



DEAN TRAVIS CLARKE

NEW BOATS

BOSTON WHALER 345 CONQUEST OPEN

Boston Whaler constantly communicates with its dealers around the globe and its customers. From those sources, the company receives terrific input as to what both groups want in a new boat. Sources located in Florida, Latin America and parts of the Mediterranean (all warm climates) logically request a large, more-open model. Whaler engineers took all that input and came up with a home run with the 345 Conquest Open.

PERFORMANCE

I watched the weather closely leading up to my sea trial, as a hurricane was on its way. Wind-against-tide conditions added to already hefty seas stacked up with four- to six-footers in the notorious Ponce Inlet on Central Florida's Atlantic coast. I dropped the speed to about 15 mph while transiting the inlet, and found the vessel safe, secure and dry. Outside, I ran the 345 at

25 mph in the troughs and it performed perfectly. It also reacted predictably in a big following sea, and was completely responsive when throttling up and down as well as in turns.

Back in the Intracoastal Waterway, the triple 300 hp Mercury Verados lifted the 345 onto plane in six seconds and hit 30 mph in 11 seconds. The 345 topped out at 52 mph, turning 6,000 rpm while burning 90 gph. A conservative 35 mph cruising speed at 4,500 rpm burned 40 gph, but it felt slow. A more probable 45 mph cruise used 65.3 gph at 5,360 rpm.

I cranked the wheel hard over at 35 mph, and the 345 bled off speed quickly, leaned into the turn and reversed course as smoothly as silk.

Close-quarters maneuvering is a dream come true on this big beast thanks to a very unique bow thruster — the only one that doesn't require a tube.

Whaler uses a keystone design that reduces vibration, and the company has even received a patent for the innovation. Combined with the widely spaced outer outboard engines, you can walk this boat in any direction you choose.

Drifting behind a shrimp boat, trying our luck for some tarpon, I found the roll characteristics remarkably comfortable. And under way, spray management proved ideal.

I particularly loved the tower while running in the heavy seas. I found it easy to enter and exit, and more important, it allowed me to see crests and troughs much earlier, which means safer and smoother navigation.

With no exaggeration, this boat should protect you from yourself in most cases.

FISHING

Being an open (express-style) boat, you can drive yet remain two steps from the cockpit action.

Whaler worked closely with Rupp Marine to create the perfect (optional) tower-mounted, 23-foot outriggers.

A pullout cooler in the tackle center comes standard, but can be optionally

replaced by three more tackle drawers and a large storage compartment. In fact, the tackle module overall features tons of storage space. It also has a terrific optional Kenyon grill.

Once your tackle proves successful, store your prizes in fish boxes outboard on each side of the cockpit. Each 345 comes standard with two rod holders in each gunwale, two forward and three across the transom, plus under-gunwale space for two rods and downrigger ball holders on each side.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Nothing has changed in Whaler's unsinkable, Unibond construction: Hull, deck and associated parts are clamped together, and closed-cell flotation foam is injected into the air spaces under pretty intense pressure, where it bonds molecularly with the curing laminate. Even the front enclosure is solid fiberglass.

For those who need height flexibility for low clearance, the 345's buggy top collapses and raises effortlessly. The stretched Stamoid material keeps the top light to avoid a higher center of gravity and attendant momentum stresses. Stamoid tops also cost much less than a hardtop. By the way, you can retrofit the upper station on an existing 345.

The windshield's center pane opens for better ventilation.

You'll find copious storage in the cabin. Above the settee forward is a comfortable berth. And to combat the "cave-dweller" syndrome, frosted-glass inserts over the in-hull port lights combine with LED lighting in the windows, so whether it's day or night, you can enjoy ambient light.

[SPECIFICATIONS]

| | |
|-----------|------------------|
| LOA | 35 ft. 11 in. |
| BEAM | 11 ft. 8 in. |
| DRAFT | 1 ft. 10 in. |
| DEADRISE | 20 deg. |
| WEIGHT | 14,200 lb. |
| FUEL | 347 gal. |
| MAX POWER | Triple 300 hp OB |
| MSRP | \$358,140 |

(Base w/ twin 300 hp Verados)

Boston Whaler
Edgewater, Florida
800-WHALER-9
whaler.com



MERCURY 300 HP VERADO FOUR-STROKE

| | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| TYPE | In-line 6 DOHC |
| DISPLACEMENT | 158.5 cid |
| MAX RPM | 6,400 |
| HP/LB RATIO | .47 |
| FUEL SYSTEM | SC EFI |
| GEAR RATIO | 1.75:1 |
| WEIGHT | 635 lb. |
| ALTERNATOR OUTPUT | 70 amps |
| MSRP | \$22,105 |

NOTABLE STANDARD FEATURES

- > Air conditioner (reverse cycle)
- > Anchor windlass with line, chain and anchor
- > Teak-and-holly sole (belowdecks)
- > Choice of hull color
- > Hardtop and spreader lights
- > Underwater lights

IMPRESSIONS

This boat performs exceptionally well — perhaps better than any Whaler that has come before.

I owned an original 13-foot Whaler too many years ago to even consider. Today's Whalers are light-years more advanced, more comfortable and more seaworthy. Ⓢ

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