

## Grady-White 251 CE (2015-)



### Captain's Report



The Grady-White 251 CE combines remarkable fishability with sportboat features that create a versatile boat that can be used for most anything by the whole family.

### Mission Statement

The mission of the 251 CE is to serve the boating needs of the whole family that live near large bodies of water, such as the Atlantic Ocean or the Great Lakes, but who also go boating in protected water, such as the ICW, estuaries, or rivers. Further, she is designed to be a coastal fishing machine -- or, a watersports bowrider with all of the functions and utility of a deckboat. By providing a versatile platform that can be optioned with equipment to take her in one direction -- or in several directions -- the 251 CE can actually perform virtually all of the functions needed for 80% of coastal boaters.

### Overview

The 251 CE is an all-new boat with a hull that draws just 14" (.36 m), making her ideal for inshore fishing both with rod and reel and for net casting. To that end, she has bow and stern casting platforms and everything in between that veteran anglers need.

With just 20" (.51 m) of cockpit depth, the 251 Coastal Explorer becomes a functional deckboat. The addition of a bow, beach re-boarding ladder (the only one we have ever seen on a center console), chaise, bowrider-type seating in the bow, transom seating and a head with a standard Porta-Potti prove the 251 CE is more than just a fishing boat. With the addition of an optional tow pylon, the 251 CE can perform virtually all of the utility normally found in a conventional sportboat or deckboat -- plus a lot more.



With sweeping curves and pin striping that follows the sheer line contours, the 251 CE has classic lines. Her 16-degree deadrise at the transom gives her a high top speed and good mid-range fuel economy.

## Major Features

- Hull design by C. Raymond Hunt & Associates
- Stainless steel thru-hull fittings
- All 316 grade stainless steel
- 100% hand laid hull and deck
- Dual 74-quart (70 L) fishboxes under the port and starboard bow seats
- Bow and stern reboarding ladders
- 10 flush-mounted rod holders
- Standard Porta-Potti

- Standard hydraulic tilt steering
- 47 sq. ft. (4.4 sq. m) cockpit area
- All drink holders, rod holders and pull up cleats are connected to tubes that allow water and condensation to drain onto the deck, rather than into the bilge.

## Performance

The 251 CE has a LOA of 24'7" (7.49 m), a beam of 8'6" (2.59 m) and a hull draft of 14" (.36 m). With an empty weight of 3,550 lbs. (1,610 kg), full fuel and two people onboard, we had an estimated test weight of 5,013 lbs. (2,274 kg).

Tested with a single Yamaha F300 4-stroke outboard turning a Saltwater Series 2 -18T-15 ¼ prop, we reached a top speed of 49.2 mph at 5700 rpm. At that speed we were burning 26.9 gph, which translated into a range of 128 miles.



**Our test boat was powered with a Yamaha F300 outboard.**

Best economic cruise was measured at 3000 rpm and 19.9 mph. That speed reduced the fuel burn to 6.6 gph, which increased the range to 211 statute miles. That said, we did find a close comparison to that speed with regards to the range and mpg with the throttle advanced to 3500 rpm. That increased the speed to 28 mph, raised the fuel burn to 9.4 gph while only dropping 1 mile off the range. For that reason, we'd label 3500 rpm as "best cruise".

She's also a quick boat with a 2.5 second time to plane, 5.1 seconds to 20 mph, and a 7.8 second time to 30

mph.

## Sea V2 Hull

Any talk of the 251 CE's performance has to start with a discussion of the Sea V2 hull design. The C. Raymond Hunt & Associates-designed hull has a continually changing deadrise as the hull transitions forward. In this case, it starts at 16-degrees at the transom and increases from there as one moves forward.

**A Key Design Factor.** This deadrise at the transom is somewhat less than we usually see on many deep-V center consoles which might be intended for blue water fishing work. That is precisely the difference that makes this design ideal for boating in protected and coastal locations. By foregoing a deep-V hull (which is not needed because the boat won't be jumping off 3' waves offshore), the 251 CE can be both far more stable at rest and at trolling speeds -- and, be faster and more fuel-efficient at the same time.

**Family-Friendly.** By making the boat more stable, she is automatically going to be more comfortable for the whole family who may not be ready for deep-V rock and roll. Her low deadrise gives her shoal draft making her easy to beach, and ideal for anglers in skinny water.

**Fast Hole Shot Times.** Because the deadrise is 16-degrees, rather than, say, 19 or 20-degrees, the boat is easier to push, which maximizes both top speed, fuel efficiency and lowers the rpm necessary to keep the boat on plane when throttling back. Skiers and wake boarders will like the boat's 2.5 seconds from zero to planing speed to get them up out of the water fast. Anglers involved with Le Mons starts in fishing tournaments can also benefit from this jackrabbit-like starting.



The 16-degree deadrise at the transom and her wide chine flats make the 251 CE fast out of the hole, fuel efficient at best cruise and fast at the top end. In addition, these two attributes dampen roll, making the 251 CE more comfortable than deep-V designs.



With both extra-wide chines and extra-wide strakes, the 251 CE gets lots of lift for better performance, and remains more stable at rest. This is a key difference with the 251 CE.

**But a Soft Ride, Too.** Forward the hull has a sharp, deep-V entry which easily cuts through chop and short waves providing a smooth ride and little or no pounding, depending on speed and conditions. The wide bow flare keeps spray out and away from the boat providing a dry ride. The strakes also contribute to that dry ride acting as deflectors once the boat is on top.



With pronounced bow flare and wide chines, the 251 CE is a dry riding boat.



The 251 CE's sharp entry cuts through waves rather than bouncing over them. Here we can see how the spray is thrown wide and low contributing to the dry ride.

### **So Does it Work?**

In a word, yes. During our test, we sadly didn't have any noteworthy sea conditions but we did do our share of experimenting with self-generated waves and found several things that are worth sharing. But remember, this boat is intended for protected and coastal waters, so we were actually able to replicate her intended environment.

**First, There's Good Tracking.** This hull design is touted as being able to allow the boat to track better in quartering seas. So we rode up to the wake of the camera boat and let it hit the quarter in a well-controlled manner and sure enough, we remained straight with hands off the wheel, when we should have been sent off in another direction. Check.



**Look Ma, no hands!** With hands off the wheel, we can see how the 251 CE tracks straight and true even with a quartering wave attempting to push her off course.

**Second, Dry and Comfortable.** Crossing wakes at varying angles showed that the hard chine and strakes, combined with the generous bow flare, served quite well towards producing a dry ride. We also noticed a softer ride than expected in a boat with a 16-degree deadrise at the transom. That is because of the sharp sections forward cushion the ride when running through chop.



With the 300-hp Yamaha doing the heavy work we reached a top speed of 49.2 mph.

**Third, is Stability.** She's stable at rest so working either of the two elevated casting platforms will be a

comfortable experience. Drift fishermen will certainly love this boat as she has a natural tendency to present her beam to the wind.

## Helm

The helm is mounted to the port side of the console and accommodates two-across seating quite well. There's plenty of open space for mounting a navigation display but Grady-White isn't in the electronics business so that option is left up to the buyer to choose and install. We think that's good news, as all too often a builder only offers one choice and that may not be the best for the consumer. Here, choose from all the manufacturers and the features desired.



**Grady-White created a good looking helm for the 251 CE and we also appreciated the ergonomics. Note that the supports for the optional T-top are affixed to the side of the console and not mounted to the deck where they will stub toes and take up space.**

The wraparound windshield is made of thick, sturdy acrylic, has little to no distortion at the curves, and should be quite durable. A storage area located at the top of the console, is divided into two sections and padded at the bases. The switch panel is separated from the dash and the horn is instantly identifiable in red. Located in the center of the console is the Yamaha multi-function display.





In the center of the panel is the Yamaha engine display allowing selectable information. There is plenty of real estate for one, large multi-screen display, or for two smaller screens.

Below, the wheel is mounted to a tilt base and the only thing we'd add is a steering knob. The engine controls are state-of-the-art digital so they are easy to move and precise. Two drink holders are to starboard with the stereo and a grab handle just above.



Below, a footrest adds to the comfortable ergonomics of the helm.

## Features Inspection

## Fishing

Being first of all a center console, it's hard to start anywhere other than with the fishing features. (The family amenities run a close second.) Be that as it may, the fishing category needs to start with a mention of the 47-sq. ft. (4.37 sq. m) cockpit area. This provides plenty of room to move about on deck without any feeling of being constricted by seating or the leaning post. As noted above, the supports for the optional T-top are bolted to the console and not the deck, making moving around the console non-problematical for even portly anglers.



There's 47-sq. ft. (4.37 sq. m) cockpit area plus a large casting deck at the stern (another at the bow).

**The aft casting deck** is U-shaped and provides its own measure of freedom to move about. All hardware is flush-mounted, eliminating any tripping hazards. There is storage to both sides, a fishbox in the middle, and a 12.75-gallon (48.3 L) livewell can be added as an option.



**At the stern is a casting deck 6'8" (2.0 m) across.**



**The transom seats lift to reveal storage bins port and starboard and an insulated, self-draining 51 quart (48.3 L) compartment that can be used as a fishbox, beverage cooler, or for more storage.**

Just ahead is a leaning post with a grab handle. The absence of a work area behind the post is probably what adds to the feeling of roominess in the cockpit. However, there is storage at the bottom port side of the post and organizers are included.

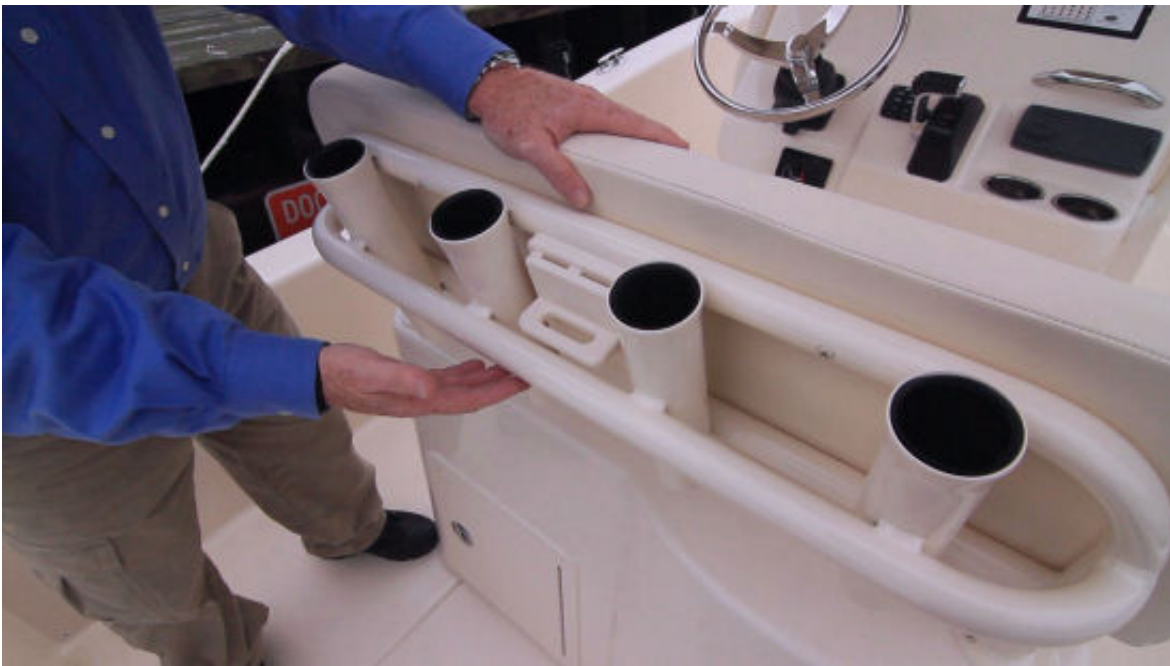


**Storage drawers were located to the lower left of the leaning post in our test boat.**

**18 Rod Holders.** Four flush-mounted rod holders are in the caprails, two to each side. Forward, just abaft the bow seating, are six vertical rod holders, making a total of 10 as standard. On our test boat, eight more were included from the back of the deluxe leaning post and up on the back of the T-top, both offered as options. That adds to 18 rod holders on our test boat, which we suspect will be typical of how boats leave the factory.



**Rod holders are in the caprails, at the bow, behind the leaning post, and at the rear of the T-top.**



At the center of the Deluxe lean bar between the rod holders is a tool holder.

**Huge Bow Casting Deck.** Forward there's another casting deck and part of it can be made up of an optional insert that serves double duty as a bow table. Normally when we see that sort of combination we have a knee-jerk reaction of thinking that we need to limit weight, as tables aren't generally made to hold excessive loads. Not so here. This is a heavy-duty table that can take the proverbial 800-lb. gorilla. It is made specifically for both rod and net casting, as well as to be a table -- and, leg rest for a chaise lounge.



At the bow, the table rests in place to form a forward casting deck. This is among the heaviest tables we've seen so there's no worry about it bouncing out of position.



**At the bow there are two 74-quart fishboxes, port and starboard. Just behind are the lifting seat backs which create chaise seating.**



**Tackle storage is to starboard and a storage drawer is to the port side of the bow seats.**



Fully forward is a dedicated locker for a Danforth-type anchor. Note the port and starboard running lights which are separate and larger than what we normally see on this type of boat.

As we had the deluxe leaning post on our test boat, we also had the included, insulated 25-gallon (95 L) livewell located under the observer's seat. The catch can be deposited in one of the two standard 74-quart (81.5 L) fishboxes that make up the bow seats/casting deck.



Under the observer's seat is an optional 25-gallon (94.6 L) livewell.

Also, at the bow there's a raw water washdown spigot. All too often we see these at the stern, which requires a long hose to reach the bow. Since all decks are typically slanted towards the stern anyway, why not have

the water connection at the bow? Here it is, making short work of the washdowns while underway.



There's no shortage of stainless steel on the 251 CE, and that includes the raw water washdown spigot at the bow. The three vertical rod holders (and the three on the starboard side) are standard.

### "Family" Features

What is a "family" feature? Basically, anything that makes the boat more comfortable and also adaptable to watersports. Our test boat was loaded with all of them and frankly taken together they create a remarkably versatile boat with high utility. It is safe to say that she could go head-to-head with virtually any sportboat or deckboat on the market as far as functionality goes.

**Console Seat with Cooler.** It starts with the usual seat ahead of the console. There's an insulated, self-draining cooler under the extra-wide seat. A dedicated seatback cushion is mounted to the console and the whole seat is molded into the console as a single unit with back support contours. Further, this is something not found on sportboats.





Ahead of the console is the usual seat but notice how the seatback is more contoured than we typically see.

**4-in-1 Bow Table.** An optional table can be ordered and we highly recommend it. Not only does this table enhance the utility of the bow area for lunch or drinks (#1), but it also comes with a cushion and a telescoping pedestal. That means it can be lowered to convert the forward console seat into a doublewide chaise lounge (#2)... a rare commodity on a boat of this size and class. With it placed forward in the casting deck (#3) position, it can be covered with cushions making a huge bow sun pad (#4).



The optional table adds lots of utility and becomes an ideal place for lunch and cocktails at anchor.



Tea for two? The forward table becomes a handy spot to place snacks and drinks when the 251 CE is in entertaining mode -- something that nearly all boats do at some point during the season.



With the optional table, the pedestal can be lowered to create a chaise lounge ahead of the console.

**Bowrider Seating.** Both the side bow seats have aft sections that lift up to form a pair of chaise lounges. In this configuration the seats are virtually the same as those found on a dual console or a bowrider sportboat. The difference is that we can't think of a bowrider that also has a third forward-facing seat just behind -- or a third chaise with the employ of the lowered table with cushion.



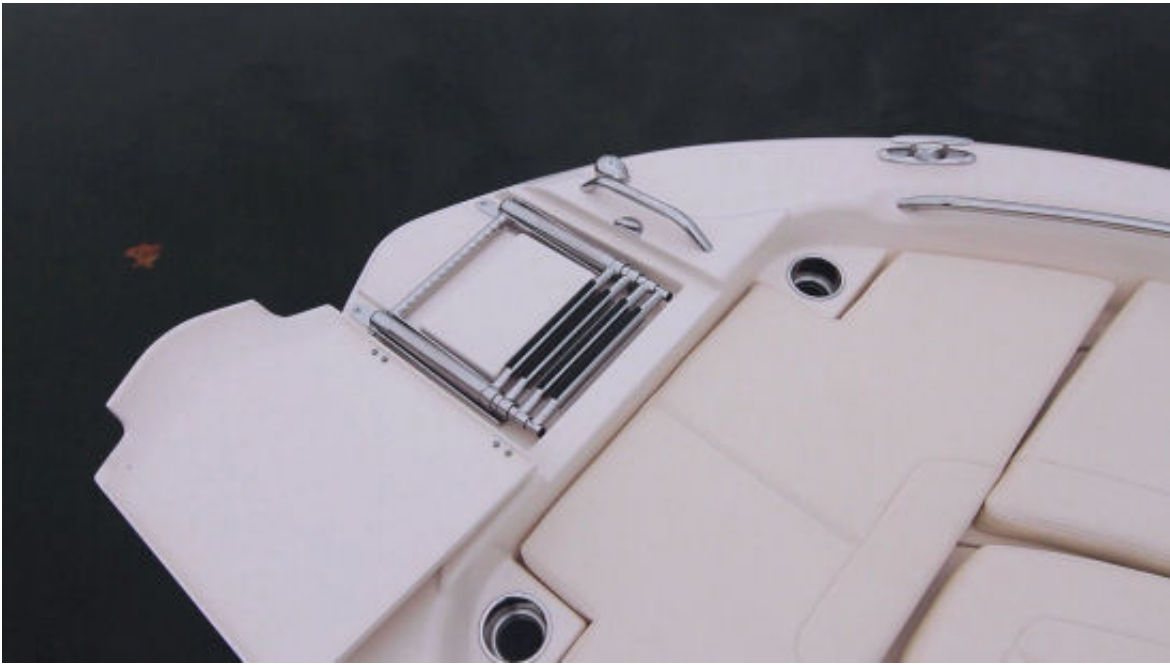
With the table inserted between the bow seats, a large sun pad is created.



Both bow seats have lifting seatbacks that create these chaise lounges. With the table moved back to the console seat we have three forward facing chaises at the bow. The length of the back support will dictate the angle of the chaise back. We'd like ours at more of an angle.

**Beach Re-Boarding Ladder.** One of the unique -- and important -- standard features on the 251 CE is her beach boarding ladder. At one time or another, virtually all boaters want to beach their vessel to get off and explore or have a picnic ashore. By selecting the right beaching site, raising the outboard a bit, this 14" (.36 m) draft vessel can be easily beached and the bow ladder can be deployed. If the angle of the bottom is right,

the ladder can reach dry land. Otherwise only feet and ankles need to get wet.



The 251 CE is designed for heading to remote beaches. Here's a bow reboarding ladder for when we tuck the bow against the shore. There's even a stainless grab handle alongside. This is the only center console that we have ever seen with a bow boarding ladder.



Standard equipment on the Grady-White 251 CE is a 4-step beach boarding ladder on the bow. This gives the boat lots of added utility and combines with the boat's 14" (.36 m) draft makes getting off and on easy, and even dry in the right locations.



Here we see the 251 CE in full-family mode. Just about anything can be done with this boat in inshore and coastal locations.

**Transom Seating.** Virtually all sportboats have transom seating and so does the 251 CE. Here the seats are lying flat across the casting deck and we only have to reach back to lift the port and starboard seat backs up from their flush position. This leaves the space under the seats untouched and Grady-White was then able to hinge these to add storage underneath. This creates three-across seating with the two jump seats having seat backs.

**Storage Bins.** And still not to be outdone in the creative use of space department, the storage under these seats consists of removable bins that when lifted, allows access to the components underneath, such as the battery switch to starboard. Pretty clever.



Lifting the seat back from the aft position, rather than having it fold down onto the seat itself, deploys these jump seats. This allows the space underneath to be more fully utilized.



With all the cushions in place there's an aft sun pad that can be used when the boat is in "family" mode, or where an angler can stretch out when fish aren't biting.



Behind the port side seat is a concealed reboarding ladder.

**Shower in the Stern.** In the port caprail there's a covered optional freshwater shower wand. Simply put a finger under the forward lip of the top, lift and pull out the sprayer. That's all there is to it and it is frankly a better design than we see on many sportboats. It is plumbed to a 10-gallon (38 L) freshwater tank.



A freshwater shower is under the easy open cover to the port side caprail.

**The Head.** And of course no boat that touts its “family features” would be complete without the head. Grady-White includes a Porta-Potti as standard. We’d like to see a pump-out option be offered as well but that’s an easy aftermarket add on.



The 251 CE includes a standard Porta-Potti in the console and stand-up head room. Note the storage shelf to the right for personal items.

## Quality Details

Like all Grady-White boats, the 251 Coastal Explorer is well-built using the best materials and construction practices. Start with the cleats... all are made of 316 stainless and the pull-up type. But then virtually all of the stainless on the 251 CE is 316 ss. Drink holders drain into the cockpit which drains overboard, not into the bilge. All electrical wiring is protected from the saltwater environment. Thru-hull fittings are bonded and the company rigorously follows ABYC standards.

Probably the most important quality detail, however, has nothing to do with materials or build -- it is Grady-White's customer service. The company has long been known for keeping owners happy and fixing things that might go wrong. Back in the days when J.D. Powers surveyed boat owners, Grady-White won top ranking in its category every year.



**All the cleats on the boat are stainless and pull-up. This leaves the surface free of snags for the fishermen and toes won't get stubbed for the families.**

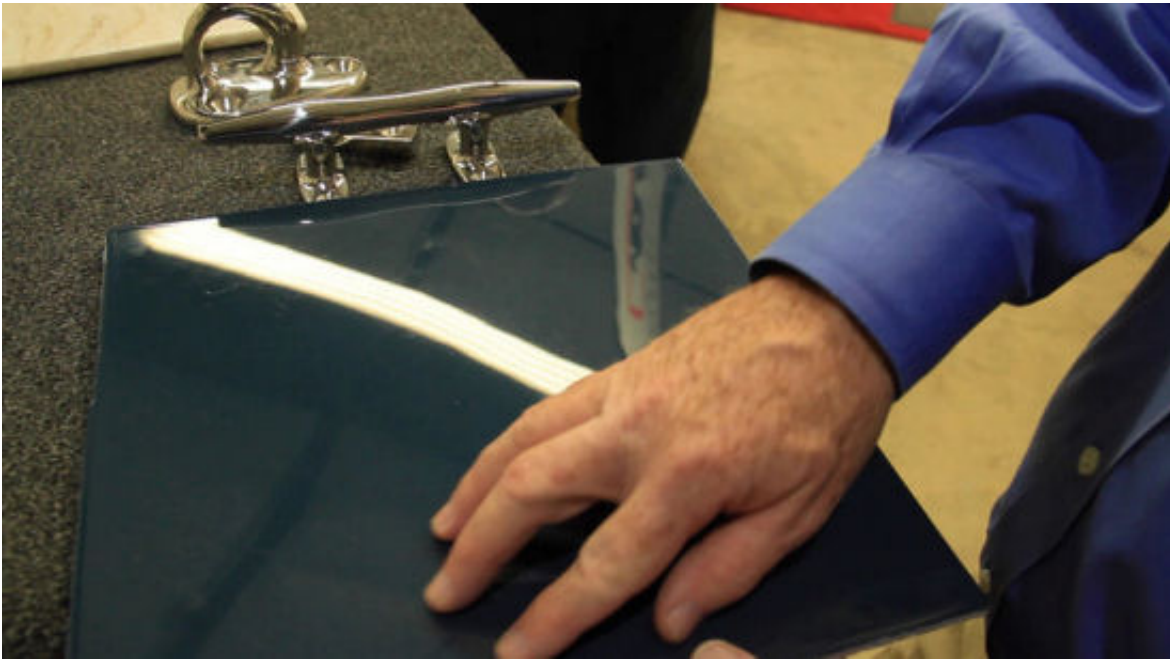




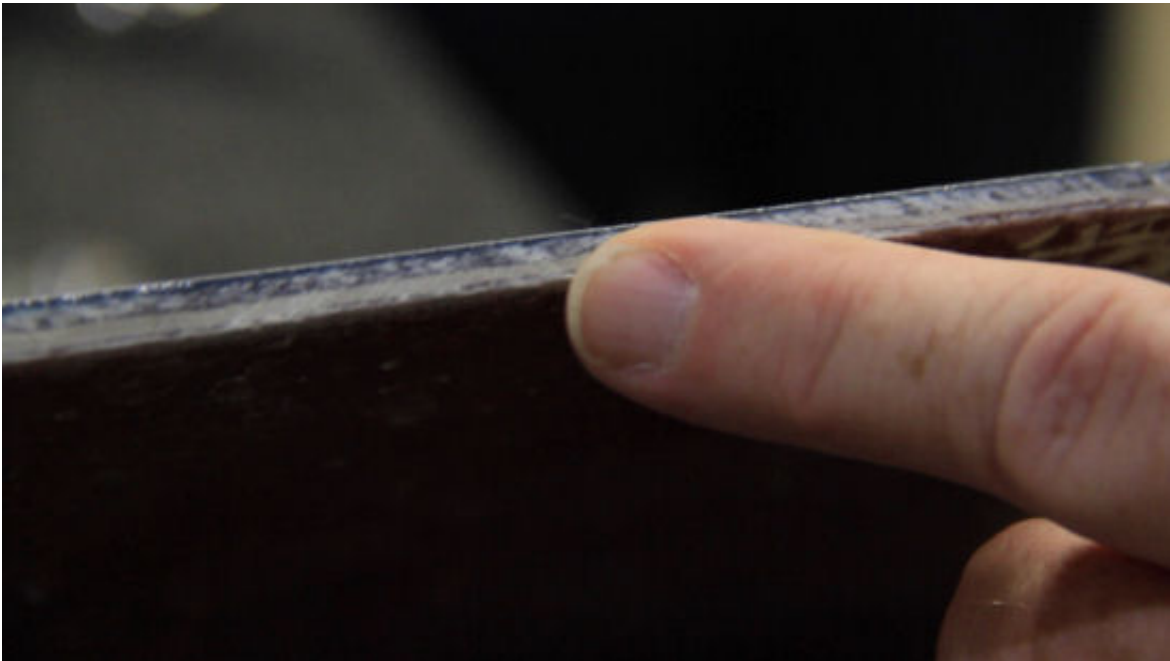
**See the drain hole at the bottom of this drink holder? A hose connects to it to allow condensation to run into the cockpit.**



**All the rod holders are flush mounted and stainless steel.**



The 251 CE comes with a choice of 6 different hull colors. The dark colored Grady White hulls are painted rather than coloring the gel, which is how the builder handles lighter colors. This dual approach permits a more controlled and a glossier shine.



The center of the fiberglass is a mat that maintains the smooth finish of the gel while adding strength and eliminating pattern "print-thru".



The stainless steel is all 316-grade alloy which maintains a high level of nickel to better resist staining. It's double polished and double passivated making it unreactive by coating the surface with a thin inert layer. This is how the shine is maintained for a longer period.

### **Options to Consider**

One of the strong points of the 251 CE is that the builder has created an options list that allows the consumer to option-out the boat for a specific application, if not several of them. This saves money for those who don't want the boat loaded up one way or another. We have mentioned many options in the report above, but here are some more to consider, depending on need --



**Boaters with small children might want to consider this option of high bow rails.**



**This sturdy tow pylon adds lots of utility to the boat for those interested in towing sports.**

## Observations

When it comes to versatility, it seems that the 251 CE has both coastal fishing and coastal watersports boating covered hands down. She's also a comfortable boat to be on in these locales.

Because she is not designed for offshore, bluewater work, her bottom does not have to be as deep, nor does her freeboard have to be as high, among other things. That means there can be a considerable savings in materials, labor, and therefore, cost. When we compare the 251 CE with three other 25-footers in Grady-White's other series offerings, we find that she is as much as 900-lbs. (408 kg) lighter. That, in a nutshell, goes a long way to explaining why she can also be less expensive than the other Grady-White boats this size.

Because she is purpose-built, the wise consumer can take advantage of this cost savings if their application is a match.