

# The Big Picture: 10 Most Influential People in High Performance

**Without these men, the high-performance boating world wouldn't be nearly as fun as it is today.**

Writers and editors love lists. That's why magazines such *Maxim* run cover lines like "228 Things That Will Drive Her Wild" and *Cosmopolitan* runs cover lines like "822 Surefire Ways to Make Him Crazy." We like lists because, frankly, we believe you like lists, and if you like lists you'll read our stuff.

Lists get people talking, and writers and editors—at least this one—like that, too. Because whenever you use superlatives such as "best" or "most," subjectivity enters the equation. And that's where things get fiery.

With that goal in mind, I present the **Top 10 Most Influential People in the High-Performance Boating World**. Of course, this is my admittedly subjective take. But I have covered this market since 1994 and know most of the big players, so I feel pretty good about my picks and—here's the scary part—their order. You might agree. You might disagree. Regardless, here goes.



Fred Kiekhaefer, president of Mercury Racing.

**1. Fred Kiekhaefer:** As the president of [Mercury Racing](#) in Fond Du Lac, Wisc., Kiekhaefer has green-lighted many world-beating products including the No. 6 Dry-Sump drive and 1075SCi engine. Under Kiekhaefer's leadership, Mercury Racing has become the No. 1 supplier of high-performance marine engines—by far. Plus, he's probably the best snow skier in the high-performance marine industry.

**2. Peter Hledin:** There's a good reason that Skater has set the benchmark for high-performance catamarans for more than 20 years. [Douglas Marine/Skater](#) founder Peter Hledin is unyielding when it comes to quality and craftsmanship, and his boats **perform**. He's also one of the best listeners in the business—he takes what he hears about his cats from offshore-racing greats like John Tomlinson and changes his products accordingly. Plus, he works in his own shop, right down to grind and sanding, in coveralls every day.

**3. Bob Leach:** Without Bob Leach, the founder of [Eliminator Performance Boats](#) in Perris Valley, Calif., the West Coast performance-boat industry would look very different (i.e. smaller). With his Daytona catamaran and Eagle V-bottom lines, Leach inspired a generation of West Coast builders including Dave Hemmingson

of Dave's Custom Boats, who worked for Leach, and John West of Ultra Performance Boats. For good reason, Leach has been called "The Godfather of West Coast Custom." Plus, he's just plain nice.



Bob Latham (left) with Brad Halpern of Mercury Marine.

**4. Bob Latham:** When you need custom steering for your new multi-million dollar catamaran (check out "[Record Attempt Catamaran Unveiled at Key West Worlds](#)," ), you go to [Latham Marine](#) in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. It's that simple. But company principal Bob Latham has done more than create hydraulic steering systems for the highest of high-end boats—he's brought it to the mainstream performance-boat industry. Plus, he's as smart as they come.

**5. John Carbonell:** You've probably heard that only cockroaches and Twinkies would survive a nuclear holocaust. Add [Super Boat International](#) honcho John Carbonell to that list. For 19 years, all sorts of would-be offshore powerboat race-organizers have, each season, predicted his demise. Yet Carbonell's outfit has gone on while most of them have fallen by the wayside. Carbonell has supporters and detractors in equal measure, but his races actually **happen**. Plus, he holds the keys to Key West as an offshore racing venue.

**6. Bob Teague:** If a "Renaissance man" exists in the high-performance powerboat world, his name is Bob Teague. Teague is a respected engine builder and rigger—he founded and owns [Teague Custom Marine](#) in Valencia, Calif. He's a world champion offshore racer—he just won another title at the 2009 Super Boat International Offshore Worlds in Key West. He's tested thousands of boats—he's Powerboat magazine's lead test driver and chief technical editor. Plus, he's larger than life, speaks his mind, stirs the pot and everybody knows his name.

**7. Mike D'Anniballe:** In a strange way, you could say that without engine guru Mike D'Anniballe of [Sterling Performance](#) in Milford there would be no Mercury Racing 1075SCi. Here's why: In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Sterling power—at least the 1,000-plus-hp stuff—was **the thing** to have. To compete with Sterling, Mercury Racing pushed hard to make the 1075 brilliant—and it is. In fact, D'Anniballe readily acknowledges that the engine cut into his business. But Sterling still cranks out stellar product, as you would expect from a guy who built engines for the UIM Class 1 Dubai team before it switched to Lamborghini mills. Plus, he's as smart as Bob Latham.



## Skip Braver of Cigarette Racing

**8. Skip Braver:** Skip Braver, owner of [Cigarette Racing Team](#), is not an innovator. He's not an engineer. Heck, he's not even a hands-on boat builder. What he is, however, is a businessman and he revived and updated a company that desperately needed both. By the accounts of people who worked under several regimes, Braver was the first owner to run Cigarette like a business, and that meant a sparkling new manufacturing facility in Opa-Locka, Fla., new models and reinvigorated the company's international presence. Plus, he's never afraid to say exactly what he thinks.

**9. Dave Hemmingson:** Before this guy started [Dave's Custom Boats](#) in El Cajon, Calif., it was sacrilege to compare the construction quality of a West Coast custom catamaran to that of an East Coast catamaran. No longer. Hemmingson learned his craft from Eliminator's Bob Leach, and then took it to his own obsessive compulsive level. In doing so, he's pushed other West Coast custom builders to produce brilliant tooling and gelcoat, immaculate rigging and zero-distortion acrylic canopies. Plus, Hemmingson never has a hair out of place.



Dean Loucks, head of the Art of Design.

**10. Dean Loucks:** Make no mistake, there are several top-shelf marine paint shops out there. But since Loucks' [The Art of Design](#) paint shop burst on the high-performance boat scene in 1998, he has captured the lion's share of attention. And for good reason. His Elkhart, Ind., shop's renowned powerboat paint work has included Sorcerer, Monopoly, Zuperman, Perfect Storm and other memorable projects. No wonder Loucks was able to tie up an exclusive deal with Outerlimits. Plus, he wears red shoes and can fly a helicopter.



**Editor's Note:** Matt Trulio is the editor at large for *Powerboat* magazine. He has written for the magazine since 1994.

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