



Albemarle 290 XF

AN EAST COAST SPORTFISHER HEADS WEST

BY ROGER MCAFFEE

THIS YEAR, ALBEMARLE CELEBRATES ITS 30TH YEAR of producing specialized sportfishing vessels. The Edenton, North Carolina builder, located on Albemarle Sound, produced hull #1 in 1978, a 24-foot cuddy that's still in use. Now part of the Brunswick Corporation, the company produces about 110 boats a year. Let's take a look at its latest offering, the 290 XF.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Albemarle's designs are based on what the company calls the "Carolina" hull, which carries a hull length/beam ratio of 3:1. The builder adds a sharp deadrise and an extra-wide bow flare to the 3:1 length/beam ratio to produce a

smooth, stable ride.

All Albemarle boats, including our test 290 XF, are hand built, with all components, including the hull, being hand laid. Hull stringers and other infrastructure are built of glass-encapsulated marine-grade fir and carry a lifetime

guarantee. Hulls are solid glass except on the 33- through 41-footers – those are Baltec cored above the waterline.

The engine spaces and bilges are hand sanded and gelcoated. The builder has also partitioned the bilges so that saltwater is not thrown onto the engines and other mechanical components.

In order to reduce draft – remember, these are sportfishing vessels and have to be able to operate around shallow reefs and sandbars – Albemarle's boat bottoms are designed with what the company calls "prop pockets." Other man-

ufacturers call this design a tunnel hull. This bottom configuration allows the props to be tucked slightly up into the hull, thereby reducing draft.

ON DECK

Our test boat was clearly a fishing machine. It bristled with rod holders, outriggers, a tower, and beefy hand and grabrails. The entire exterior was wash and wear – not a piece of wood in sight. The cockpit had two washdown systems, one raw water and one freshwater. The self-bailing cockpit emptied overboard

An Inside Look



TESTER'S OPINION

"Albemarle's 290 XF is a strong, tough boat. It is definitely a battlewagon with class and style – a sturdy, hand-built vessel."



This boat's interior proves that the 290 XF is no average small sportfisher. Space planning in this 29-footer has been thoughtfully laid out to accommodate up to four people in comfort. Right: When fighting fish, who wants to worry about keeping your boat's exterior clean? With no wood on deck, washdowns are a snap.



through two grated drains.

A note about the tower: Towers on sportfishing boats on the West Coast are uncommon. On the East Coast, however, no boat can be called a sportfisher if it doesn't have a tower. The tower, almost always complete with engine controls, enables the skipper to operate the vessel from an elevated position to better spot surfacing fish. The tower on our test boat required a bridge clearance of 15 feet, 10 inches.

The system had room for 16 rods – 10 in rocket launchers, four in the coamings and two on the outriggers. Rods can be rigged for various fisheries and stowed in the holders, at the ready. That way,

regardless of what type of fish presents, there's an appropriate rod rigged and ready to splash down.

Our test boat had two fishboxes, one 49-gallon in the cockpit sole and a 43-gallon in the transom. Albemarle has installed a substantial cleat at each end of the cockpit fishbox. This ensures that whatever is placed in the box can be secured to avoid a weight shift and the change in balance that could come about as the vessel pounds through the water.

The cockpit also has a 21-gallon livewell located at the port forward corner. That livewell is located a couple of steps from the tackle/bait prep station.

Before we fired up the engines, I wan-

Albemarle 290 XF

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA (with pulpit)	30 ft., 6 in.
Beam	10 ft., 9 in.
Draft	32 ft.
Weight (dry)	12,500 lbs.
Fuel	265 gals.
Water	28 gals.
Engines	Twin Yanmar 6LPA-STP 315 hp
Price	Ask Dealer

PERFORMANCE SPECS

Top Speed	33 mph @ 3830 rpm
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STANDARD EQUIPMENT

110v dockside wiring w/breakers, 110v outlet in engine room, automatic Halon fire protection, Coast Guard safety kit, cabin rod storage, 4 flush-mounted rod holders, fresh- and raw-water washdowns, nonskid deck, transom (49 gals.) and in-deck (43 gals.) fishboxes, aluminum plate in cockpit for fighting chair, full instrumentation, full V-berth w/cushions, twin hanging bunks, stand-up head w/shower galley w/solid surface countertop and sink, microwave, refrigerator and dinette, helm chairs w/cushions, more

OPTIONS

MX Pro Series outriggers, 4.0 kw generator w/AC, reverse cycle heat, AM/FM/CD stereo w/four speakers, flat-screen 19-in. LCD TV/DVD combo, anchor windlass w/rope, chain and anchor, transom door, anodized aluminum tower w/fiberglass sunshade, full enclosure, top and side rocket launchers and spreader lights, more

CONSTRUCTION

Hand-laid hull, stringers built w/glass-encapsulated marine-grade fir

COMPANY PROFILE

Years in Business	30
Headquarters	Edenton, NC
Lines	Albemarle

BUILDER

ALBEMARLE BOATS, Edenton, NC;
(252) 482-7423; www.albemarleboats.com

WEST COAST DEALERS

Horizon Yacht & Ship, Gardena, CA;
(877) 297-3804; www.horizonyachts.net

Edmonds Yacht Sales, Edmonds, WA;
(877) 459-6531; www.edmondsmarinayacht-sales.com

dered up onto the long broad foredeck and jumped up and down a few times. That's a good test of how stiff and tough the deck is. I weigh close to 200 pounds and still, the deck exhibited no flexing.

BELOW DECK

Belowdecks was a very pleasant surprise. I expected an "all-business" fishing boat to have a utilitarian interior, but that was not the case here. The cabin woodwork was oiled teak and the fit of the components was excellent. Albemarle's boat interiors are made in-house, and it's clear that the cabinet-makers know what they're doing. Teak and holly flooring was meticulously matched, fitted and finished.

The galley, complete with a built-in sink and a microwave, features solid surface countertops, as does the counter-top in the head. The sound system is top of the line as is the LCD TV.

The most striking thing about the cabin is that the designers haven't tried to stuff a 29-footer with the amenities that one would find in a cabin of a 40-foot or larger boat. The cabin is small, with a V-berth, drop-down table, small galley and combination head/shower. For West Coast cruisers like me, I believe two people could cruise comfortably on this vessel. According to the manufacturer, however, the vessel will sleep four.

The head/shower space is another indicator of how well Albemarle has laid out the cabin. On many boats this size, the boater has to "shoehorn" himself or herself into the head space. Not so on our test vessel. It's a full stand-up space, of course, but it's larger than many heads on 40-footers.

POWER

Our test boat was powered by a pair of turbocharged, intercooled Yanmar 6LPA-STP 315 hp inboard diesels. These six-cylinder, 254-cubic-inch engines weigh in at 899 pounds, without a gear. They transmit their power to the four-bladed 21- x 26-inch props through a pair of Kanzaki reverse/reduction gears and a pair of 1.75- x 84-inch shafts. The horsepower rating is taken at the crankshaft at 3800 rpm. Yanmar rates these engines for continuous use at 255 hp and 3600 rpm.

The engines started easily without smoking. They vibrated a bit at idle, but

smoothed out as they warmed up and engine speed increased.

UNDER WAY

We moved easily away from the dock at 700 rpm making 4.6 mph. Even at that low speed the vessel responded quickly and precisely to the helm. The ability to move slowly, under complete control, is becoming more important in our increasingly crowded marinas.

Visibility from the helm station, located to starboard, was excellent all around, but that's to be expected on sportfishers of this size. As we pulled clear of the other boats leaving the marina, we increased the throttle and at 2500 rpm the vessel came up on plane, making about 16 mph as measured by the GPS. Wide-open throttle was at 3830 rpm and the 290 XF topped out at 33 mph.

At the engines' maximum torque, about 3000 rpm, boat speed was 23.5 mph and the engines were burning a total of about 16 gph. At wide-open throttle they burned almost 36 gph.

After our speed run, we brought the vessel to a stop, cranked the helm hard over and kept it there. We then increased power until both engines were wide open. The vessel initially leaned slightly and then flattened out. We then straightened out and at full throttle, threw the helm hard to port and then immediately, hard to starboard. The vessel was well behaved and handled all of these maneuvers without problems.

IN SUMMARY

The 290 XF is a sportfishing boat that leans heavily on Albemarle's 30-year tradition of building strong, tough boats. They are well thought out and don't try to be something they are not. They're fishing boats, but the builder has realized that a wash and wear exterior, suitable for ease of cleanup after a day of successful angling, doesn't mean the interior has to be utilitarian.

It's always difficult to try to describe a boat in a single word, but in putting this test together I came across a word used by the builder in its promotional material. The company refers to its boats as "battlewagons." The 290 XF certainly qualifies, but I would suggest Albemarle add something along the lines of "with class and style." ●