

GRADY-WHITE 281 CE

TARPON TIME OFF THE BEACHES OF SW FLORIDA

DESTINATION: Sanibel **TARGET SPECIES:** Tarpon
SEASON: March-July **HAZARDS:** Navigate With Caution After Hurricane Ian **ESSENTIALS:** Seaworthy Hull, Nonskid Deck, Trolling Motor, Livewell Capacity, Casting Platform

Sanibel, situated between Charlotte Harbor and Estero Bay, stretches from east to west, as opposed to the typical north-south orientation of most other barrier islands in Florida. It stands out as one of the best locations for intercepting migrating tarpon in the entire Gulf of Mexico. In fact, the first tarpon was caught on rod and reel in 1885 just across the bay from Sanibel. However, the preferred platform for tarpon fishing has evolved significantly since that legendary catch.

Drawing on the success of Grady-White's 251 Coastal Explorer, the new 281 CE is brimming with features inspired by customer feedback. It builds upon Grady's reputation for safety and seaworthiness, with its smooth-riding, continuously variable SeaV2 hull, sporting a 16-degree deadrise at the transom for outstanding stability as tarpon anglers drift with the tide.

In these storied waters, anglers find threadfin herring to be a favorite bait for tarpon. Collect choice 6-inch baits near bridges and channel markers and place them in the 281 CE's 38-gallon livewell in the leaning post. Like all Grady-White livewells, this one features a full-column distribution plenum to evenly circulate fresh seawater. A second 18-gallon livewell can also double as a fish box, although many tarpon anglers prefer using it for pass crabs and hand-pick shrimp.

With bait secured, anglers head to the beach to search for tarpon on the surface. Then it's time to remove the bow cushions, lower the cocktail table, and drop a crescent-shaped insert that extends from the table to the double console seat, transforming the entire bow into an expansive casting platform. Another noteworthy feature, made possible by the new Yamaha digital integrated electric steering, is the absence of hydraulic lines



Forward dining table lowers to create a massive casting deck or lounge with cushions. Below: Innovative side door swim platform hinges out with the touch of a button.



Courtesy of Grady-White

protruding from the engines and the elimination of the need for a splashwell. So, in effect, there's two platforms to safely cast from in the stern.

Grady-White can pre-rig the 281 CE for a bow trolling motor, complete with a swivel bracket, and three batteries for a 36V motor, which is essential for tarpon fishing. When the tide begins to slack, it's the perfect time to take the family to the sandbar. Shelling is a popular pastime on Sanibel and with the push of a button, the port-side gunnel extends to reveal a unique swim platform. Other family-friendly features include an 18-gallon freshwater system, a Bluetooth stereo with a waterproof touchscreen and six speakers, 12V and USB ports at the helm, and an electric-flush head in the console. —Steve Dougherty

LOA: 27'7" • **BEAM:** 9'4" • **DRAFT:** 19"
WEIGHT: 5,650 LBS. (W/O ENGINES)
FUEL: 160 GAL. • **MAX HP:** 600 HP

