

Grady-White 281 *Coastal Explorer*

DOUBLE DUTY. BY CHUCK WARREN



PHOTOS COURTESY
OF GRADY-WHITE



With more than 60 years of history in its wake, Greenville, North Carolina-based boating icon Grady-White has built a stellar reputation on a foundation of quality, reliability, innovation and performance.

Whether you're looking to fish close to shore for perch or walleye or want to run out to deep water chasing summer salmon, Grady-White has spent decades building generation after generation of tough but agile fishing vessels made to match every sportfishing desire.

The company also maintains one of the industry's highest customer satisfaction levels through close relationships with its customers and dealers, and listening to what they have to say.

LEGENDARY FISHING MACHINE

While the boat builder has always been known for an uncompromising commitment to quality and craftsmanship, it might have been challenging to use a word like luxurious while describing a Grady-White in the past. Terms like tough, reliable and sturdy would have been far more fitting.

However, Grady-White's new models regularly draw lasting looks from boaters with much less interest in fishing and more desire to purchase a single boat that can take on the fishing crew in the morning, get the kids out wakeboarding in the afternoon, and comfortably shuttle friends and family to the evening's sunset cruise. Simply put: Grady-Whites are now luxury boats.

The Grady-White 281 Coastal Explorer (CE) is not only capable of performing all of these tasks, but it has given up nothing to fit these needs. The 281 CE may offer pretty hull colors, underwater lighting and a ski arch, but it is every bit the legendary fishing machine as Grady-White models from previous decades.

SEE FOR MYSELF

I really wanted to see this boat for myself, so I took a ride down to Huron, Ohio, to meet Grady-White's marketing pro, Katie Creech. Katie had lined up a test ride in the 2023 281 CE — courtesy of Grady-White dealer South Shore Marine.

At the Huron Boat Basin, South Shore Marine's captain, Nick Elders, was waiting at the helm while we took in the boat's

beautiful lines and striking, pale blue hull color. Look close and you'll see a familiar profile that brings back memories of your grandparent's Grady-White and the summer you spent at their lake house.

The 281 CE is built on Grady-White's proprietary SeaV² hull. Designed exclusively for Grady-White, the SeaV² hull features — in Grady-White's own words — a "continuously variable vee" hull that starts with a lesser degree of deadrise at the transom and gradually sharpens into a deep-V design at the bow, providing a soft, dry ride.

Although the 281 CE is available with a single Yamaha 425-hp engine, our test boat featured two Yamaha 300-hp outboards.

It seems easy to question the demand for a single-engine option, but the lone 425-hp outboard will push the 281 CE to a very respectable 50 mph wide-open while using less fuel to do it. Other benefits include a lower purchase price, weight savings and lower maintenance costs.

BUILT FOR FUN

Onboard, Grady-White's world-renowned build quality is easy to see. So is the boat's sportfishing lineage. Rod holders and rocket launchers are everywhere you look, while flush-mount cleats ring the boat. Two huge, 70-quart fishwells are hidden beneath the forward seating. An 18-gallon livewell waits at the transom while an optional 38-gallon livewell can be found in the back of the leaning post.

True to its nature, the 281 CE includes lots of accessories that make fishing more fun. Hidden tackle boxes fill cabinet drawers, a 296-quart cooler fits under the console, and there is plenty of rod storage in the gunnels.

But it's equally easy to see that this boat was also built for comfort and fun. There is plenty of room to move around the boat, and passengers will find all kinds of extremely comfortable and innovative solutions waiting. Seatbacks swing to provide a wide variety of adjustments, easily converting benches into comfortable lounge seating.

At the helm, our test boat featured some popular options like Yamaha's Helm Master EX joystick controls and twin

Garmin touchscreen displays. A door on the helm's port side exposes a roomy head complete with a VacuFlush toilet.

The 281 CE is packed with creature comforts, but its best feature could be easily overlooked. With the touch of a button, several feet of hullside folds down to create the Sport Deck. The platform creates an extra swim platform, and the removable ladder with dedicated storage helps passengers get back onboard easily.

BONE-DRY RIDE

Whether rigged with the twin 300s or the single 425-hp engine, the 281 CE cruises at approximately 29 mph. However, at wide-open throttle, the twin 300s win out with a top speed of 57.5 mph — nearly an 8 mph advantage over the single 425.

Throttle up and the boat jumps out of the water with very little bow rise before quickly flattening out on plane. Grady-White's SeaV² provides terrific performance with tight, smooth turns, no skipping and a bone-dry ride.

This boat is a perfect example of a company's ability to aim at and hit multiple targets. With the 281 CE, Grady-White has created a high-performance center console that can hunt big fish in the morning and tow wakeboarders all afternoon.

The bottom line is Grady-White built a boat capable of meeting a wide variety of wants and needs so that everyone can climb aboard and spend a great day on the water. Whether you are serious about fishing or serious about fun, the 2023 Grady-White 281 Coastal Explorer can pull double duty and handle both tasks with ease. ★



GRADY-WHITE 281 CE

» SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 27'7"
 Beam: 9'4"
 Draft: 17"
 Weight: 5,650 lbs.
 Fuel Capacity: 160 gals.
 Water Capacity: 18 gals.
 Max Power: 600 hp
 MSRP: Contact dealer
GRADYWHITE.COM

» DEALERS

South Shore Marine
SOUTHSHOREMARINE.COM
 Demasdon's Boat Works
DESMASDONS.COM
 Drummond Marine
DRUMMONDMARINE.COM
 Jerry's Majestic Marine
JERRYSMAJESTIC.COM
 The Boat House
BOATHOUSEH2O.COM

✓ Roomy enclosed head. Huge storage space below forward center seat.

✗ Would be nice to have dedicated step pads on gunnels for easier dockside boarding.



Watch the video at LAKELANDBOATING.COM