

USED BOAT

BY STEVE KNAUTH

Grady-White 280 Marlin



“We’ve got a little slice of paradise down here.” That’s how Brian Cunningham describes the boating around his Vero Beach, Florida, home. Fishing, cruising, running out to the islands — he and his wife, Karen, and their extended family do it all.

“We like to fish,” says Cunningham, 56, who is originally from New Jersey. “We have three daughters and two grandkids. They love to get in the water, they love to go boating, and we do it as a family. We cruise on weekend getaways to the Miami or Daytona area. We do two weeks a year in the Bahamas and make a Miami-Keys trip once a year, too. And when we travel, we stay aboard — up to four of us. We use the boat the way it was intended to be used.”

It takes a multipurpose boat to cover all those bases, especially when you’re taking along your family. And Cunningham, who owns and operates Vero Marine Center, a

full-service marina and boat dealership, has just what he needs in his 1990 Grady-White 280 Marlin. Purchased in 2004 for about \$45,000, the boat has fulfilled the vision he had when he replaced the family’s Grady-White 272 Sailfish. “We wanted a boat that

we could cruise farther, with more room for people to stay aboard,” says Cunningham. “Our family was growing, and we wanted to get something that fit a little better.”

The 280 Marlin was in rough shape, a “project,” in fact. The Isinglass was bad, the outboards were ready for replacement, and the bottom was thick with barnacles. But Cunningham, a Grady-White dealer for

32 years, was familiar with the boat. “I got to know the model right out of the gate,” he says. “I worked the Grady-White booth at the Miami boat show in 1989, when the 280 Marlin was introduced. In fact, this particular boat was the second one we ever sold at Vero Marine.” And it had come through the



dealership three times over the years.

Cunningham has updated the cosmetics, seating and propulsion regularly since 2004, and with its Flag Blue Awlgripped hull and teak trim, it certainly stands out. “The first owner had added a lot of woodwork, and people thought he was crazy,” says Cunningham. “I added more, and people thought I was crazier.”

The companionway door trim, covering boards, armrests, trim on the dash, louvered companionway hatch and rod racks are varnished teak. “I spend a month each year sanding and refinishing,” he says. “It makes for a nice late-spring/early-summer project. Building up the coats of varnish — it’s a labor of love.”

In the past year, Cunningham has done a full electronics upgrade, installing an array of Garmin devices, including autopilot, sonar and GPS. New radar is next. “It’s nice to know where you are and what you’re dealing with,” he says. “It makes things more fun.”

Cunningham, who grew up boating on southern New Jersey’s Barnegat Bay, says he takes a lot of good-natured ribbing for “riding around in an old relic,” but the teak and

blue hull “appeal to my Northeast roots.”

The Grady-White is powered by a pair of Yamaha F225s, and they’ve proved to be good performers. Cruising speed is about 30 mph at 4,600 rpm, using 22 gallons an hour. With its 300-gallon fuel capacity, the Bahamas are an “easy reach,” Cunningham says. “We can leave at 3 o’clock from Vero Beach and be tied up in a slip for dinner on the West End, Grand Bahamas, and watch the sunset. You spend two nights there, get back on Sunday and go to work the next morning.”

The boat lives up to its fishing reputation, too. “You can fish in 3- to 5-foot seas very comfortably. It trolls nice and has a nice, safe feeling with its high gunwales and self-bailing cockpit,” says Cunningham. “It does a nice job near-shore and offshore. We’ve had everything from a boxful of dolphin to numerous sailfish in this boat.”

Now Cunningham’s grandkids are getting hooked on boating. “We took my 5-year-old grandson tuna fishing this past summer, and he put some big blackfin in the boat — with a little assistance, of course,” he says.

From a dinner cruise to a grander adventure, the 280 Marlin seems to handle it all. “It’s tough to find anything wrong with this

BACKGROUND

Grady-White Boats gets its name from its founders, North Carolina builders Glen Grady and Don White. The pair were bought out by Eddie Smith, who over the years established himself and the Grady-White name by designing and building high-quality small and midsize fishing boats known for their seaworthiness and solid construction. Grady-White also has been an innovator, credited with the first walkaround design and a variable-deadrise hull known as the Sea-V. Today the builder is well-known for its express, center console, dual console and walkaround models from 18 to 36 feet. Company headquarters remain where the firm was started in 1958 — Greenville, North Carolina. The builder has been honored several times with J.D. Power and Associates customer satisfaction awards in the coastal fishing boat segment.

boat,” Cunningham says. “People consider it more of a fish boat than a cruise boat, but it does both so well.”

Walkthrough

The PowerBoat Guide describes the Grady-White 280 Marlin as “one of the biggest 28-foot walkarounds in the business,” with a roomy, well-equipped interior and a large self-bailing cockpit that can handle a full-sized fighting chair. Introduced in 1989, it was a popular model during its 6-year production run. (It was reintroduced in 1994 as the 300 Marlin.)

Standard cockpit fishing gear includes a live well and a bait station with sink and

tackle drawers, along with insulated fish-boxes and a raw-water washdown system. The helm is a step up, set to starboard, with a pedestal seat and companion at a two-panel windscreen with side protection. The molded dash has room for a full slate of instruments and electronics, and the hardtop has a locking overhead.

Below, the cabin layout features a full V-berth and a quarter-berth, unusual in a boat of this size. The galley includes a stove top and refrigerator, and the enclosed head compartment has a shower. The 280 Marlin rides a deep-vee hull with 20 degrees of transom deadrise. Standard power is a pair of 225-hp outboards, and cruising speed is 35 to 40 mph. ■



Brian Cunningham

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 32 feet, 7 inches (including pulpit)

BEAM: 10 feet, 7 inches

DRAFT: 1 foot, 7 inches

WEIGHT: 7,000 pounds

HULL TYPE: deep-vee

PROPULSION: twin 225-hp outboards

TANKAGE: 306 gallons fuel, 35 gallons water

BUILDER: Grady-White Boats, Greenville, North Carolina, (252) 752-2111. gradywhite.com