



Grady White 191CE

boat sense: Inshore Fishing Boats

Welcome to the Fisherman's inaugural "Boat Sense" series! In the coming months, we will explore a number of boating topics including: inshore fishing boats, buying your first boat, dual console family boats, light tackle back bay boats, speed demon go-fast center consoles, how to tweak maximum range out of your current fishing boat, luxury 35- to 45-foot outboard fishing boats, a repowering guide on how to add new life to an old friend, all-weather cuddy cabin and pilot house boats, a sneak peek at some 2018 models and the latest in marine electronics. For this month's issue, we take a closer look at inshore "hybrid" craft that have been popping up at marinas over the past few years, so sit back and enjoy the ride.

BUILDER'S PERSPECTIVE

What constitutes the limits of inshore fishing? Certainly it includes the shallow back bays and channels, expansive open waterways, inlets, rips, ocean side beaches and wrecks and reefs that might be anywhere from 5 to 10 miles offshore. A vessel that explores this domain on a regular basis needs to possess certain attributes in order to successfully navigate an ever-changing environment of wind, varying water depths, currents, washboard chop, wind-against-tide, fickle weather patterns, a hot August sun, windblown spray and more. From a practical size standpoint, inshore boats that meet most of these requirements typically range from 17 to 25 feet in length, but as we all know, not all boats are created equal. To get a better feel for the true soul of the ideal

inshore fishing platform, I reached out to some of the industry leaders for their viewpoints on how they construct and accessorize their ultimate vision of the ideal candidate.

Grady-White currently offers a pair of "hybrid" boats - their 191 and 251 Explorer center consoles. These twins were designed to fill a niche, boats built for a specific set of "jack-of-all trade" requirements. To get additional insights on how these Explorers were birthed, I reached out to Grady-White's VP of Engineering, David Neese. According to David, "The original 251 Explorer was our initial hybrid model and was introduced a few years back, followed shortly by the smaller 191 CE, to offer our customers a smaller and more affordable version of the same basic shallow water approach. Even though Grady-White was one of the last players to the inshore hybrid dance, we spent quality research time designing a next-gen platform that put every square inch of internal space to good use. The Explorers differ from our regular center console lineup in that they have slightly lower gunwales to minimize wind resistance when drift fishing in shallow bays or inshore waterways. The lower gunwales also make it easier to get in and out of the boat on those days when you are splitting fishing time with family time and you decide to do some clamming in shallow water or head off to your favorite beach."

"We combine these lower gunwales with a wide beam, reverse chines and moderate aft deadrise (14.5 degrees for the 191 CE and 16 degrees for the 251 CE) to increase stability when working a rod from the roomy bow or stern casting platforms. Our Explorers feature twin livewells, built-in fishboxes that drain overboard even at rest, plenty of rod storage and more. They

can drift without grounding in 14 inches of water with the out-board drives up and either model can fish near offshore waters if you pick your days, hence the hybrid namesake.”

COMMON CORE

By this time, you’ve probably started to develop an understanding of the preferred standard features that some of the best and most advanced inshore boats have in common. However, you should also realize that these are not mandatory requirements for all inshore boats, just a wish-list of some of the most desirable features found on a handful of the top boats.

I recently purchased a used, smaller inshore boat for my family to enjoy on their aquatic adventures and many of these aforementioned common core features were definitely on my radar screen, but not all of them were included. Like the majority of boating decisions that are driven by need, opportunity, budget, safety, performance and more, I was forced to “compromise” and get the inshore boat that had the most of these need-driven items from a lengthy wish list, that ultimately blended them all into a safe, roomy and capable angling and entertainment platform.

When I was searching the usual internet websites and local boat dealers for my ultimate used inshore boat, I had established the following attributes that any boat to make the short list should/must have, broken down into the mandatory deal-breakers. That list is as follows:

Inshore Boat Must Have List:

- Positive foam flotation
- Self-bailing cockpit sole
- 20 inches of cockpit depth
- 25-inch transom height
- Recirculating livewell with self-bailing drain
- Raised forward casting platform
- Onboard or removable fishbox/cooler
- Basic rod storage
- Easy access to bilge pumps and wiring
- Wood-free construction, especially in the hull and transom
- Removable gas tank hatch
- Top-shelf boat builder
- Minimum 50-gallon fuel tank

As an experienced 36-year boat owner, boat tester and charter boat captain, the reasons for the mandatory must-haves were a straightforward no-brainer for me. My boat is going to be used by my kids and grandkids, so positive foam flotation, a self-bailing cockpit sole, 25-inch transom and a minimum of 20 inches of cockpit depth were total deal-breakers for me—and I walked away from dozens of boats during my two-year search because they lacked one of these critical components.

From an ergonomic standpoint, the concept of an inshore boat is to cover the gamut from the skinny water back bays to near-off-shore shark or deepwater fluke drifts 10 miles off the beach.

Hopefully, this first installment of our monthly Boat Sense column offered some useful ideas on searching for or equipping your ideal inshore boat. Next month’s column will cover buying your first boat, so our detailed mandatory and wish lists will make for a great starting-off point for our discussion.

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