

boat review: Glacier Bay 2270 Isle Runner



Glacier Bay 2270 Isle Runner Something Very Special

■ by BILL JENNINGS

Glacier Bay founder and designer Larry Graf started playing around with power catamaran designs more than 20 years ago in 1986. His primary goal was to design a hull that could run at high speeds without planning. After four years of testing scale models and full-size prototypes, the first production Glacier Bay – a curious-looking 24-footer powered by a single 90 hp outboard – debuted at the Seattle International Boat Show in 1990.

Today, the company operates out of a 125,000-square-foot facility employing

200+ boat-builders and manufactures 16 models ranging from 22 to 34 feet, all based on Graf's original concept – a high-speed displacement hull.

The 2270 Isle Runner, recently winning the 2007 Imported Trailerable Boat of the Year, is Glacier Bay's 22' cuddy model, which is also available in 26' and 30-foot versions, and the cuddy itself on the 2270 is remarkably roomy. That's due in part to the raised foredeck, which rises well above the gunwales, and also in part to a thoughtful layout. From the portside door, two moulded steps lead down into

the port hull, where a six-footer can stand straight up – nice for pulling on clothes out of the weather when it's your turn at the wheel. Just forward is a portable toilet, and along the port wall are racks for four rods and lots of storage.

Stretching from the inner edge of the port hull to the outer edge of the starboard is the piece de resistance – a full-on, real, rectangular queen-size berth in a 22-footer. The area is ventilated by a pair of portlights and a skylight, and a panel on the aft bulkhead offers easy access to the

wiring. To work on it, you'd just seat yourself comfortably on the mattress.

The cockpit isn't huge, but it's deep and uncluttered, with nice high bolsters that hit you on the upper thigh. The test boat had a sizeable live bait tank behind the helm seat which was fully plumped with its own electric pump and drain setup. Under the deck are two big, insulated fish boxes – each 132cm long, 38cm wide and 30cm deep – with hydraulically assisted hatches and their own electric pump-outs. The best thought out fish boxes I have seen for a very long time. Removing a few screws allows the boxes to be lifted out for full access to the twin 240L each fuel tanks.

Hatches in the transom offer easy access to the 22L freshwater tank, the fuel-water separators, and the main battery switch. To starboard is a hatch holding three tackle boxes and on top of the transom is a sizable cutting board with holders for knife, pliers and lures. Forward under the starboard rail is a salt-water washdown hook-up, and inside a snug fiberglass pod beneath the helmsman's chair are the dual batteries. A matching pod beneath the companion helm chair contains a large bulk storage area.

The helm is comfortable, that rotates 360 degrees, as well as sliding fore and aft, and the raked windshield does an outstanding job of shielding the helm from both direct and eddying wind. The throttles are nicely positioned, and the tilt wheel accommodates a variety of driving styles. The electronics panel is directly above the wheel and could accommodate a pair of seven-inch displays.

Beneath the helmsman's feet is something unusual – lift-out fiberglass hatch that accesses a sizable compartment perhaps 125cm deep. It seems like an excellent place to store emergency gear, but the floor of the compartment is covered in nonskid as well and is apparently intended also to accommodate very tall drivers. Good thinking.

The optional stainless canvas top provides full coverage with the wrap around cleats fitted, and a useful mounting point for radar equipment, with six rocket launchers, a pair of spreader lights and ample room for mounting other VHF and GPS equipment.



The ride, though, is what really sets Glacier Bay apart from all other cats (and of course mono hulls). Their displacement hulls are the result of a fundamentally different approach to boat design, and there's no mistaking that on the water. To begin with, when you push the throttles forward, there's no bow-rise whatsoever.

To reach plane, a conventional hull must "climb" up and over its own bow-wave. Then, once the hull "passed" the bow-wave, the entire boat rides much higher in the water than it does at rest. The sensation of the hull rising up onto plane is so natural to people who spend a lot of time on planning boats that its absence is really, really strange.

And it is indeed completely absent on the Glacier Bay. There's no vertical component at all to its acceleration; you just go faster without rising a bit. The sensation, for me, was that of being "stuck" to the surface, the way an amusement park racecar is locked down to its track.

Crossing wakes was especially weird. Almost instinctually, I anticipated the brief feeling of partial weightlessness that comes when a planning hull launches off a wave and then falls back to the surface. But it never came. It wasn't that the Glacier Bay didn't respond to the wake at all – it's not that smooth – but the response was both smaller and of a



2270 Isle Runner at cruising speed. (opposite page)

No bow-rise whatsoever. (top)

Three tackle boxes mounted in transom. (above)



Cat's knife-like hull slices on-coming waves. (top)

Large cabin with toilet and double berth. (above)

Plenty of room for electronics. (right)

different nature than that of a planning hull.

I'm inclined to say the difference has to do with the fact that when a planning hull hits a wave, its bow reacts first and most – we all know, after all, that the farther aft you get, the smoother the ride. But it seemed that the cat's knife-like entries simply sliced into oncoming waves rather than rising up on them, while the wider mid and aft sections of the hull responded more noticeably to the wave. I think it would take some getting used to, but once you acquaint yourself with the motion

and action of this hull, you would never get into a mono hull again!

Displacement cats such as the Glacier Bay trade a bit of top-end speed for a softer ride, but the 2270 is no slouch, reaching a top-end speed of 38 mph at a 6,000 rpm. At a 4,100 rpm cruise, she ran 26 mph. Coming out through the rough water, pointing the Glacier Bay 45 degrees off the seas and throttling up, I learned another of the oddities of the displacement hull – amazingly, it actually gets smoother the faster it goes.

At an 8 mph troll, the ride was nothing to complain about but nothing really spectacular, either. But at cruising speed, it was unbelievably smooth – minimal pitching and nothing even close to a hard landing. At 35 mph, it was smoother still, although a bit scary for the uninitiated.

Running directly into both the wind and the swell at 25 mph, the Glacier Bay finally lost its strange “grip” on the water and even went completely airborne once, but there was still nothing like slamming. With a following sea, she tracked predictably – contrary to conventional wisdom about excessive bow-steer in displacement cats – and I found I could let go of the wheel without deviating more than five or 10 degrees. This just amazed me.

As for the much-discussed problem of “sneezing” in power catamarans, it just wasn’t apparent. The only situation in which any mist at all was visible coming out from between the hulls was running hard downswell, but there wasn’t much of



Roomy cockpit for sportsfishing or family cruising.

it and after a minor correction to the trim of the engines, the phenomena disappeared and the hulls cut through the swell like a knife through butter.

Overall, this boat is a sensational package. The standard features included in the base boat specification are very comprehensive. It has all the fishing amenities that any hardcore off-shore sports fisherman would desire with the creature comforts, safety and style to

spend a pleasurable day on the water with the family.

Glacier Bay now has dealers in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia. Please check their website www.glacierbaycats.com.au for all their contact details or contact them directly on 0418 388 827. ❖

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