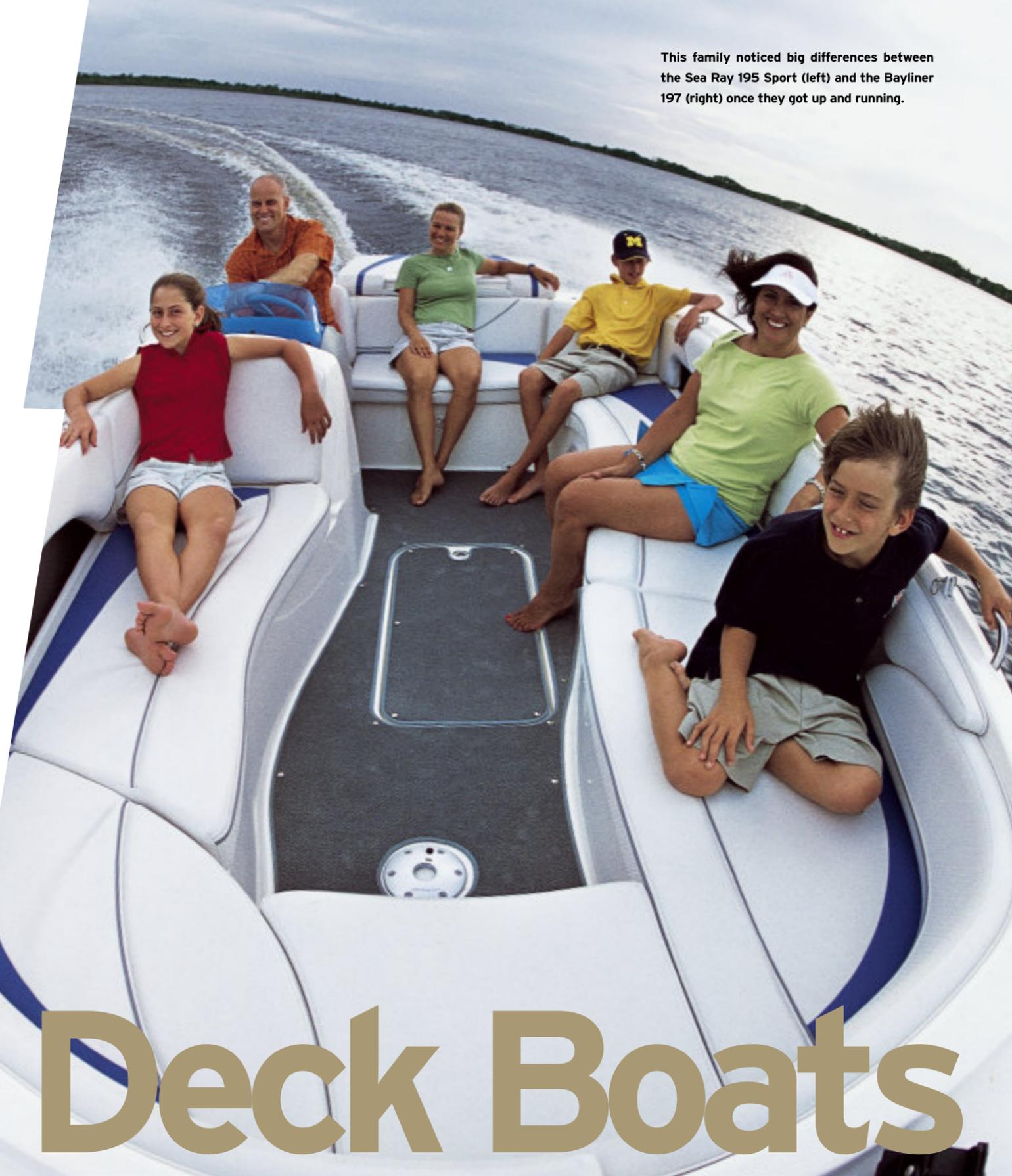


Bowriders vs. Deck Boats

BY DARREN WENDROFF
PHOTOS BY TOM KING

What's The Difference?



This family noticed big differences between the Sea Ray 195 Sport (left) and the Bayliner 197 (right) once they got up and running.

Deck Boats

We go to eight enthusiasts to find out which style of boat is best



Look at them side by side. Telling the difference between bowriders and deck boats really isn't that difficult — just point to the bow and say, "There." The deck boat has a rounded bow and the bowrider has a narrow bow. Simple as that. But in reality, it's like comparing apples and oranges — there's much more to the distinction than what meets the immediate eye. We found eight boat owners who've recently purchased a bowrider or a deck boat. Their reasons for their choices and their levels of satisfaction go well beneath the surface to answer the burning question.



Meet: **Andy and Danielle Lehrer** **BR**
Boat of choice:
Sea Ray 195 Sport

BILL DOSTER

Hometown: Orlando, Florida **Years boating:** 30 **Family:** Walker, 12; Garrett, 8 **Reason they boat:** "To spend time with the family and get away from work." **Their take:** "We didn't even consider the differences of a deck boat. We just like how this boat looks."

When your native state is nicknamed "The Land of 10,000 Lakes," lofty boating expectations tend to develop early. So when Andy Lehrer — who grew up water skiing behind his best friend's inboard on Prior Lake near the Twin Cities in Minnesota — bought his Sea Ray 195 Sport, the boat already had some heady competition from Andy's past.

"I'm a ski-boat guy," he says.

That experience has groomed him to expect immediate turns at the end of slalom passes and powerful torque at hole shot. But the cost of a direct-drive inboard, and the sacrifice of interior space that comes with it, ruled out a pure water-sports boat. He gravitated instead to the 195 Sport.

"I've really been surprised with how responsive and smooth it runs," he says. The steeper deadrise of a bowrider hull, typically 20 degrees, helps it track better than a deck boat.

Andy plans to relive those nostalgic days of water skiing with his own kids and their new boat — as soon as he finds the right lake, that is.

"We're just trying to find one where there aren't any alligators," says Andy. "Because I imagine that would ruin any day of boating."



Meet: **Brad Greely** **DB**
Boat of choice:
Bayliner 197

Hometown: Coto De Caza, California **Years boating:** 30 **Family:** triplets Gavin, Grant and Bryce, 17 **Reason they boat:** "To get on the water and do something active, exciting." **His take:** "A deck boat is diverse, which meets my family's lifestyle."

Over the past 30 years, Brad Greely has water skied behind his in-laws' Hallett, cruised the Alaskan coast on his buddy's custom fishing boat and dived into the Santa Barbara Chain off a pal's cuddy cab. Finally, all this apparent freeloading came to a stop last August when he bought his first boat, a Bayliner 197 deck boat with the biggest



cockpit he'd ever seen in a 19-foot boat.

"Boating's my passion, but I never owned one because I felt they were too one-dimensional for everything I wanted to do," Greely says of his water sports, diving, cruising, camping and fly-fishing lifestyle. "This is really like five boats in one for me."

He could do all those things from a bowrider, but not comfortably — especially considering he was looking for something under 20 feet. The wide-beam forward of a deck boat creates more usable square footage than is found on a like-size bowrider. It's especially true of the Bayliner 197 because of the boat's wide-open floor plan. Greely and his three teenage boys find they have excess space during their annual trips to Lake Mead and Lake Havasu. Yet the boat is deceptively compact and easy to trailer.

"If it involves water from Alaska to Mexico, I've done it," he says. "Now I've just got my own boat to do it in."

BILL DOSTER (2)



Meet: **Bill Perkins** **BR**
Boat of choice:
Caravelle 232 Interceptor

Caravelle's 232 (above) and Starcraft's 2080 (far left) are performance boats capable of reaching nearly 60 mph, but in opposing styles.

Hometown: Corona del Mar, California **Years boating:** 1 **Family:** It's friends, lots of 'em **Reason he boats:** "To get away from it all." **His take:** "I like the aggressive look of bowriders."

California boater Bill Perkins approached his first boat purchase like the diligent corporate sales manager he is: with solid research and gut instinct.

"I do a lot of entertaining," says

Perkins, who spent a year and a half visiting boat shows, “so deck boats definitely drew me in for their open space. I dug that. But I wanted a boat with more testosterone.”

That’s why the former University of Florida defensive end finally chose the 23-foot bowrider in Caravelle’s Interceptor line. The hull is more slender up front and therefore more aerodynamic than the hulls of most deck boats. The mono-



hull also lifts better than a traditional deck boat, so there’s less water friction. Less friction means more speed. And more speed means a happy Bill Perkins.

For the past year, Perkins has been pushing that hull, whether he’s racing a buddy’s 35-foot Fountain or chasing dolphins in the Pacific Ocean with clients.

“A performance boat would have cost me twice the money,” says Perkins, “and I’m basically doing what they are, just getting a little wetter.”



Meet: **Doug and Debbie Jones** **DB**
Boat of choice:
Starcraft 2080 Aurora

Hometown: Corona, California **Years boating:** 35 **Family:** Darin, 19; Derek, 16 **Reason he boats:** “It’s by far one of the best ways to spend time with my family.” **His take:** “You can’t say all bowriders perform better than deck boats anymore.”

This Aurora model is so new that at press time Doug Jones was the only person other than the *Boating Life* test team and the techs at Starcraft who’d inspected the boat inside and out. The 2080 at his Island Marine dealership in Corona, California, was the first out of the mold. It is unlike any deck boat Starcraft has ever developed.

“Our customers are really impressed with the features,” says Jones, “but they really stop in their tracks when they find out the boat can run in the high 50s.”

We topped it out at 56 mph, faster than 81 of the 86 boats we tested for the January Boat Buyers Guide. And that was with a 5.7-liter Volvo Pentam turning out a rather moderate 320 horsepower.

“You can see the hull has pressure release vents on the side to reduce friction,” says Jones.

The wide, gull-wing-shaped hull is what tends to keep more of a deck boat on the water, as opposed to a bowrider with minimal water contact. That prevents the average deck boat from keeping up with the Caravelle Interceptors of the world, but this is no average deck boat.



How to Detect a Deck Boat

SPELLING isn’t the only way deck boats and bowriders differ. Here are five more ways to tell that you’re looking at a deck boat:

Less deadrise at the transom This gives greater lift and stability port to starboard when carrying weight in the cockpit.

Versatile interior design More space equals a greater variety of seating and storage configurations.

Wider beams forward This is the easiest physical feature to see, as the bow becomes visibly more rounded.



Wider chines give more lift and stability at planing speeds.

Less deadrise in the bow This gives greater lateral stability and buoyancy when people are in the bow.



Meet: **Stephen and Zelma Wilson**

BR

Boat of choice:

Glastron GXL 205

Hometown: Pepper Pike, Ohio **Years boating:** 3
Family: Martin, 13; twins Julian and Joy, 11 **Reason they boat:** "To relax with the family, relieve stress." **Their take:** "To be perfectly honest with you, I don't know the difference between deck boats and bowriders. We just liked what we saw."

When you spend long days poking around people's teeth, time is of the essence, so Ohio dentist Steven Wilson appreciates that he doesn't have to waste it trying to learn the nuances of his Glastron GXL 205.

"For a first-time boat owner like myself, it's a real easy boat to handle," says Wilson. "Even my 13-year-old daughter can drive it."



Glastron uses a one-piece hull design, which adds strength and also responsiveness at moderate speeds.

The deeper keel of a bowrider will typically keep the boat tracking more true from idle up to cruise, whereas deck boats are prone to wander a bit in the low-rpm range. It also takes stronger wave action to make the ride rough in a bowrider. All of this, along with the compact construction of the GXL 205, makes it an easy model for new boaters to cut their teeth on (pun intended).

And don't think Dr. Wilson hasn't noticed.

"I don't think we've hit top speed yet," says Wilson. "But we've come real close." And isn't it true that everybody loves a fast dentist?



The Deck Rider

Ebbtide's 2600

Talk about the best of both worlds. The 2600 carves out a category of its own, with the space and amenities of a deck boat and the performance and handling of a big bowrider. This model is 5,200 pounds, seats 14 and has a 70-gallon fuel capacity – yet we clocked it at 57 mph on a single engine. We talked with Ebbtide President Tommy Trabue about this latest innovation.

Where did you get the idea for the 2600?

"I feel people want the style of a bowrider, without the boxiness of a deck boat. So why not give them a good-looking boat with all the space advantages of a deck boat?"

And the initial reaction?

"My staff was reluctant at first, like, that's an abrupt change, not your normal deck boat. Well, I didn't want it to look like everybody else's. Every boat's a compromise. We try to please a discerning Ebbtide buyer who wants a boat not everybody can have."



Do you think this is the wave of the future?

"Definitely. There will always be a market for the regular bowrider, but in lakes and reservoirs where this type of boat makes sense, the 2600 is the next thing."



What's next?

"I'm a blue blazer type of guy, a classicist. I feel taking a classic design and moving it forward will always work. And that's what we'll keep doing." – D.W.

COURTESY GLASTRON; DOUG DUKANE (3)



Meet: **Jay and Laura Riley**
Boat of choice:
Tahoe 215

DB

Hometown: San Antonio, Texas **Years boating:** 34 **Family:** Bradley, 13; Michael, 9 **Reason they boat:** "To be outdoors with the family." **Their take:** "Until someone shows us something with better versatility, a deck boat is what we're going to have."

Texas boater Jay Riley never thought he'd trade in his Nitro 205 bowrider. Or his boat before that, a Nitro 175 Fish and Ski. Or his previous, previous boat, a 17-foot aluminum bass boat. After all, he loved those boats. But what he really wanted was all of them in one model. He thinks he found a catchall in the Tahoe 215.

"We promised ourselves when we bought a boat, it wasn't going to sit in a storage shed," says Jay, "and this one certainly hasn't."

Neither has any of the equipment that the Rileys stuff into their boat. The tri-hull design, as opposed to the mono-hull design typically found on bowriders, results in a wider area under the deck, so there's more space for storage compartments. The 215 will hold fishing chairs, rods, wakeboards and coolers completely out of sight — something you can't do with a 21-foot bowrider.



COURTESY TAHOE, RINKER, HURRICANE

The 215's versatility has even sparked a little sibling rivalry. Says Jay: "Now my brother's considering trading in his boat for a 215." Trading up ... it must run in the family.



Meet: **Al and Rosemary Garcia**
Boat of choice:
Rinker 282

BR

Hometown: Edwardsville, Illinois **Years boating:** 12 **Family:** Grandkids Samantha, 4; Haylee, 2 **Reason they boat:** "It's just a beautiful way to spend a day with the kids, being on the water." **Their take:** "On the Ozarks you need a tough boat, and for us, that's a bowrider."



By the time the Garcias finished test-driving Rinker's 282 bowrider, they knew it was solid enough to handle any wave the Lake of the Ozarks threw their way. And it had nothing to do with the guy sinking next to them.

"He was in a smaller boat getting swamped," says Rosemary Garcia of the unfortunate boater. "But the 282 was stable as a rock and handled great. We love that."

Bowriders are constructed with a sharper deadrise, which pays dividends in rough water. Even better is a big bowrider like this 28-foot, 6,000-pound behemoth: More weight plus a deeper hull equals less susceptibility to being pushed around. And it gives up nothing

in terms of interior space to a slightly smaller deck boat.

So now that Rosemary's taking control of the wheel, and even planning a girls' night, will Al be the odd man out?

"No, no, no, he's useful to have around," laughs Rosemary. "Besides, he loves it when I drive, so he can finally sit back and relax."



Meet: **Henry and Mary Ann Deemer**
Boat of choice:
Hurricane 257

DB

Hometown: Cape Coral, Florida **Years boating:** 30 **Family:** Grandkids Josh, 10; Erin, 9 **Reason they boat:** "We like to go to the beach, to the restaurants. We like to relax." **Their take:** "I don't know what they call this boat, a sundeck, a fun-boat? I just got this boat because it had a big open bow."

Henry Deemer does things big. He builds big buildings (he's an industrial developer), and he drives big boats (he keeps a 44-foot Silverton at his Massachusetts home), so there's no way a mere 25-foot deck boat could satiate this man's appetite for size, right?

"It's perfect for day cruises," says Deemer of the Hurricane 257, for which he traded in his 28-foot overnighter.

Deck boats are known for their spacious interiors, but satisfying a man used to 10-ton yachts says a lot. And labels didn't influence Deemer. Bowriders. Deck boats. He doesn't really know the difference, and it doesn't matter now anyway.

"I love my yacht, but this is like bringing your house with you," says Deemer. "Call it what you want. All I know is, it's perfect for us."

