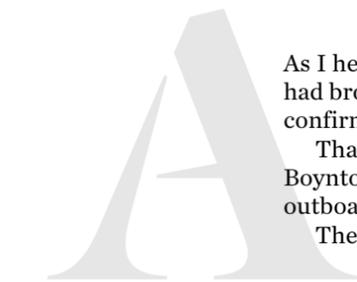


BY JIM HENDRICKS

COBIA 261CC

Maximum Interior Space Combines with Efficiency and Ease of Ownership



As I helped Capt. Ryan Buel load gear and ice aboard the test boat, I silently questioned whether he had brought the wrong Cobia model. It seemed too spacious for a 26-footer. Yet a check of the badge confirmed that this was the new Cobia 261CC. We had not left the dock, and I was already impressed.

That trend continued as we spun the 261CC around in the tight quarters of the launch ramp in Boynton Beach, Florida, and exited the nearby inlet. Propelled by twin Yamaha F150 four-cylinder outboards, the boat sped smoothly across the two-foot chop of the Atlantic at 35 mph.

The 261CC rides like a bigger boat. I could feel its solid construction as it plied the seas with neither

rattles nor creaks. The deep-V hull carved turns at speed with precision and comfort. The high, flaring bow knocked spray down and away.

Buel's plan for this mid-May Fish Trial consisted of scouting for signs of fish offshore while trolling for blackfin tuna, mahimahi and wahoo. Along this stretch of Florida's east coast, it's an easy jaunt to blue water. The undulating Gulf Stream swings in close, and the bottom drops off quickly. We ran only about a mile off the beach before finding a healthy weed line and packs of skittering flyers.

Cobia's new 261CC offers outstanding performance, great fuel efficiency and superb handling when powered by a pair of Yamaha F150 outboards.

I took over the wheel as Buel fed out the trolling lines with the engine speed set at 2,000 rpm (as indicated on the standard Yamaha 6YC information display), which moved the 261CC at a clip of about 9 mph. The SeaStar Solutions hydraulic steering system made easy work of piloting the boat.

WIDE STANCE

The 9-foot-3-inch beam provided plenty of room to maneuver and work lines in the aft cockpit.

PERFORMANCE

POWER Twin Yamaha F150 outboards
LOAD 100 gal. fuel, two crew
TOP SPEED 50.3 mph @ 6,000 rpm
TIME TO 30 MPH 6.4 sec.
BEST MPG 2.53 @ 27.1 mph (3,500 rpm)

HULL

LOA 26 ft. 1 in.
BEAM 9 ft. 3 in.
DEADRISE 21.5 deg.
DRY WEIGHT 4,600 lb. (w/o engines)
DRAFT 1 ft. 5 in.
FUEL 161 gal.
MAX POWER 400 hp

BASE MSRP \$102,452 (w/ twin Yamaha F150s)

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I noticed that the wide beam also enhanced stability while we trolled in the trough. Padded coaming bolsters on each side of the 25-inch-high gunwales cushion your knees and thighs, while stainless-steel toe rails let you lock in your feet at deck level.

The 261CC offers three gunwale rod holders on each side of the aft cockpit, which allowed Buel to position a pair of rods in the forward holders with lines clipped to the Rupp Revolution outriggers (using mounts integrated into aft stanchions of the optional deluxe hardtop). A pair of flat lines were trolled from the middle rod holders, and wire-line trolling rods were set in the aft rod holders.

Cobia also placed two gunwale rod holders in the transom (for trolling lines down the middle) and two optional pairs flanking the bow for kite-fishing, once again lending the 261CC a big-boat feel. I found optional vertical rod stowage in a rack of four tubes abaft the helm seat, and another five on the aft edge of the hardtop, plus optional kingfish rod holders at the corners.

We trolled lures and rigged ballyhoo, but this Cobia can also carry a good supply of live bait thanks to the 29-gallon transom livewell with its clear acrylic lid. A pair of insulated 45-gallon in-sole

The 261CC is available with a deluxe hardtop that allows for flush-mounting of stereo speakers and spreader lights.

The 3-foot-wide helm panel will accommodate one 12-inch or two 10-inch flush-mounted multifunction displays.

fish lockers flank the aft deck, giving you abundant room to ice your catch.

You can also stow plenty of tackle and fishing tools in drawers and in a cabinet within the module that serves as the base for the helm seating. The stowage is particularly easy to access when you deploy the foldout transom bench seat, allowing you to sit and rig lines. A removable backrest fits into the transom rod holders. The bench easily folds into its own recess when it's time to clear the decks. There's additional room to stow gear in cabinets on both sides of the module.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

With the trolling lines set, Buel shared his impressions of the new Cobia. Serving as a marine technician as well as a sea-trial captain for the Marine Connection, a Cobia Boats dealership in West Palm Beach, Florida, Buel gets to see vessels from every angle. He is particularly impressed with Cobia.

"I do a lot of boat rigging, so I see how boats are put together on the inside,"



he explained. "I've found that the electrical-wire assemblies and other systems are top-quality, very neat, and easy to access. I can't say that about all boats I work on."

When it comes to installing marine electronics, Buel said he likes to flush-mount one or even two multifunction displays in the 36-inch-wide dash panel of the 261CC. It's the buyer's decision, but he usually suggests a single Garmin GPSMAP 7612 or a pair of Garmin GPSMAP 7610 displays.

As we relaxed in the twin adjustable high-back helm seats, each featuring fold-down armrests and flip-up bolsters, Buel told me that the 261CC is ideally suited to the weekend warrior.

"This boat is great for dads who love





Left: With the addition of seating pads and a forward filler cushion, the bow becomes a seating area. Foldout backrests turn each side into a lounger. **Above:** Abundant tackle storage resides abaft and below the helm seats.

to fish but also like to take Mom and the kids to the sandbar,” he explained. “The level, self-bailing grit-style nonskid deck makes cleanup easy, whether it’s fish blood or sand from the kids climbing back aboard.” Two spigots, one in each stern quarter, offer both raw- and freshwater washdown options, and racks under each gunwale allow you to stow a deck brush as well as gaffs, boathooks and fishing rods.

For sandbar days, a port transom door offers easy access to the swim platforms bracketing the outboards. A stainless-steel foldout boarding ladder makes it easy to climb aboard after a swim.

FAMILY FUN

In a nod to luxury, the 261CC features a pair of 18-by-67-inch seating pods in the bow, which also serve as forward-facing loungers when you swing the backrests out from the gunwales. Use the filler cushion to bridge the pods and create wraparound seating. When it’s time to fish, stow the filler cushion, remove the seat cushions, and fold away the backrests. Under each seat is great stowage, and there’s also a cavernous locker under the forward deck.

The 261CC abounds with convenient storage, including two overhead boxes in

the optional deluxe hardtop and a handy cubby below the helm station — a great place for stashing cellphones, wallets and tubes of sunscreen.

With 21-inch-wide walkways alongside the console, the layout of the 261CC lets you easily move forward and aft, and I found that the recessed anodized-aluminum bow rail offered an extra measure of security as I checked out the features in the forward cockpit. This included a forward door that swings open to port, offering access to the step-down head compartment within the console. Here I found 6 feet of headroom and an optional permanent pump-out marine head. With the console door shut, you get a high-back seat on the forward console with an insulated 52-quart cooler underneath for drinks and cold goods.

Farther forward, under the forepeak, I found a big anchor locker equipped with an optional vertical windlass, an in-stem anchor roller/chute, and a raw-water washdown for rinsing mud and sand from the rode.

FAST AND EFFICIENT

Just as I was returning to the aft cockpit, a fish grabbed the port rigger

bait and peeled off about 10 yards of line, but it didn’t stick. Unfortunately, our brief foray aboard the 261CC came to an end without any other strikes, so we reluctantly headed in to gather performance data in the calm waters of the Intracoastal Waterway.

While you might consider upgrading to twin Yamaha F200s, I found the twin F150s provided outstanding performance, vaulting the 261CC to 30 mph in 6.4 seconds. The boat achieved an impressive top speed of 50.3 mph at 6,000 rpm, while the two 150s burned 31.9 gph for 1.58 mpg.

The most fuel-efficient cruising speed occurred at 3,500 rpm and 27.1 mph, with a burn rate of 10.7 gph for a remarkable 2.53 mpg. That translates to a cruising range of more than 400 miles based on the 161-gallon fuel capacity.

Ultimately, Cobia’s new 261CC offers anglers a well-built, easily maintained machine that exceeds expectations when it comes to performance, fuel economy, fishing features, seakeeping ability and, as odd as it might sound, size. 🐟



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