

Southport 28 CC



BY DEAN TRAVIS CLARKE

WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH, NORTH CAROLINA, qualifies as the quintessential summer resort area: beautiful beaches; young, bronzed bodies; and unending traffic. It

would be a great place to take up residence if you could live on the water and commute by boat — as many locals do. It's also the closest port to the Southport Boatworks factory in nearby Leland.

Though a relatively new company, Southport boasts a management team with more solid (read "successful") experience than most: Alton Hemdon, former president of Hatteras Yachts, runs

the factory; Frank Longino, former vice president of marketing at Grady-White, runs sales and marketing; and Val Jenkins, former engineering wizard at Mako, Blackfin, Chris Craft and Cigarette, now

sits at the director of engineering's desk. So what has this mammoth brain trust devised? A new 28-foot center console. Now, if you're muttering to yourself, "Wow! That's unique," consider this: I run virtually every saltwater fishing boat in North America. I experience everything, from the ridiculous to the sublime. I can say without hesitation that no one builds a *better* 28-footer than Southport.

PERFORMANCE

Seas from the southeast ran 2 feet in the morning and picked up to 4 in the afternoon on the day I tried out this 28. The naval architects at C. Raymond Hunt specifically designed the Southport to use four-stroke outboards. The pair of Mercury Verado 250s on our transom pushed us up onto plane in a scant three seconds, then revved to 6,000 rpm, which translates to 51 mph and 42 gph.



With fewer people aboard, I'm quite certain we could have hit highway speed. I figure the optimum cruising speed to be 25 mph at 3,000 rpm burning a total of 10.8 gph. That allows you a range of about 550 statute miles with a cushion.

Southport offers optional side curtains for the helm console. You may need them if it rains, but in 10 hours of fishing and running the boat hard, we never got spray on the windscreen. Wrightsville Beach also has channels that don't require idle speed, and I loved cranking in totally controlled turns in tight spaces at cruising speed. The Southport 28 responded exactly as I expected.

The 10-plus-foot beam and 22-degree deadrise allow this 28 to drift and troll beam-to with remarkable stability. Up-sea performance seemed ideal on test day as the waterline length spanned the waves perfectly. Down-sea running proved a non-event at every speed. In fact, in 4-foot seas two passengers rode seated in the bow — while we ran virtually wide open — with no ill effect. Overall, you'll find this boat to run smooth, quiet and dry.

FISHING

All the players at Southport spend lots of free time fishing offshore. They've spent years at it and know exactly which features a serious fishing boat must have. In addition to the 45-gallon livewell and transom bait box, the Southport 28 sports a large, 181-gallon insulated coffin, which doubles as lounge seating, in front of the console. A huge foredeck provides plenty of room to stand and fish or throw a cast net, and the

recessed cleats and bow light mean you'll never snag your net or line.

Despite the moderate Carolina flare to the bow, the foredeck design allows you to make full use of the space to fight a fish because your feet aren't forced amidships. That, combined with fore and aft coaming pads and a single-level deck, makes for some stress-free battles. We fought a 60-pound wahoo from a dead boat in total comfort — because we could. The cockpit provides undergunwale toe rails beneath the storage boxes.

Southport puts six flush-mounted rod holders in the gunwales with more on an optional T-top. More storage can be found under the gunwales both fore and aft, as well as in the lockable console.

About the only feature I could do without personally is the freshwater sink and cutting board that are part of the transom rigging station. Since I'm so tall, I hate bending over to work, so I'd enlarge the insulated bait box there. I could just as easily do my rigging work atop the 45-gallon, above-deck livewell in the leaning post. Overall, a pretty small concern as the only negative I could find. Finally, a sealed and guttered pull-out aft deck box with macerator and overboard pump-out will keep your ice and fish for days. Other notable fishing features include three tackle storage compartments with a pull-out tray and built-in knife and pliers holders.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Southport doesn't skimp anywhere in building its 26- and 28-footers. From the highest-quality gelcoats on the outside (in

your choice of trendy colors) to the vinylester resin for external layers of the laminate to the fiberglass and composite construction, this boat gets built with tender, loving care and only the finest ingredients. Each one consists of four pieces: a foam-filled fiberglass grid stringer system, solid fiberglass hull, cockpit liner and the deck, with the latter three chemically bonded. Southport even encases the polyethylene fuel tanks inside special fiberglass chambers.

In addition, a high-density composite transom bonds not only to the hull, but directly to the stringer system as well. This distributes the thrust from the engines throughout the entire boat rather than focusing on just the back end. But like me, the hull is more than strong — it's pretty. A reverse transom complements the dramatic tumblehome aft, while the raked Clipper bow with its Carolina flare lets you know the heritage of this boat at a glance.

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	28 ft. 6 in.
BEAM	10 ft. 6 in.
MAX HP	(2) 300-hp OB
DEADRISE	22 deg.
HULL DRAFT	1 ft. 7 in.
FUEL	250 gal.
WEIGHT	7,897 lb. (as tested)
MSRP	\$165,000 (w/Verado 250s)

Southport Boatworks

Leland, North Carolina
910-383-0365

www.southport-boatworks.com

MERCURY 250-HP VERADO FOUR-STROKE

TYPE	In-line 6
DISPL.	158.5 cid
MAX RPM	6,400
HP/LB RATIO	.39
FUEL SYSTEM	Supercharged Sequential MPI
GEAR RATIO	1.85:1
WEIGHT	649 lb.
ALT. OUTPUT	70 amps
MSRP	\$18,046

NOTABLE STANDARD EQUIPMENT

- Leaning post w/back and storage
- Recessed aluminum bow rails
- Dual acrylic transom doors
- Through-transom scupper system
- 181-gallon insulated coffin box
- Luxury T-top

IMPRESSIONS

The bar for 28-footers has just been raised to an entirely unheard-of level.

FOR MORE INFORMATION visit our boats section at www.sportfishingmag.com/boats.

