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THE PERFECT STORM DEALING WITH A MOLDY HOUSEBOAT

Houseboat

Volume 20 Issue 7

It's Not Just Boating – It's A Lifestyle

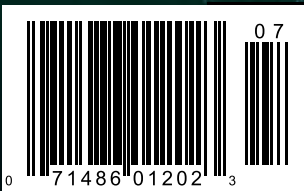
Adventure Craft

invades the Keys
A Trailerable Houseboat?



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A Trailerable Houseboat?

Adventure Craft
invades the Keys

Story and photos
by Dan Armitage

“That’s my next boat,” said the guy matter-of-factly as he stood back to take in the craft nudged into the sand. “Where can I order one?”

The remark was typical of many we received during our week aboard the new Adventure Craft 2850 houseboat while conducting a test and collecting photographs for this review. Everywhere we cruised through the Lower Florida Keys the banana-colored DeckYacht drew attention and accolades. Veteran boaters recognized immediately how perfectly suited the jaunty-looking craft was for comfortable gunk-holing in the shallow, protected waters around Bahia Honda State Park, where the test was based.

With a helm station on the top deck, as well as one below in the protection of the cockpit, the operator has a gull’s-eye view of the waters—and their bounty—surrounding the boat while underway. Powered by a 135hp Honda outboard and a bow designed for beaching, the boat can literally be run up against the sand and be secured with a spike for a day of play or a night of rest, and backed off the shore when it’s time to depart. It’s simply the perfect “stay-aboard” boat for those—and similar—waters.

Adventure Craft 2850 DeckYacht

Length: 28’ 6”
Beam: 8’ 6”
Draft: 12”
Height on Water: 9’0”
Height on Trailer: 12’ 6”
Dry Weight: 5300 lbs.
Horsepower Std: 135hp
Horsepower Max: 150hp
Top Speed: 25 mph (w/135hp)
Fuel Capacity: 76 gallons
Fresh Water Capacity: 37 gallons
Waste Tank Capacity: 15 gallons
Persons Max: 8
As-Tested Price: \$113,500

Adventure Craft Houseboats
23199 Airpark Blvd
Calumet, MI 49913
906-482-7015
www.adventurecraft.com



The Open Seas

Yes, some experienced admirers questioned the AC's abilities in open water, especially when wind and water can make the going rough. And valid those questions are. After all, the craft is a houseboat, and trailerable at that, so its center of gravity is higher than that of traditional 28-foot boats. In addition, the trimaran hull was designed for stability and beach-ability rather than for parting rollers in the open ocean. So no, the Adventure Craft is not a boat to count on for comfortable daily trips to the reef; you would have to pick your days and keep an eye on the weather to keep the ride reasonable. But when we tested its mettle in seas of two to three feet, the boat handled the waves, and as long as we didn't tarry in the trough, the houseboat rocked with minimal rolling.

That said, the DeckYacht was wonderful for cruising in protected waters and by far the most comfortable trailerable family craft we have reviewed in a decade and a half of testing boats for various national publications.

Fave Features

One of our favorite features of the boat is how open and bright the interior is, thanks to huge tinted windows throughout. With most crafts large enough to overnight on, it seems you are either out in the elements or down inside the dark confines of the cabin. Not so the AC, where the living quarters are above the waterline and, depending on which drapes you draw, fed with bright, natural light from all sides. Another feature we appreciated after a week aboard was the open, fore-aft access through large, swinging-glass doors. You can simply walk through the boat to get from one end to the other instead of ducking into the cabin and popping out of hatches, bumping into fellow passengers or waiting for your turn to pass.

Due to the view afforded and comfort provided, while underway or at anchor we spent most of our time up on the top deck, which is protected by a large bimini top and features a remarkably simple, extremely comfortable forward lounging area that flips flat to make a large sunning or sleeping deck. Protected from the breeze by the seat backs, the topside "pit" became a favorite area for relaxing, reading, napping and canoodling.

Cozy Quarters

With the optional bimini overhead, the top deck was shaded and comfortable during the warmest days. With the top down and the convertible lounge seats folded flat to create a giant bed, the stars over the sub-tropics were better than any flat screen TV. Which, by the way, the AC 2850 model offers: a unit that folds flat into the cabin ceiling, complete with built-in DVD player. One rainy night we popped microwave popcorn and watched the Disney version of *Treasure Island*, as my wife and young son snuggled up in the aft berth. The next day we bought the illustrated version of the book at the Big Pine Key Flea Market, an event that has become a shopping/social institution on winter weekends there for three decades.

The AC's cabin also offers air conditioning and a galley with a single flat-cook top with concealed burner for easy cleanup, a built-in microwave, a drip-style coffee maker and decent-sized refrigerator. The galley lacked a bit in storage space, and I would forgo

the coffee maker for more shelf space; but then, I'm not particular about how I get my daily dose of caffeine. Using the boat's standard 3000-watt electric-start Honda generator, we could use any of the appliances while on the hook or via shore power back at the dock.

With the seating fore and aft unfolded to make berths, we had our choice of two places to sleep, each with space for two adults and a child. At six feet even in height, I did have to angle myself a bit to fully stretch out. And I had to bend a bit to stand in the combination shower/head, but even that space was remarkably roomy for a trailerable boat.

Fishing Features

The test boat offered the optional fishing package, which included tackle trays built into the flybridge helm console, two clamp-on vertical rod storage holders bolted to the aft rail of the flybridge and a pair of flush-mounted fishing rod holders and portable pedestal seats in the aft cockpit. The cabin helm station had the combo fish-finder and GPS. As an avid angler, I would have liked the option of having those electronics up top, and at least two more storage holders to secure rigs when not in use, but it was easy enough to add them from my boat test kit that I always carry on such outings.





The AC's cabin offers great headroom and sleeping space, and curtains allow you to separate interior spaces and cover all the windows for complete privacy.

The new Adventure Craft 2850 DeckYacht turned heads wherever we cruised in the Lower Florida Keys. We based the week-long liveboard review at Bahia Honda State Park and explored the surrounding waters, which proved to be the perfect place to put the trailerable houseboat through its paces.



Keys Travel Jargon

The Florida Keys stretch 115 miles from mainland Florida to Key West, curving almost due west in the Lower Keys, the string of islands located beyond Marathon and the Seven Mile Bridge. Traveling on US 1, the two-lane highway connecting the Keys to each other, also known as the Overseas Highway, locals refer to the “ocean-side” or “gulf-side” rather than north or south or east or west when referencing locations. Mile Markers, which begin with MM1 in Key West and end at MM110 near Blackwater Sound and the Florida mainland, are used as well for identifying specific locations along US 1. The entrance for Bahia Honda State Park, for example, would be described as at “Mile Marker 37, Ocean-side,” Meaning it is 37 miles from Key West and on the south, or ocean, side of the Overseas Highway.

The water surrounding the Keys can be so clear that it can be difficult to tell how deep it is, especially over shallow flats of grass and sand. It's important when crossing grass flats in the Adventure Craft or any other boat that you have enough depth under your boat's lower unit to allow you to pass without cutting through or otherwise disturbing the fragile growth, which serves as a nursery and a feeding ground for many of the Keys' marine inhabitants. And it is those critters that make the elevated perspective from the flybridge so entertaining!

And fish we did; we would anchor or drift slowly in Big Spanish Channel with a bag of frozen chum hung over the side to get the action started. Soon schools of pinfish and small snapper and ballyhoo and other baitfish would be swarming just off the transom, where my son Ethan delighted in using sunfish-size tackle and hooks and pieces of thawed squid or Power Bait to catch as many baitfish as we needed. We could cut those baits up and, using stouter tackle, tempt the larger snapper and grouper that eventually showed up in the chum slick, or put a live pinfish on a large hook suspended a few feet below a toy balloon, let it drift 50-100 yards back, and hook tarpon, mackerel, barracuda and sharks. Due to their teeth, wire leaders were required to land the latter three, and we got spooled by a 100-pound-plus tarpon one afternoon that we simply couldn't slow down even with 50-pound-test gear!

King Of The Day

Our largest catch came on the final day when, as an afterthought, we trolled a Rapala on the slow cruise back to the docks at Bahia Honda State Park. On the ocean-side just off the swimming beach Ethan happened to turn to look at the rig in the port rod holder and noticed it was bent double and the spinning reel had only a few wraps of line

remaining. My wife Maria jumped to take the wheel, I grabbed the rod and Ethan danced around the cockpit with a gaff, guessing at what species of fish had taken our bait and was currently doing its best to shake it. Seas were running about two feet and when the boat got broadside in the trough it would roll a bit, so Maria had her hands full keeping the big fish off the transom corner. Twice it sounded and tried to get under the boat and I had to plunge the rod into the water and work the fish back off the stern. But 15 frantic minutes later we had a three-foot-long king mackerel in the boat, quite a catch on 12-pound test line!

The trophy catch was a fitting end to a fun week with the family in the fabulous Florida Keys. Made all the more enjoyable by the little houseboat that could—and did—almost anything!

If You Go:

Bahia Honda State Park

36850 Overseas Hwy.

Big Pine Key, FL. 33043

www.bahiahondapark.com; 305-872-3210; 305-872-2353

Marina Dockage: \$2 per foot per night; \$30 per night minimum

Recommended Resources:

Standard Mapping's *Lower Keys Chart # F103* and aerial photo map of *Big Pine Key Sugarloaf to Ohio Key* on the reverse is an excellent resource (\$21; 985-809-0065; info@standard-map.com) as is *Waterproof Chart #7F Lower Keys Fish/Dive* (\$27; 800-423-9026; www.waterproofcharts.com)

The Cruising Guide to the Florida Keys by Captain Frank Papy (\$20; frankpapy@reefnet.com) is an excellent resource with charts.





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the digital version
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magazine.
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The Honda 135hp outboard is a perfect match for the AC2850, offering enough power to push the boat to 25 mph at 5200 rpms and mid-range speeds that are fuel-efficient and give the boat great range with its 76 gallon fuel tank.

