



HIGH SEAS

AMERICAN EXPRESS

THE NEW EXPRESS 340 FROM NORTH CAROLINA-BASED GRADY-WHITE BOATS BLENDS LUXURY WITH SERIOUS OFF-SHORE FISHING MUSCLE

BY HOWARD WALKER

» Call it boat show blinders. Gaze at any shiny new boat perched high in some convention center hall, and it's easy to get all glassy-eyed over those fancy features. The stark-white, diamond-quilted upholstery. The mega-watt stereo with its neon-flashing speakers. The ice bucket with chilled bubbly on the mirror-varnished cockpit table. It all conjures blissful images of a sunny Florida day, hanging with the family on some deserted sandbar, toes in the water, butt in the sand. As chief Parrothead Jimmy Buffett sang: "Shells sink, dreams float. Life's good on our boat."

But all those fancy doodads mean nothing when you're 40 miles offshore, fishing your favorite grouper hole and the weather takes a turn for the worse. Suddenly, you're facing frothy whitecaps, howling gusts,



COURTESY OF GRADY-WHITE BOATS

driving rain, and looks of abject terror from the crew.

It's times like these when you'll be glad to be behind the helm of a Grady-White. Take the North Carolina builder's brand-new Express 340; this is the Mack truck of family cruisers—cum—fishing machines.

It's the successor to Grady's Express 330 that was in production for more than 20 years and saw more than 1,200 examples built. To fill those huge Sebagos, the company reimagined the entire boat, focusing on more fish-catching capability, practicality, and comfort.

What hasn't changed is Grady-White's wave-cleaving SeaV² hull design, penned in collaboration with famed naval architects Ray Hunt Design, creators of the legendary Hunt deep-V hull. The variable-dead rise

hull lets it power through waves like a hot knife through warm butter. Throw in wide chines and precision strokes, along with a high freeboard and pronounced bow flare, and the Express 340 effortlessly deflects spray and adds lift for a drier, smoother ride. The 11-foot-7-inch beam only enhances the stability.

And talk about power. With standard twin Yamaha XTO 450 outboards hanging off the transom, the Express 340 is good for a 52-mph top speed. Upgrade to triple 350 Yamahas and you'll top 57 mph. The 340-gallon tank should give serious range when you're heading offshore.

No, the exterior design won't spin heads like some plumb-bowed Euro offering from Axopar, Saxdor, or Fjord. But there's classic elegance that comes with the upward sweep of the gunwale, the lovely pointy bow, and the towering windshield.

Speaking of which, the screen is new for the 340 and features curvier glass. An all-new hardtop is now supported by thicker molded uprights rather than thin, powder-coated tubing.

Grady-White makes a big deal about listening to its owners, and the clever redesign of the cockpit and helm areas is said to have been a direct result of customer input. There's now an extra side door on the starboard for hauling in that big catch or easier boarding from the dock. Gone is the previous transom door; in its place are 166-quart and 87-quart fish boxes and a 30-gallon insulated live well. The helm was moved from a central

POWER FILE

LENGTH: 33 FEET, 6

INCHES BEAM: 11 FEET, 7

INCHES DRAFT: 27 INCHES

POWER: 2 X YAMAHA 450

OR 3 X YAMAHA 350 FUEL

CAPACITY: 340 GALLONS

TOP SPEED: 57 MPH WITH

350S WHY WE LOVE IT:

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ICONIC EXPRESS 330.



position across to the starboard side, allowing for a big copilot seat to port and a new cabin entryway in the middle.

The cabin area has had a major makeover and is now far more practical. As before, there's a rear sleeping space under the cockpit. But instead of a black hole with the headroom of a car trunk, there's a proper cabin perfect for

the kids or even the owner to overnight. Up front, the forward dinette converts to a double via a drop-down table. There's also a well-thought-out galley and a separate head with shower opposite. Throughout the cabin, the upgrade in quality is impressive, with new choices of upholstery—I love the seagrass panels—and lighter, more contemporary wood finishes.

With this new Express 340, Grady-White has certainly finessed its dual roles of hardcore fishing boat and super-comfortable family cruiser. It should be good enough to take it through the next 20 years. ◀◀