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# POWER BROKERS

ONLY THE STRONGEST INDEPENDENT BUILDERS REMAIN IN THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE MARINE ENGINE GAME. FOR CHOICES FROM NEW POWER TO REBUILDS, HERE ARE FIVE OUTFITS YOU CAN COUNT ON. words Eric Colby

**N**o segment of the high-performance powerboat world got hit harder by the recession of 2008 and the tough years that followed than independent—or regional—performance-boat engine builders. Not only did the number of people buying boats dwindle, but a lot of buyers avoided higher-horsepower, thirstier engines and bigger,

more expensive drives and accessories.

If there was a silver lining, it's that the shops that built lower-quality products and provided sub-par service were weeded out. While there are fewer companies today, those that remain have carved out a collective reputation for building reliable, powerful engines and for providing attentive service

after the sale.

Some stayed afloat by developing new products while others focused on offering rebuild/upgrade packages for existing engines, including models originally built by Mercury Racing, which still dominates the performance-boat engine market. What follows is a closer look at some remaining prime-time players.



### GOODWIN COMPETITION

With an extensive history and a collection of championships in other motorsports, Goodwin Competition knows how to build serious horsepower. When it comes to marine applications, the Omro, Wis., company has developed a reputation for high-output, exotic engines, most notably Bill Pyburn's Skater 388, *Pure Platinum*.

"We build the upper echelon exotic products," said company president Todd Goodwin. "We build the stuff at power levels that nobody else really builds."

After being impressed with the power produced by Pyburn's 650-cid, 1,850-hp motors, veteran boater David Branton decided to order a pair for his Platinum Edition Skater 388. Pyburn will oversee the rigging on the boat for Branton.

Since Goodwin Competition basically builds its motors from scratch, it calls on a long and storied history in a number of motorsports disciplines. The company has built engines for champions in drag racing, circle track cars, Pro 2 and Pro 4



This 1,850-hp Goodwin Competition engine is one of two 650-cubic-inch power plants that help propel the stunning *Pure Platinum Skater 388*.

off-road trucks, sprint cars, road racing and more.

The Goodwin Competition team also has been building performance boat engines behind the scenes for 30 years. Goodwin explained that his goal is for the company to offer customers a one-stop shopping experience.

"We do it all in-house—from ideas to designs to prototyping and research and development to validating to manufacturing and assembly," he said. "We go above and beyond what people want. We have our own Spintron that we have performed years of dynamic and durability testing on."

For example, the engines in Pyburn's and Branton's boats have been in development for six or seven years. "We're always refining," Goodwin said. "We try to do as much refining and testing because technology never stops."

The 650-cubic-inch engine is based off the company's championship truck pulling and drag racing platform that is made more durable for the marine environment. The block, head and most components are made out of billet aluminum that Goodwin Competition machines in-house. ("We didn't just do a spinoff of a big-block Chevrolet," Goodwin said.) It also makes its own pistons and connecting rods, but the crankshaft is a Sonny Bryant billet steel model.

Most people would assume that saltwater would be the kiss of death for an engine like this, but Goodwin Competition applies a seven-stage anti-corrosive chemical treatment to





**Ben Wiersum, left of Precision Power Offshore, and Tommy Hofstetter of Chief Performance are excited about future collaboration opportunities.**

be tuned remotely almost anywhere in the world. “We’re going to have a product that Mercury is going to have a tough time competing with,” Wiersum said.

In addition to the large turbocharged motors, Precision Power does a good amount of rebuilds and upgrades. If the company rebuilds a Mercury Racing 1350 or 1650, the motor receives the Chief engine management software.

The company does rebuilds on smaller Mercury Racing engines as well and prices start at about \$12,000 to go through an HP525EFI. Wiersum said the easiest gains to be made are on the Mercury Racing HP575SCi. For about \$18,000, the engine gets a new camshaft, cylinder head work, different programming and the blower gets sealed. The upgraded version makes 675 hp. Wiersum said a straight rebuild on an HP575SCi costs about \$13,000, so “spending another \$5,000 for another 100 hp is a no-brainer.”

The other thing that Wiersum and Hofstetter have always agreed on is that an engine must be reliable. “It’s almost more important than horsepower,” Wiersum said. “I think this is why Tommy and I always got along so well. His motors might not have been the highest horsepower, but he knew how to make them live. At the end of the day, it has to be running.”

the engine so it can be used in saltwater. The engine has twin 4.0-liter Whipple superchargers with an engine management system from A.E.M. that has proprietary firmware and it makes 1,850 hp on 91-octane gasoline. Goodwin Competition also designs the engines with maintenance in mind. Regularly serviced accessories are easy to get to. “You don’t have to take apart 10 things to get to one thing behind them,” Goodwin said.

### **PRECISION POWER OFFSHORE/CHIEF PERFORMANCE**

Precision Power Offshore recently merged with Chief Performance. The two companies will be housed primarily out of the Precision facility in Spring Lake, Mich., and company president Ben Wiersum said that future engines coming out of the facility will wear the Chief name while Precision will take care of maintenance, rigging and

storage. The company will offer full service from rigging to upholstery and even paint.

Like Precision, Chief is known for its turbocharged engines and sophisticated management systems thanks to its founder Tommy Hofstetter. “(Tommy) and I just always saw eye to eye,” Wiersum said. “To this day, any aspect of the motor, we’re just in agreement.”

Precision’s biggest and most popular pump-gas engine is a 1,350-hp turbocharged big block. Chief offers a similar product and both have engine management systems, but going forward, all engines the company builds will use Chief engine management software on which Hofstetter and Wiersum collaborated. “We can put it on any motor that doesn’t have it and it will make more power and do it more reliably,” Wiersum said.

Additionally, both companies have wireless access to their engines, meaning they can

