

GRADY-WHITE 251 COASTAL EXPLORER



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BY CAPT. DAVE LEAR

TEST CONDITIONS

WEATHER:	Sunny
LOCATION:	Perdido Bay, Alabama
WIND:	SW 15 to 18 knots
SEA STATE:	1- to 2-foot chop
TEST LOAD:	Two adults, 35 gallons of fuel, no water



In current usage, the term “hybrid” most often refers to a car propelled by either a gasoline engine or electric motor. But it also means something distinctive that’s made by combining two different elements. Grady-White’s 251 Coastal Explorer represents the latest example of that in the marine world. This new model — not a bay boat and not a pocket center console either — is a hybrid in a class all its own.

The backside of a summer front provided the perfect conditions to test the 251’s mettle. With help from the local dealer, Gulf Shores Marine Max, we exited the no-wake zone and

throttled into a choppy Perdido Bay. Even with the stacked 2-footers, the ride was as soft as a microfiber cloth, and absolutely bone dry regardless of heading. I didn’t get a bit of spray, even in beam seas with the wind whipping whitecaps into a froth. The CE handles like my old Alfa Romeo too, gripping the water in sharp turns like a low-slung convertible — and just as exhilarating. It’s an absolute blast to drive, with no surprises.

Sporting Grady’s proven SeaV2 variable deadrise hull with 16 degrees at the transom, the CE quite capably runs to nearshore reefs and barrier islands, yet the 14-inch draft lets



The console gives the operator a comfortable and ergonomic vantage point.



The insulated 51-quart fish box on the aft casting deck augments the two larger boxes in the bow.



The starboard compartment below the bow casting deck holds four large tackle boxes.



When the fish aren’t biting, passengers can relax on the forward-facing seats incorporated into the bow casting deck.

Length: 24'7"	Beam: 8'6"	Draft: 14"	Fuel: 78 gal.	Max hp: 300
Weight: 3,550 lb. (hull only)	Base Price: \$97,715 with F300 Yamaha outboard	Grady-White Boats: 252-752-2111; gradywhite.com		

you slip into the back bays and tidal creeks to chase flounder, stripers or reds. A long-shaft trolling motor may be added as an option. The boat comes with a Yamaha F250 or F300 four-stroke outboard, and both provide plenty of oomph. Factory tests with the 250 produced a top speed of over 45 mph. During my trial with a 300 on the stern, we clocked 51.5 mph at 5,800 rpm with a fuel burn of 26.1 gph. Cruising at 3,500 rpm, the 300 makes 3.46 mpg, which translates into an impressive range with the 78-gallon tank.

True to its North Carolina heritage, the 251 is a fishing boat foremost, albeit with a nod for family outings at the beach. For starters, plenty of rod storage in strategic locations includes four holders in the covering boards and three more vertical per side straddling the bow casting deck. The deluxe leaning post on the test model holds four more, and you double

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that with the T-top rocket launcher. The split passenger cushion on the leaning post conceals the 25-gallon livewell with full-column water distribution, lighted and finished in light blue to keep the baits calm. On the backside, facing into the cockpit, are lockable tackle drawers. There’s more storage in the removable boxes under the aft jump seats, complementing the two compartments in the bow. Large items stow in the one to port, while four racked tackle boxes sit in the starboard bow compartment.

The 251 is set up well to handle banner catches. A 51-quart fish box sits on the centerline of the aft casting deck. Twin 74-quart boxes are mounted in the bow. All are insulated, drain overboard, and come with finished hatch lids for quick cleaning. For easy drink access, there’s yet another built-in cooler in the forward console seat, plus 10 cup holders throughout the boat.

The helm on the 251 offers a



commanding vantage point with good sight lines. A wraparound acrylic windshield provides protection, while the tilt hydraulic steering and angled footrest add to the comfort level. The dash has more than enough room for the largest displays, and the system rocker switches sit in easy-to-reach, well-identified panels. The optional fiberglass T-top comes with a radio box, radar mount, dome and spreader lights, storage net, and the aforementioned rocket launcher. The console’s starboard hatch opens into the head compartment with a portable head, lighting (natural and electric), and storage. These spaces aren’t gigantic, but they’re certainly not claustrophobic either, and they provide privacy.

Simple yet sturdy mechanisms lock the backs of the aft jump seats, as well as two more stowaways on the bow casting deck, into a forward-facing position for

lounging. A quick pop drops them back down. A complete cushion package is an available option, as is the bow casting insert, which converts to a table. Other notable add-ons include a stowable bow boarding ladder for beach moorings, plus raw-water and freshwater washdown with 10-gallon capacity.

In keeping with Grady-White’s meticulous standards, only premium resins and durable hardware go into the CE. The fit and finish, as expected from this high-end builder, means hatches fit snugly yet don’t rub; the hull doesn’t pop and slap while underway; and wiring harnesses are neatly organized. All mark quality construction, promising the buyer long, dependable service and top value when it does come time to trade. It’s hard to typecast a model that performs equally well shallow and deep, but the 251 CE does just that, with a style — and a flair — all its own. 🏆

■ PERFORMANCE

RPM	MPH	GPH
4,000	33.5	11.4
4,500	37.9	15.0
5,000	42.9	19.5
5,500	48.0	25.4
5,800	51.5	26.1
With F300 Yamaha four-stroke outboard		

SUPERIOR SPEED AND IMPRESSIVE RANGE: Pushed by a 300 hp Yamaha, the 251 CE has the quickness to get you to the fishing grounds in a hurry, and the efficiency to let you cruise long distances without stopping to refuel.

