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The Big Picture: Playing the Engine Upgrade Game

Boosting your power costs a lot less than buying a new engine or boat - but keep in mind that the expenses don't end with a blower kit.

This isn't big news to anyone who hasn't been living under a rock, but new-boat sales—including those in the high-performance powerboat segment—are way down. Credit is tough to get, and even those folks who can afford a go-fast boat out of pocket are a little skittish about dropping that kind of dough for a new toy at the moment.



Speed Racer is going with new twin 1,200-hp Potter Performance engines for 2010, but even if you don't have that kind of cash, upgrading your existing engines is still a good call.

But the need for ever-increasing speed runs deep in performance-boat owners. That's why many are choosing to upgrade the engines in their current rides.

Not a bad idea. In fact, it's darn good one, at least until we—that's the royal we—get more comfy spending big bucks. What you need to remember, however, is that engine upgrades are, economically speaking, like dominos. Do one thing and there's a good chance you'll have to do another. And another. And another.



Whipple Supercharger kit.

Here's an example: Let's say you have a single-engine V-bottom sport boat powered by an out-of-warranty 425-hp MerCruiser 496 Mag HO engine. (I use the words "out-of-warranty" because power upgrades void engine warranties and you don't want to mess with that.) For \$7,000 to \$8,000, you can get a killer supercharger/EFI kit from [Whipple Industries](#) that will boost your horsepower 50 percent or more.



Upper and lower units for a Teague XR drive.

The bad news? That kind of power will destroy the stock Bravo One stern-drive that came with your stock 425-hp engine. So you need to upgrade your drive with something that can handle it, such as a [Teague Custom Marine](#) Platinum XR drive, which will set you back approximately \$10,000.

Of course, thanks to your more-powerful engine, you'll be able to spin a bigger-pitch propeller. (You did want to go faster, right?) You likely don't already own a taller prop, so you'll need to pick up a new one, maybe a lab-finished four-blade Bravo One or five-

blade Maximus wheel from [Mercury Marine](#), or perhaps something stellar from [Hering Propellers](#). Add another \$1,000 to \$2,000.



A full hydraulic steering kit from Latham Marine.

So now you're going faster—perhaps your 65-mph boat has become an 85-mph boat. Guess what? Your cable-assist hydraulic steering system is completely inadequate for a boat that can go that fast. That means you'll need to upgrade to full hydraulic steering from a company such as [Latham Marine](#), the industry leader in hydraulic steering systems. (For the full story on hydraulic system steering upgrades, check out my piece in the next [Powerboat magazine](#)). Full hydraulic steering for a single-engine boat will set you back somewhere between \$4,000 and \$6,000.

Add up the numbers and you're looking at more than \$25,000, at least on the high end of the scale. (And that's assuming you are mechanically inclined enough to do all your own work.) That's not chump change, but it's still significantly less than you'd spend on the average new 700-plus-hp high-performance marine engine—and you'd still have to add the drive, propeller and steering upgrades—and a whole lot less expensive than buying a new go-fast boat.

Engine upgrades do make financial sense. Just know what you're getting into.



Editor's Note: Boats.com bi-weekly columnist Matt Trulio is the editor at large for *Powerboat* magazine. He has written for the magazine since 1994.