full throttle. If we were carrying the maximum load of 12 people, we would probably be lugging out of the hole and straining the engine. With this modest power, the 226 can handle inflatable

towing duties just fine, but those wanting to go skiing should opt for the max power of 150 hp and three-tube performance package option that also gives you lifting strakes and an aluminum under-skin for better hydrodynamics.

Handling

The standard Teleflex single-cable 4.2 system didn't allow the driver to easily steer the Limited 226 – especially if the kids want to play crack the whip as they are being towed on an inflatable. For better steering, upgrade to the Bay Star hydraulic system, unless you are going for a full, upper body workout.

Otherwise, the driver has a cushy setup with an extra-wide captain's bucket seat that swivels, has a pair of flip-up armrests and features the EZ Slide adjuster.

Cornering with the two-tube

setup is typical with some lean to the outside in hard turns. Full-length keels help keep the Limited 226 tracking on the intended line and but for a slight list to port at idle, it runs very level.

Recommended Setup

If you are just interested in leisurely cruising, the two-tube setup with the Mercury EFI 90 FourStroke is fine, but for those who stay with the twin-tube configuration, a better option would be the 115 FourStroke, which weighs the same as the 90 at 399 pounds. For those who would like the flexibility of more speed for activities such as skiing, going with the three-tube performance package and upgrading to the supercharged 150 hp Verado FourStroke would be the way to go. You could save some money by choosing the OptiMax 150, which is louder than the Verado, but because it resides behind the large padded stern sunpad, it would be hushed up reasonably well.

You can option up the Limited 226 with some passenger comfort features such as the aforementioned bow market umbrella and movable cupholder/armrest, while bumping up the entertainment quotient with a rail-mounted grill and an upgraded JBL satellite-ready stereo system.

Best Uses

The Starcraft Limited 226 RE CR is the perfect model for those who are heavily into comfort whether cruising or at rest. Swimmers and skiers will love the large rear boarding ladder that features swimming pool-style grabrails to hoist them up. An optional ski tow rail is a must, and with the three-tube option there's an extra-large center locker for ski storage. Those who fish would probably be better served by Starcraft's Starfish Series that features fishing seats in the bow and an optional package that includes a trolling motor and a fishfinder.

STARCRAFT LIMITED 226 RE CR

Length	22 ft., 3 in.				
Beam	8 ft., 6 in.				
Capacity	12 people/1,700 lbs.				
Dry Weight	2,315 lbs.				
Fuel Capacity	30 gals.				

PERFORMANCE

	mph	rpm	mpg	miles	dBa
Peak	22.8	4800	3.8	103	83
Cruise	14.6	3000	5.3	143	74
Time to Plane	5.8 seconds				
Time to 30 mph	N/A				

POWER

Test	Mercury 90 EFI FourStroke				
Max hp	150				
Cylinders	I-4				
Displacement	1732 cc (105.7 cid)				
Weight	399 lbs.				
WOT Range	5000-6000 rpm				
Base Price (w/Mercury 90 EFI FourStroke)	N/A				

VALUE-ADDED STANDARD FEATURES

Flip-up changing room, rear entrance w/boarding ladder, Bimini top w/push-button release

MUST-HAVE OPTIONS

Hydraulic steering, third-tube option w/under-skin, upgraded JBL MP3 satellite-ready stereo.

BUILDER

StarCraft Marine
(866) 772-4538; www.starcraftmarine.com



FINANCING:

See your local dealer for finance options.

tested Starcraft Limited 226 RE CR



Everything on the Limited 226 RE CR is geared for a comfortable cruising day.

IN BRIEF: FEATURES

- 1 Extra-wide swiveling captain's bucket seat with EZ Slide Adjuster
- 2 Hydraulic steering, upgraded JBL MP3 satellite-ready stereo

- 3 Huge flip-up changing room, larger than previous models
- 4 Plenty of storage for tow gear or fishing gear.
- 5 Classy tuck and roll style upholstery **BW**

