



**BOATING
CERTIFIED
TEST**

#3327

WELLCRAFT 355

Its enclosed pilothouse, big cockpit, walk-around layout and deep-V hull make this boat ready for adventure.



A

As a former Wellcraft Scarab owner, I can vouch that no Wellcraft was ever made of lead, but this boat has served notice that the new Wellcraft is pure gold.

First, it is so striking in appearance that you don't need thong-clad babes aboard to get attention at the local sandbar. You'll draw eyes like iron filings to magnets, even with Aunt Edna in her flowered one-piece. Mosey up to the local waterfront pub, with three big Yammies or Mercs burbling on the transom, and you own the place.

Part of this fascination is the bow, which Wellcraft calls a plumb bow. This clearly draws on the Euro influence of builders such as Axopar. This boat is a modern classic,

PHOTO: COURTESY WELLCRAFT



SCAN ME

To see our photo gallery of the Wellcraft 355, visit boatingmag.com.



though, carving its own place among bows from Rybovich to Trumpy that once set the standard for what the pointy end should look like.

I spent an evening across a bottle of fine pinot grigio at the debut of the 355, talking to Chris Critchett of Michael Peters Yacht Design, which conjured the 355's lines. Peters has a reputation for not just fast boats, but also fast, solid boats that track well and ride softly. Critchett explained to me that a great

amount of time went into designing the 355's bow section, with its cutaway forefoot that seems cribbed from Coast Guard icebreakers. But it wasn't until our on-water testing that I was completely convinced.

Boating editor-at-large Randy Vance and I took the 355 out of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration promising 2- to 3-foot waves—but the Gulf Stream winked and delivered 4 to 6s, with some bigger

holes. Vance, God love him, is a closet ocean racer, and as we cleared the inlet, he grabbed a fistful of throttles and put the hammers down. It was an outing to put Mr. Toad's Wild Ride to shame, but the 355 was rock-solid with nary a squeak or groan. Sure, we had a few crash landings, but here's the thing: The 355 steered arrow-straight.

A criticism of some Euro-styled boats is that a plumb or ax bow can act as a forward rudder, steering the boat as it punches into a swell. But the 355 proved perfectly well-mannered. And fun. And fast too. In spite of the seas, we saw just shy of 50 mph with the triple Merc 350s, which is plenty quick enough to get you to Bimini or Nantucket for lunch, although you wouldn't subject your family (or Aunt Edna) to our ride.

The overall styling is pure "commuter,"

A wraparound gutter to drain the top cleverly doubles as a solid handrail.

such as those 1920s yachts that carried the Gatsby-esque magnates from Long Island homes to Wall Street. With a slightly reversed sheer, the house can only be described as Early Perpendicular, with windows that don't pretend to be tear-shaped or anything but are big. Even the forward windshield rakes forward like commercial fishing vessels. If the 355 was a guy we knew in high school, he would roll his cigarettes in his T-shirt sleeve and drive a chopped Chevy—there is a "don't mess with me" tough and intriguing quality.

The cockpit has two options: a stainless-steel "roll bar" that holds fenders or scuba tanks, or a galley module with a sink and grill. Step over a splash rail into the cabin and you're surrounded by unbroken vistas. The aft window hinges up and, with the door locked open, the cabin is open to the cockpit. An L-shaped settee wraps around a table to starboard, and a minimalist single-burner galley to port whispers "let's eat ashore."

The helm has sporty twin high-back seats with a matching third to port, and the wide dash is fitted with twin Garmin multifunction displays. Step down into the cabin and you'll find an almost-queen berth, and a pleasant head with a vessel



sink and a full shower stall with a seat. (No water everywhere!)

The cabin itself is asymmetrical, using a deep walkway forward to starboard with high coamings and fat stainless-steel rails. Of note is the sliding door next to the helm, which is wide enough for someone to exit behind the helm without disturbing the skipper. Also, two boarding gates in the cockpit sides are positioned for easy access from the water or dock. Forward, a trio of lounges and an aft-facing settee will draw sun worshippers.

Construction is rugged with twice as many ribs as similar boats, all resin-infused and foam-filled. It's no wonder the 355 was so quiet and solid in the Gulf Stream.

Comparison shoppers should look at more than general aesthetics and LOA. The almost 39-foot LOA Wellcraft 355 carries a 10'8" beam and is rated for triple 350-hp outboards. Saxdor's soon-to-be released 400 GT is a foot longer, carries seven inches more beam, but is only rated for twin outboards to 800-hp. A price is not yet available for the 400 GT.

Your local Wellcraft dealer truly is an alchemist because he can turn you into a 355 owner easily. Don't miss this one! —Capt. Chris Caswell

High Points

- ▶ Slightly offset steering wheel makes use of the throttles easy.
- ▶ Oversize handrails are everywhere.
- ▶ Fast and fun to run, as our rough-water test in the ocean proved.

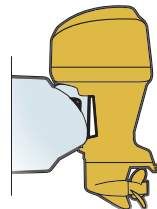
Low Points

- ▶ Port companion seat is a bit tight for some people (me).
- ▶ Folding armrests on the helm seats would make access easier.

• LOA: 38'10" • BEAM: 10'9" • DRAFT (MAX): 2'9"
 • DISPLACEMENT (APPROX.): 16,131 lb. • TRANSOM DEADRISE: 20 degrees • BRIDGE CLEARANCE: 10'8" (radar); 8'0" (top) • MAX CABIN HEADROOM: 6'7" • FUEL CAPACITY: 264 gal. • MAX HORSEPOWER: 1,050
 • AVAILABLE POWER: Triple Mercury or Yamaha to 350 hp

Price: \$589,000
(with test power)

AVAILABLE POWER:
OUTBOARD



HOW WE TESTED

ENGINES: Triple Mercury 350 hp Verado **DRIVE/PROP:** Outboard/Revolution 4 4-blade stainless steel
GEAR RATIO: 1.75:1 **FUEL LOAD:** 100 gal. **WATER ON BOARD:** 25 gal. **CREW WEIGHT:** 550 lb.

WELLCRAFT
 Cadillac, Michigan; 231-775-1351; wellcraft.com



**BOATING
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 RESULTS**

SPEED			EFFICIENCY				OPERATION		
rpm	knots	mph	gph	naut. mpg	stat. mpg	n. mi. range	s. mi. range	angle	sound level
1000	4.4	5.1	3.6	1.2	1.4	292.5	336.6	0	65
1500	6.8	7.9	5.8	1.2	1.4	279.4	321.6	2	68
2000	7.7	8.9	10.1	0.8	0.9	181.9	209.4	3	70
2500	9.1	10.5	10.1	0.9	1.0	214.6	247.0	4	75
3000	15.3	17.7	17.0	0.9	1.0	214.4	246.7	2	78
3500	24.1	27.8	25.0	1.0	1.1	229.2	263.7	2	80
4000	31.1	35.8	28.2	1.1	1.3	261.7	301.2	1	84
4500	37.7	43.4	34.9	1.1	1.2	256.8	295.5	1	85
5000	42.3	48.7	44.8	0.9	1.1	224.2	258.0	1	85
5500	45.9	52.9	62.5	0.7	0.8	174.6	200.9	1	85
6000	49.7	57.2	79.0	0.6	0.7	149.4	171.9	1	88

MOST ECONOMICAL CRUISING SPEED