



Clockwise from top: This crossover offers anglers lots of fishing amenities; the entire bow can transform from a casting platform to a family fun-in-the-sun center.



FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

The new Grady-White 281 CE blends the best of fishing and water sports fun.

By Steve Davis

The best way to test a boat is to take it out on what some would call a crummy day. It was definitely not a beach day when I walked down the dock at MarineMax in Pensacola, Florida, to take a ride on Grady-White's 281 CE, the new addition to the inshore/offshore Coastal Explorer series. A storm front had just passed through that made my flight circle the airport for 45 minutes before it headed off to bring tornadoes to the eastern side of Florida. It was cool, cloudy, windy, and rainy, but the ride was smooth, steady, and stable as we played around in Pensacola Bay. As Grady-White describes it, the 281 CE is "an inshore piece of Heaven with an offshore peace of mind."

The Grady-White SeaV² hull design is the foundation for this versatile fishing and family-fun model. Tagged as a "sandbar chariot," the 281 CE is designed to venture out to deep waters yet easily go shallow where others in her class might not. "This model is really meant to be that perfect crossover, the sandbar chariot while also having all the fishing features," says Katie Creech of Grady-White. In other words, anglers can fish offshore in the morning and then take the family to the sandbar or the beach in the afternoon. She has all the amenities, features, and creature comforts for both.

Let's Talk Fishing

The SeaV² hull is designed to handle the waves with its continuously variable-V design. "On this boat, it's a little bit different than previous models," says Creech. "It's still a SeaV² hull design, but in the back of the transom, deadrise is about sixteen degrees, much shallower than our other styles. However, it is similar in that it continuously sharpens going forward, so amidship, it is around thirty degrees and up to around fifty degrees at the bow stem." The hull also has a shallower draft, about 19 inches, to get close to the shore, and with the strakes and the Carolina-style flare, the boat stays dry, which was evident as we powered out into the Pensacola Bay chop.

There are padded bolsters all around, and the optional Elite lean bar has Command Elite captain's chairs with flip-up bolsters and armrests. The Deluxe lean bar is

standard but with bench seating. Both lean bars include tackle storage, separate knife and plier holders, rod holders, rigging station with a recessed freshwater shower, cutting board, bait locker, and a 38-gallon insulated raw-water livewell. There's also an 18-gallon insulated livewell under the transom bench with a 500-gph pump that offers plenty of room for bait so you can fill both 70-quart fish boxes in the bow. In addition, a 296-quart cooler under the forward console seat with a removable divider is the spot for drinks, lunch, snacks, and, perhaps, the fish caught on that perfect day when the other fish boxes are full.

The entire bow area can transform into a casting platform. With the cushions removed and the casting platform insert (along with an optional crescent-shaped insert that connects the bow seating to the forward console), anglers have full range across the bow.

Back at the transom, the newly designed aft bench can configure for three different uses. For fishing, remove the cushions and swing the port and starboard backrests aft as well as remove the optional center backrest to create a raised casting platform with ample space to pull in your catch on the lower engine mount platform.

"An interesting thing about this model that I've not seen on another Grady is that there's no engine well, it's just flat back there," says Creech. "So you have a Euro transom design without the well, and you can actually come back here and have another fishing platform." The backrests can also act as a bolster when on the engine platform. Swing the backrests back, insert the optional center backrest, and add the cushions to reset the comfortable bench seating.

The 281 CE is available with a single Yamaha 425 or a dual Yamaha 300 engine configuration, both with digital integrated electric steering. Standard steering is through the Helm Master EX, but does not include the joystick. The option then is the Full Maneuverability Helm Master EX that includes the joystick and autopilot.

"My opinion is it's pretty much like a rocket ship," says Andrew Haring, a MarineMax Pensacola team member who is at the helm. "I mean, on a calm day, it comfortably runs at fifty miles an hour with these three hundreds. This boat, when I took it out, got up to sixty, but obviously I'm not running



The 281 CE transom has a variety of setups for fishing or water sports with the option for single or twin outboards.

that fast for that long, but comfortably, fifty miles an hour.”

Another fishing option is a trolling motor swivel mounting bracket with quick release, head stabilizer, three 12-volt batteries, and a 20-amp battery charger. The choice of trolling motor is up to you.

Let's Talk Family

If the family loves to fish, then they'll appreciate all the features noted above. But if cruising around and playing in the water is the name of the game, then Grady-White has done its job in making the 281 CE a “sandbar chariot.”

To start, Grady-White has designed an innovative cockpit side door that sets it apart from other boats in that style—the new portside Sport Deck. “It was very evolutionary for Grady because, like many other manufacturers, we got into the cockpit door game in the past decade or so,” explains Creech. “This is going to be completely different because it's much wider than your average cockpit door, and it opens out to be a deck instead of just swinging in on the hinges.... It is electro-mechanically controlled and is the only one on the market right now that's a standard feature.” A sturdy, four-step ladder is fitted to the door deck for swimming, diving, etc., and is removable (with its own storage cabinet under the gunwale) so it can act as a flat deck for fishing. It's not meant for boarding at the dock as the door opens outward. Additionally, there is a pull-out, single pole ladder with folding steps that stows within the hull at the transom.

When you add all the cushions back after a morning of fishing, there is abundant seating and sunpad options both in the bow and the stern. Besides the port and starboard swing-away transom backrests, the bow seating on each side include electro-mechanically adjustable backrests for comfort. There's also an optional bow table.

Rarely a day goes by without music, and the standard stereo system, which includes a waterproof color touchscreen

display, an AM/FM tuner, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity, and speakers with LED lights in the bow, cockpit, and T-top will satisfy music lovers of any age. Speaking of which, there are accessory outlets and USB ports in the console to keep devices charged.

Seating and music are important, but most of all, the 281 CE offers a sizable console cabin area for a marine head with electric flush. The holding tank with macerator has overboard discharge and a deck pump-out. The cabin is lockable to keep gear and valuables safe when off the boat and has a composite cherry and holly sole. Another family advantage is the optional SureShade electrically retractable cockpit shade for shelter from the hot sun as well as an “Easy Up Bow Shade” for those in the bow. Cold drinks are also refreshing, and as mentioned, the 296-quart cooler under the bow lounge seat will hold plenty.

For those who like to ski or wakeboard or tube, an optional ski pylon is available with the twin 300 outboard setup, while a ski arch is available if the boat has the single 425 outboard package. Either way, the water is always invigorating on a hot day, and that flat Euro transom platform makes it easy to get into and out of the water.

“For me, personally, I think this boat is the perfect size for a great inshore boat,” says one of MarineMax's deckhands walking by on the dock. “And if you still want to go forty miles out, you can definitely go forty miles out.”

“Grady's are notoriously overbuilt because they're built for saltwater,” adds Creech. “They're built for rough seas, and you'll be able to put your family on it and feel comfortable and safe.”

Grady-White has succeeded in designing a family boat that is easy to handle and has loads of standard features on a stable platform for an exceptionally comfortable day on the water. Whether fishing or playing sandbar chariot, the 281 CE is an outstanding crossover for Grady-White Boats. 🍷

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA (w/o engines): 27' 7"

Beam: 9' 4"

Draft: 1' 7"

Weight (w/o engines): 5,650 lbs.

Maximum HP: 600

Fuel: 160 U.S. gals.

Optimum Cruise: 29.8 mph (425 outboard);
29.1 mph (twin 300 outboards)

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