



# Grady-White 281 CE: *Exploration Sensation*

By Lenny Rudow

For 2023 Grady-White expands its Coastal Explorer line with their biggest bay boat yet, the all-new 281 CE. This model line is aptly named. You want to explore the back-bays and creeks? With a minimum draft of 1'7" and the optional trolling motor rigged on the bow, shoal water sight fishing is in the cards. You want to run out into the open bay and search for stripers? You couldn't find a better boat for this application. There are yellowfin chewing chunks at the Hot Dog? With more interior freeboard

(22 inches) than most hybrid bay boats and a Grady-White SeaV2 variable-degree deadrise hull, this fishing machine can handle those oceanic adventures better than some 28-foot dedicated offshore boats. Explorer, indeed.

Another reason this boat's ideal for probing uncharted waters is its performance. When you're going to try untested fishing grounds you don't want to burn up a bunch of time slowly cruising around, and with a pair of F300s on the transom, this model can run along in the low-

to mid-40s in the 4500-rpm range. Nail the throttles, and speeds in the upper 50s are in store. Added bonus: with a 160-gallon fuel tank this boat carries one heck of a lot more juice than most hybrid bay boats its size, and when you crunch the numbers you'll discover that if you throttled back to 30 mph (where you'll get around 2.4 mpg), even allowing for a 10-percent fuel reserve you could cruise for close to 350 miles.

Of course, like all Grady-Whites the 281 CE is thoroughly equipped for angling. Pull the cushions and

put in the insert and the entire bow turns into a massive casting platform; there's an elevated aft casting deck which houses an 18-gallon livewell; tackle stowage with six trays lives in the post, where you'll also find a 38-gallon livewell; a pair of insulated fishboxes are under the bowdeck; there's a massive 74-gallon fish/stowage compartment under the forward console lounger; and there are eight rodholders plus four rocket launchers on the T-top and four more in the leaning post. Still, the angling highlight in our humble opinion is that bowdeck design. With the insert in place we stepped up and faux-casted (there wasn't enough time to fish for real since we jumped aboard for a spin during the Miami International Boat Show), and came to realize that you'll have no problem posting multiple anglers up there. In fact, we don't think it would be a stretch to take out five or even six anglers and still cast in comfort.

Speaking of comfort — this is no rough-and-tumble fishboat. In fact, it delivers about as much luxury as you could hope for in a boat of this size and then some. Take the bow seating, for example. When the casting call is complete and you drop the cushions back on, you can press a button to electro-mechanically raise up the forward-facing seatbacks integrated into the bowdeck. Or, let's say you want to go for a dip. Move aft, press another button, and the portside gunwale swings down to become a dive door and swim platform. Not that it's tough to get to the aft swim platforms in the first place, because the transom seatbacks swing fore and aft then lock into place to create a walkway.

Other comfort-inducing, family-friendly features include an 18-gallon freshwater system, a Bluetooth stereo with a waterproof touchscreen and six speakers, auto-retracting hydraulic trim tabs, 12-V and USB ports at the helm, and a compartment inside the console

## QUICK FACTS

**LOA:** 27'7"

**Beam:** 9'4"

**Displacement:** 5650 lbs.

**Draft (hull):** 1'7"

**Transom Deadrise:** 16 degrees

**Fuel Capacity:** 160 gal.

**Max. Power:** 600 hp

with an electric flush head. We're putting the through-stem anchoring system into this category, too, since the anchor windlass with bow and helm controls will certainly be a lot easier to use than a rope and your shoulders.

Are you ready to do some piscatorial pioneering? If so, it's time to explore setting up a sea trial on the 281 CE. ■



■ A large section of the port hullside swings down to water level at the press of a button.