

BY CHRIS WOODWARD

FOUR ON-TREND OUTBOARD EXPRESSES

Better Engine Technology Has Driven
New Designs in a Fluctuating Economy

WHEN CELESTIAL BODIES align, navigators know the way forward. The same apparently applies to boatbuilders.

During the mid-aughts, as the economy dipped, the owners of expensive inboard-powered sport-fishing boats looked to downsize. That trend aligned with the introduction of more powerful four-stroke outboard engines in the 300 hp and 350 hp range. The resulting solution: outboard-powered express boats.

Now, as financial conditions improve, owners of smaller walkarounds are looking to upsize to outboard-powered expresses, creating a perfect mix of opportunity and growing demand.

To further explore this star-guided market change, I talked to four outboard-powered-express makers. Here are their thoughts and comments. (Boats are listed alphabetically.)

GRADY-WHITE EXPRESS 370



SPECS: LOA: 36 ft. 7 in. • Beam: 13 ft. 2 in. • Transom Deadrise: 20 deg. • Draft: 29 in.
Dry Weight: 14,919 lb. • Max Power: 1,050 hp

Grady actually built two of its Express models (the 330 and 360) before the economic downturn. “For our market, many times our Express series is a move up the boating scale,” says Shelley Tubaugh, marketing vice president.

But as the economy declined, Grady watched the buying trend reverse. “We saw people with larger models come down from 60-, 50- or even 45-foot sport-fishers into our Express models,” Tubaugh says, “as something that still

gave them great range to fish offshore yet was far more economical to use and maintain, as well as easy for one person to handle alone.”

Customers who downsize say they don’t miss the costly annual maintenance of a large inboard boat. The quiet hum of outboards — which operate without that diesel stench — is a welcome change too, Tubaugh says. Outboard boats also perform and handle more nimbly than slower inboard giants.

Tubaugh says that Grady’s long history with outboards gave the company a distinct advantage in developing its larger Express models. “We have been able to combine the best things from traditional express boats — a commanding captain’s station with clear visibility and an ergonomic layout, a large fishing cockpit, and roomy, luxurious cabin interiors — with our SeaV2 hull and quiet, economical Yamaha four-stroke engines,” she says. “The bottom line is that the outboard design greatly improved the utility of the express layout by giving more room, less noise and vibration, and better safety.”