

Generational Favorite

Grady-White's 20-foot walkarounds have been pleasing anglers and boating families for decades—and most are still going strong.

by John Page Williams



John Bidahel Photos

Capt. Jon Schomig puts *Goose*, his 1984 Grady-White 204-C Overnighter, through her paces.

In 1968, when Eddie Smith Jr. was a young entrepreneur, three years out of college but well-schooled in business by his father, he and his family bought Grady-White Boats Inc. from founders Glenn Grady and Don White. The nine-year-old company had been building superior 16- to 33-foot lapstrake wooden boats that proved themselves in the rough waters off North Carolina, but its founders were struggling to make the transition to fiberglass.

Hiring good people to work for him, Smith made that shift quickly and successfully. Over the next 39 years, he has built Grady-White into an award-winning boatbuilding powerhouse by striving for top-quality workmanship and paying careful attention to detail while listening carefully to customers and dealers. He and his experienced team have also taken advantage of the oppor-

tunities offered by advances in materials, manufacturing techniques and four-stroke outboard power. As a result, Grady-White boats have set a standard for quality for decades. The company's current model lineup extends from 18 to 36 feet, and even older Gradys manage to command a good price in the used-boat market.

Goose is a fine example. She is a 1984 204-C Overnighter, a 20-foot, 4-inch outboard boat currently powered by a 2001 Honda 130 four-stroke. Capt. Jon Schomig and his family have owned her for nine years, keeping her in a marina slip near Annapolis, Maryland, where she serves three generations of the Schomig family as a cruiser, fishboat and "boat-ride boat." Schomig maintains both boat and engine carefully, and *Goose* continues to suit her family's needs very well. Between Grady-White

quality and Honda durability, she's got a lot of good years left in her.

Design and Construction

The basic look of nearly all Grady-White hulls built under Smith's ownership harks back to the brand's classic wooden boats, with a pretty sheer, a Carolina flare in the bow and a clipper stem. Smith and his design team were among the earliest to combine a semi-V bottom with reversed chines and longitudinal bottom strakes, to provide lift, a dry ride and stability, especially when at rest and trolling. Since the mid-1980s, Grady-White's sheerlines have risen gracefully about halfway forward, just as they do on larger Carolina sportfishermen.

Goose's bottom has less deadrise than the C. Raymond Hunt Associates-designed SeaV2 hulls used by all Gradys since 1993, but there's still plenty of "V"

at a glance

GRADY-WHITE
204-C OVERNIGHTER

Grady-White Boats, Inc.
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P.O. Box 1527
Greenville, NC 27835
252-752-2111
www.gradywhite.com

Designer:**204-C Overnighter—Grady-White Design Team****208 Adventure—C. Raymond Hunt Associates****Details** (208 specs in parentheses)

Production.....	1979–1992
	(Replaced by 208 Adventure in 1993)
LOA.....	20' 4"
Beam.....	8' (8' 1")
Draft.....	14"
Deadrise.....	15° (18°)
Transom height.....	25"
Transom width.....	7' 10"
Maximum power.....	230 hp (250 hp)
Fuel.....	65 gals. (82 gals.)
Weight w/o engine.....	2,300 lbs. (2,900 lbs.)
Price range.....	\$4,500–\$48,000 (new 208)

for a savvy skipper like Schomig, who has learned his boat well. The power trim on the Honda allows him to adjust the sharp bow entry down to cleave head seas and up to ride the backs of following seas. The boat is also well balanced, so she planes at low speeds, allowing Schomig to slow down to the mid-teens when the going gets rough. He and his wife are comfortable taking *Goose* on weekend cruises, and hard-core anglers in the Northeast happily fish her sisters in rougher coastal waters.

Traditional—and meticulous—hand-laid fiberglass construction has been a hallmark of Grady-White hulls since the boatbuilder's transition from wood. The stringer grid system is plywood (now pressure-treated), which offers an excellent strength-to-weight ratio if properly encased in fiberglass the way Grady-White's crews have always done it. Today's fiberglass materials and resins may have improved and the fabrics may be computer-cut for uniformity, but



*Schomig and his wife found *Goose's* cabin too basic for sleeping. It serves them well as a storage space for gear.*

Goose's carefully built hull remains rock-solid after 23 years.

On Deck

From the wooden-boat days through 1974, Grady-White boats were laid out as traditional runabouts with forward windshields or as cruisers. Starting in 1975, however, the company began adding new models following the recent trend to center consoles and the emerging move to the walkaround cabin. The walkaround layout actually evolved from the center console, adding weather protection and a small cabin to the 360-degree openness and inherently good balance of a center console. The layout was a nearly instant success with coastal anglers and others who wanted weather protection and stability. Grady-White didn't invent the walkaround cabin, but the builder embraced it early and became a leading proponent of the breed.

By 1984, when *Goose* was built, the company had worked out the arrangement that endures in today's 208 Adventure, which replaced the 204-C. Pedestal helm and companion seats mount on storage boxes. The newer 208 Adventure offers a lockable electronics box at the helm, but *Goose* does just fine with a compact fishfinder and GPS bracket-mounted on the broad flat surface forward of the dash, while the VHF is mounted vertically within easy reach

on the inside of the companionway door. A navy top with side curtains and zippered vents over the windshield provides protection from sun, rain, wind and spray.

Behind the helm, port and starboard boxes serve both as steps to the bow walkway and as aft-facing seats when fitted with cushions. Beneath, both extend under the walkway, with the port box plumbed to serve as a cooler or livewell and the starboard one as a fishbox. On the inside of each is a vertical rack that holds three fishing rods. (Schomig has placed dowels in the port rack to hold coiled dock lines.) Cushioned jump seats in the stern quarters house the primary battery (to starboard) and cleaning supplies (to port). Between them, on the forward edge of the splashwell, is a small bait cooler in a lift-out tray that provides access to the bilge. The rest of the cockpit is open.

The 12-inch-wide walkaround channel provides good bow access, with handholds on the top's sturdy stainless frame and the bow rail. The anchor locker is hidden below a seat molded into the front of the cuddy cabin. This arrangement allows younger boaters to feel the wind in their faces while sitting safely inside the boat and in plain sight of the skipper.

No boat lasts 23 years without the replacement of some operating systems.

Several years ago, Schomig became concerned about corrosion in *Goose's* 65-gallon aluminum fuel tank, which sits below a screwed and bedded hatch under the cockpit sole. Replacing it with a new custom tank, built to Grady specs, took care, but it was well within the basic skills of this handy owner. He also replaced the navy top two years ago.

There's a wealth of information on the subject of maintenance on the Grady-White website, including PDFs of owners' manuals and catalogs from 1968 through 2007, plus one catalog from the wooden-boat era. Like other classic marques, Grady-White has also attracted a group of loyal owners who maintain a website (www.greatgrady.com) where members can ask questions, exchange information about projects, provide photographs of their boats and advertise boats and equipment for sale. The site's forum contains several entries about projects for 204-Cs and 208s, including

construction of a belowdecks platform between the helm and companion seats for a pair of batteries and a switch.

Belowdecks

Jon Schomig spent one night in *Goose's* cabin. That was enough. When he and his wife cruise, they make good use of inns and bed-and-breakfasts. The cabin is great, however, for providing a head (portable in this case) and a spot where grandchildren can get out of the sun to nap. It also provides secure storage for electronics and other valuables, including his son Jeff's fishing tackle. Larger Grady walkarounds offer a broad range of amenities belowdecks, but the 204-C and the 208 are simple boats with minimal wiring and plumbing, which is a virtue to their owners.

Power and Performance

Goose is rated for 230 horsepower, and her younger 208 sisters can handle 250

horsepower, but that power is overkill for most owners. In our sea trial, the Honda 130 provided a top speed of 34 mph at 5800 rpm, but the sweet spot was cruising at 20 to 23 mph (4000 to 4200 rpm). The boat planed cleanly at 13 mph (3000 rpm), a speed at which she can slog home in truly nasty seas if necessary. Yamaha's F150 four-stroke is a popular choice with new 208 Adventures, providing a top speed of 39.2 mph at 5500 rpm, with best cruise at 26 to 29 mph (4000 to 4200 rpm and fuel burn of 7 to 8 gph), according to Yamaha.

Running through boat wakes up to three feet was no challenge for *Goose*, but it was apparent that learning how to dial in the combination of heading, speed and trim pays dividends. Jon Schomig knows his boat, and the two of them inspire confidence. I did take a turn at the helm to try a couple of dirty tricks, like banking her into a two-foot wake so she would pound on the

reversed chine under her bow flare. She came down hard, but that's not something a skipper would normally do. She threw no spray during our maneuvers. The bottom strakes and the chines on both the older Grady-White hulls and the SeaV2s are very effective in deflecting spray.


Goose is also very maneuverable. She's small enough to help Schomig fish the pilings of docks, but she also handles well when he trolls around bridge pilings and in open water. In both situations, the Honda purrs, providing excellent speed control to make Schomig's lures swim properly.

Price and Availability

Grady-White quality doesn't come cheap. A new 208 Adventure with an F150 lists in the neighborhood of \$48,000. A check of boats offered on www.greatgrady.com over the past four months turned up prices from \$4,500

(a '79 204-C with a 1984 engine) to \$39,000 (an '06 208 with an F150), with the bulk from the late '80s and early to mid-'90s in the range of \$10,000 to \$20,000. Those boats represent bargains for a handy person prepared to invest some elbow grease and stay current with issues like engines, wiring, fuel tanks and canvas. Several of these boats included trailers. The 204-C and the 208 weigh 4,500 to 5,000 pounds on the road, so it doesn't take a huge truck to tow them.

Conclusions

At one time the 204-C and 208 together constituted Grady-White's all-time best-seller. A couple of larger boats have since claimed that title, but even today, the 208 ranks near the top. 

John Page Williams reviews boats for Offshore from his home in Annapolis, Maryland.