

tested Grady-White Freedom 255



Freedom of Movement

Grady-White Freedom 255

BY ALAN JONES

To offshore fishing snobs, the dual-console fishing boat is something of a Rodney Dangerfield: It gets no respect. But those who have been aboard Grady-White's Freedom 255 know that you can have a serious fishing boat and a luxurious family-pleaser in one package without giving up your quest to have the best fishing year ever.

Unique Factor

For families, the Freedom 255 has a few advantages over center consoles. The consoles sit forward of amidships, which opens up the rear

of the boat, providing elbow room for fishing or entertaining with 60 square feet of guest-mingling space in the cockpit. Our test boat is even equipped with a Kenyon electric grill behind the captain's seat, so you can give that just-caught tuna a quick sear for the freshest seafood you've ever had, or throw some shrimp on the "barbie" during your sunset cruise for a heightened wow factor.

On rough days, windborne spray is the bane of center-console anglers, because that small rectangle optimistically known as a windshield might protect the captain if he leans toward the centerline, but the rest of

the passengers will be uniformly salted like a Lay's potato chip by the end of the day. The Freedom 255's windscreen is tall and wraps around, which kept us dry on a blustery test day on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, with 25-knot winds that kept even large sportfishing yachts inside Beaufort Inlet. The advantage is further realized on cold days, thanks to the folding dam that seals the gap between the consoles, effectively adding a month or two to the fishing season for anglers living on the Yankee side of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Performance

Our test boat is powered by Yamaha's V-8 brute, the F350, which is an excellent match for this hull, given the top speed of 47 mph at full fishing weight — loaded with offshore rods, reels, tackle and enough ice to handle the greatest day fishing ever. If you drop down to a smaller V-6 F300, according to Grady-White

test results, your top speed drops by 3.5 mph, which to me is the fine line between fast and half-fast.

Because the twin consoles move the center of gravity farther forward, there was scant bowrise and never a loss of horizon as the bow slightly pushed over in 4.2 seconds, with a 0-to-30-mph time of 10 seconds. Fuel economy, according to Yamaha's 5-inch color Command Link Plus display, peaked at 2.24 mpg at 4000 rpm and had us motoring along at a brisk 29.5 mph. The F350 loves the 4000-4500 rpm range and runs extremely quiet, measuring only 84 decibels at both speeds. Part of the quietude can be attributed to the wrap-around windshield, which also cuts down on wind noise, making normal conversation possible even when hauling bass at a high speed.

Handling

I've yet to pilot a Grady-White boat that I didn't immediately feel comfortable driving, and the Freedom 255 didn't break that streak. My favorite attribute of the SeaV2 hull is the fact you can drive any direction through the waves with little risk of slamming if you are working the drive-by-wire throttle properly. I recently took my 88-year-old father 40 miles offshore, fishing in a Grady-White during sloppy conditions, and he was quite comfortable, even though we cruised at speeds up to 40 mph in the chop. The SeaV2 uses a variable-degree hull that starts at 20 degrees at the stern and gradually sharpens to about 30 degrees amidships with an even sharper 50-something-degree entry.

Because the 255 runs so level at any speed, when we pointed into the head seas in the exposed part of the inlet, we could stay on plane without launching — a very handy trick. The sharp hull also allowed us to carve a tight horseshoe wake as we did an about-face.

Best Uses

Because this boat can handle any maritime chore from tuna fishing to tube towing (if you equip it with optional outriggers and a ski pylon), it will be a far easier sell to the spousal unit than a single-purpose tournament-rigged SKA boat. Especially when she sees the roomy head compartment in the port console. You get fishing features such as a cutting board, a 165-quart fishbox in the bow and six rod holders set into the gunwale. Throw in a massive 153-gallon fuel tank, and a run from Florida to the Bahamas or from California to Mexico is now in your range.

One problem with some dual-console boats is that the helm chair often puts you in a sitting-only position, which isn't the best arrangement in rough water, but the 255 has an electronically adjustable seat that scoots back far enough to stand comfortably. We could have used a grabrail behind the grill to provide a stand-up station for rough rides. But in the chop, the flippable stern bench is the best seat in the house. In calmer conditions, the twin bowrider seats are ergonomically sublime. The companion front/back seat gives the on-deck angler a great place to relax while waiting for a bite or a ski observer a perfect vantage point, and the whole unit can be opened to provide a fold-out sunning sleeper.

Preferred Setup

With a few options, the Freedom 255 can be transformed into the ultimate do-it-all machine. To maximize its fishing potential, opt for the 15-foot outrigger kit, the lighted 26-gallon livewell, the hardtop with rod holders, and a windlass, so bottom-fishing doesn't turn into a day of manual labor. For maximum entertainment, the bow table provides a great dining space, particularly if you choose the cockpit grill that replaces the wet bar. You'll want the port-side console equipped with an electric head with a 10-gallon holding tank, and no Freedom 255 would be complete without the six-speaker Kenwood stereo system.

GRADY-WHITE FREEDOM 255



SPECIFICATIONS

Length	24 ft., 9 in.
Beam	8 ft., 6 in.
Deadrise	20 degrees
Dry Weight	4,459 lbs.
Fuel Capacity	153 gals.

PERFORMANCE

	mph	rpm	dB
Peak	47	6000	92
Cruise	29.5	4000	84
Time to Plane			4.2 secs.
Time to 30 mph			10 secs.

POWER

Test	Yamaha F350
Max hp	350
Cylinders	V-8
Displacement	5.3L
Weight	804 lbs.
WOT Range	5000-6000 rpm
Base Price	w/Yamaha F350 \$101,971

VALUE-ADDED STANDARD FEATURES

Hydraulic trim tabs w/indicator lights, horizontal rod racks, tilt steering, freshwater shower w/20-gal. tank, portable toilet

MUST-HAVE OPTIONS

Hardtop, outriggers, ski pylon, electric flush toilet, livewell, windlass, sleeper seat, bow table, painted hull

BUILDER

Grady-White, gradywhite.com

FINANCING: \$731/month w/15% down and 6% interest for 15 years

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Owner Feedback Tom and Kaye Ertter, Beaufort, S.C.

PURCHASED AT HILTON HEAD BOATHOUSE, HILTON HEAD, S.C.

What we liked:

- Hardtop with rod holders
- Full-sized head compartment
- Wide beam and roomy cockpit
- Quality of Grady-White fit and finish
- Excellent ride in choppy water

What we would change:

I wish the fishbox weren't in the bow of the boat. When you have an angry cobia on the gaff, it would be better to have the fishbox in the stern.

Why we bought it:

This is my fourth Grady-White and the largest one I've owned. Once you've experienced the quality of this

brand, you'd be hard-pressed to buy anything else. I was impressed that they listened to our feedback and even incorporated two of our ideas in subsequent models. They even retrofitted my wife's suggestion for an additional grabrail onto our boat without charge. We fish for redfish, trout, flounder and cobia, and the 255 is well laid out for this type of fishing. Its shallow draft allows us to explore the creeks and rivers in this area, but it's substantial enough to be safe when it gets a little rough. We had the smaller



Freedom 225, but this one has more room thanks to the wider beam. We love to entertain and take trips to Hilton Head and Charleston, and we want to cruise to Savannah and Georgetown. As our three grandkids get a little older, we will be getting into watersports. **BW**



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- 6 Dual-console design yields a full-sized windshield
- 7 Bowrider seats sit atop massive fish boxes