

Class Act

TRAILER
BOATS TEST

Fishy enough for him,
civilized enough for her,
Robalo's new 24-footer
really has its act together

By Rebecca Stone



After a week of playing tag with a succession of fierce spring storms, finally a day broke that allowed us to get out on the water and spin the twin screws of Robalo's new R245 Walkaround. In fact, once the early morning shroud of fog lifted, it was your basic perfect Southern California day. By the time we backed Robalo's sharp-looking 24-footer down the ramp, sunlight was dodging off the water's lightly riffled surface while a faint breeze stirred the storm-washed air.

Following the weather delays, we were champing at the bit to try out the latest addition to what this boatbuilder calls its 2006 armada of sportfishing utility vessels, or SUVs. Robalo claims these craft are equally at home on lakes or the ocean, offering cabin accommodations and fishing-friendly cockpit designs that cater to families. The R245 is a handsome rig with sweet lines; available in all white or with an optional black, yellow or light blue hull stripe, she's a head turner.

On top of — or actually below — all of its topside treasures is Robalo's real *raison d'être*: solid construction and hull design. Like her sister models, which range from 22 to 29 feet, the R245 boasts the company's Hydro-Lift hull, which is engineered to efficiently transfer hydrodynamic pressure from the sharp keel to the broad surfaces of the strakes, and past reverse chines that aid in water or spray deflection. Featuring 22 degrees of transom deadrise, the boat's aggressive deep-V is able to generate substantial lift while still maintaining the ability to cut through chop — traits sure to be appreciated whether you're a hard-driving tournament angler or the sort who just likes to get away for the weekend.

LARGER THAN LIFE

With a beam of 8 feet, 9 inches, the Robalo R245 is, but just barely, legally considered an "over-wide" for trailering purposes, as most states set a cap of 8¹/₂ feet before you need permits (which are easy to get). Perhaps it's the extra 3 inches of beam, but this boat seems bigger than her 24 feet — especially when perched on a trailer.

As we hooked up our Nissan Titan project truck to the big Robalo, we were confident that our 1/2-ton crew cab's 9400-pound tow rating would easily handle our test unit, which only carried a

one-third load in her 150-gallon fuel tank. Per Robalo's figures, a single-engine R245 weighs 5833 pounds dry, and you can count on another 1200 pounds or so for a tandem-axle trailer. Considering our boat had twin



For a detailed look at R245 packages and options, log onto TrailerBoats.com.

Yamaha F150 four-strokes (although the photo shoot was done on a Honda-powered rig), plus the factory Hardtop and Cruise packages, we figured a fully fueled wet towing weight in the high

8000- or low 9000-pound range.

Rated for up to 10 people, the added room of the extra beam was put to good use. The R245 is chock full of features that will put a smile on the faces of anglers and cruisers alike. It's not that you'll need to lay out a trail of breadcrumbs to find your way around the boat, but, just the same, thoughtful standards can be found from stem to stern.

CATCHY HABIT

Although it also caters to families, this is, essentially, a fishing boat, and there is no shortage of features to support the piscatorial habit. Two insulated 40-gallon fishboxes located under aft port and starboard jumpseats are standard, as is a 30-gallon,



■ Robalo's helm is tidy and well laid out, offering good visibility and room to spare. Sophisticated cabin features include a teak-and-holly sole, maple cabinetry, galley extras and a generous V-berth/dinette.



LED-lighted bait tank. Stainless toe rails situated below the gunwales are ready to provide extra traction for anglers. To help manage your sticks, four rod holders are integrated into the coaming boards; horizontal, tubed rod storage can house six outfits; and the optional hardtop package (\$4996) comes with four rocket launchers.

Robalo's sculpted hardtop also features a lockable PFD storage bin, fitted with a net, that hinges down from the top. Very slick. Another nifty amenity is the tackle center tucked into the portside bulwark. A transom bench seat, which hinges up to reveal the rigging compartment, is available with an optional backrest that lifts out so it doesn't get in the way when it's time to fish.

Two pedestal chairs occupy the helm area, and the co-pilot's seat even has a flip-down footrest. Both are perched on raised portions of the bridge deck with the center at a lower level, which poses a potential tripping hazard for those not paying attention. The custom curved windshield seemed to be just the right height to keep the wind out of our faces while not bisecting the view, and wind deflection was also enhanced by an acrylic venturi suspended from the leading edge of the hardtop.

Though the addition of a glove box and an armrest adjacent to the throttles would be assets, the helm was nicely appointed with a standard stainless wheel and power-assist hydraulic tilt steering with power knob. Other stan-

dards include a Sirius Satellite-ready, four-speaker AM/FM/CD player with a six-month free activation, and weatherproof switches and circuit breakers.

MOVING FORWARD

Catwalks on the cabin's port and starboard sides provide access to the bow, though the stainless bow rail only stands about knee high at the house. It's an adequate route to the foredeck in smooth conditions, although the rougher it gets, the more you will appreciate the higher handholds offered by the optional hardtop frame. Once you make it to the bow, you'll find a bow roller/chain locker combo that can be fitted with an \$1810 windlass package capped by a Lewmar 600 Sprint windlass and a 14-pound Delta anchor.

Robalo uses stainless deck hardware, including sleek, pull-up cleats at the springline position (bow and stern pull-up cleats can be ordered in place of the standard fixed cleats), non-skid decks with optional, snap-in carpet, and stainless gas-piston assists on all locker lids to keep fingers out of harm's way.

Consistent with modern walkaround design, the Robalo has an integrated outboard platform and swimstep, which means she also has a full-height aft bulkhead with a transom door. A three-step boarding ladder pulls out from a tiny slot on the starboard side of the transom. This proved quite handy in boarding while on the trailer, however, the handle placement to assist in climbing up and down is a stretch for those with no hope of being recruited for pro basketball. We kept searching for a closer handhold, such as the aft pull-up cleat on our boat, a potential finger pincher if used this way.

Also standard are recessed trim tabs, which lend a clean look. Unfortunately, we experienced a slight problem with this arrangement when one of the tie-down straps slipped between

a hull strake and tab. Prior to launching, it was necessary to dismantle the tab in order to remove the strap. Perhaps a guide of some sort along the edge that turns into the recess would prevent the strap from slipping around the corner.

INNER BEAUTY

When you want to take a break from the action, ducking through the sliding hatch and down into the cabin will transport you into a world of "yachty" touches, once again promoting the bigger-boat illusion. Here you'll find a standard (yes, standard) teak-and-holly laminate sole set off by maple cabinetry and attractive upholstery on the V-berth/dinette. The comfortably sized galley features a stainless sink, drawers and storage compartment, and our boat's \$1107 Cruise package included a nice-looking solid-surface countertop, 12-volt refrigerator and 24-quart Igloo cooler for the cockpit's in-floor storage box.

Nights spent on the hook shouldn't be much of a sacrifice once you convert the dinette into a V-berth that can sleep two adults at a polite distance — if so desired. The screened ceiling



■ Rather than a pulpit, the Robalo R245 handles anchoring duties via a conventional bow roller.

hatch assures good ventilation, and more time spent stargazing than swatting at bugs. A Porta Pottie with cover, or optional VacuFlush porcelain head provides a measure of civility. Too bad there's not quite enough room for an enclosed head. It's always nice to have the toilet facilities separate from the sleeping quarters or food prep areas. Color-matched soft tones and

premium lighting add to the cabin's cozy ambience. For those dying for a shower, head for the transom, where you'll find a freshwater transom shower.

THE PLANE TRUTH

While the R245 looks great on wheels, it's when you lay down the throttles that the magic happens. As we started to put her through her paces, we discovered that with the twin 150s, she left a heavy footprint when throttle speeds were held in the lower rpm range. But once she climbed onto plane, the R245 really sparked to life.

We measured an optimum cruising speed at 4000 rpm, where the lightly laden Robalo posted 2.3 mpg, not bad for an optioned-out, twin-engine 24-foot walkaround. Top speed was clocked at 44.5 mph, and our 0-to-30 mph holeshot trials averaged 8.0 seconds, which is quite satisfactory for this type of rig.

The boat's handling felt smooth and dead-on sure as we carved turns this way and that over a mild chop. And though we did not have the opportunity to test the boat in heavy conditions, we didn't notice any slipping or sliding through our



■ The R245's cockpit allows plenty of obstacle-free room for fishing. A bonus for anglers is the stainless toe rail.


Test Notes

- Teak-and-holly cabin sole was a nice surprise
- Below-waterline through-hull fittings are double clamped
- Stainless toe rail is a winner with anglers
- Cool PFD storage integrated into the hardtop
- Could use a handhold closer to boarding ladder
- Towed weight requires a beefy 1/2-ton or, better, a 3/4- or 1-ton truck

Class Act

grapevine of maneuvers, and the R245 turned in a ride that might be described as plush. There was no jarring of any kind.

Though offered with base power of a Yamaha F250 four-stroke for \$71,943, Robalo's new 24-foot walkaround is also available with Honda 150s for \$92,900 or Honda 135s for \$78,969. Obviously, this is not an inexpensive boat. It's not meant to be. And if you are getting the impression that we liked this rig, you're right. Aside

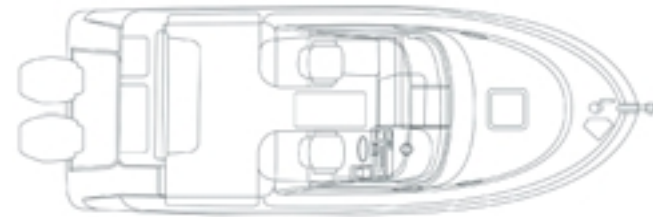
from a short list of wished-for improvements, the R245 made us believers. This boat felt substantial, like she'd take care of you in style on liquid glass or in a heavy quartering sea. She was a joy to drive and offered an elegance not common to most fishing boats. And with a cruising range of more than 300 miles, the rig we tested is a class act that can handle most trips without the need to stop at the fuel dock. And that's good to know whether you're headed across the lake or clear across the horizon. 



■ The aft bench seat drops away to create more fishing room and lifts up to allow unfettered access to the rigging compartment.

SPECIFICATIONS

Robalo R245 Walkaround



Base Price (w/ Yamaha F250) \$71,943
Price as Tested \$92,900
Length 24' 0"
Beam 8' 9"
Deadrise at Transom 22 degrees
Weight (w/ single OB) 5833 lbs.
Draft (drive down) 20"
Fuel Capacity 150 gals.
Maximum Horsepower 400

NOTABLE STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Recessed trim tabs; 30-gallon lighted bait tank; cockpit toe rails; hydraulic steering with tilt wheel; teak-and-holly cabin sole; transom shower; digital instruments with fuel management function

NOTABLE OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT

Cruise package (includes 24-quart Igloo cooler for in-floor storage, 12-volt refrigerator, butane stove and VacuFlush head); hardtop with lockable PFD storage; tackle center

Robalo, Dept. TBM, 300 Industrial Park Blvd., Nashville, GA 31639; 229/686-2700; robalo.com

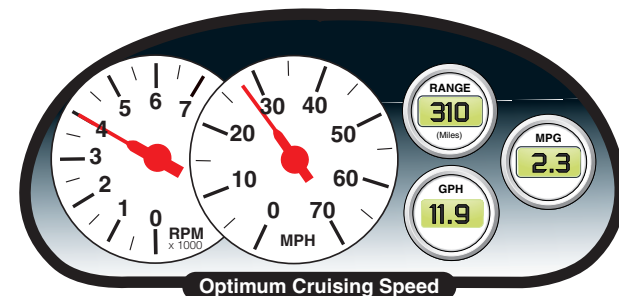
ENGINE AS TESTED

Make Yamaha F150 four-strokes
Horsepower 300 total (150 each)
Number of Cylinders I-4
Displacement 2.7L (163 cid)
Weight (each) 466 lbs.
Gear Ratio 2.00:1
Maximum WOT RPM 5000-6000
Propellers Yamaha 15x17" aluminum 3-blades

Yamaha, Dept. TBM, 1270 Chastain Road, Kennesaw, GA 30144; 800/526-6650; yamaha-motor.com

A special thanks to Garry Helgeson and his crew at Sun Country Marine (661/257-3800; suncountrymarine.com) in Castaic, California, for providing the boat for this evaluation.

TEST RESULTS¹



Top Speed

44.5 mph

| Engine (rpm) | Speed (mph) | Fuel (gph) | Fuel (mpg) | Range ² (miles) |
|-------------------|-------------|------------|------------|----------------------------|
| 1000 | 5.4 | 1.5 | 3.6 | 486 |
| 1500 | 7.0 | 2.3 | 3.0 | 405 |
| 2000 | 8.4 | 4.1 | 2.0 | 270 |
| 2500 | 9.6 | 5.9 | 1.6 | 216 |
| 3000 | 10.7 | 7.5 | 1.4 | 189 |
| 3500 | 12.2 | 10.6 | 1.2 | 162 |
| 4000 ³ | 27.8 | 11.9 | 2.3 | 310 |
| 4500 | 32.7 | 15.1 | 2.2 | 297 |
| 5000 | 36.8 | 18.9 | 1.9 | 256 |
| 5500 | 41.2 | 24.1 | 1.7 | 229 |
| 5900 (WOT) | 44.5 | 29.5 | 1.5 | 202 |

¹ Data for both engines ² Based on 90% fuel capacity ³ Optimum cruising speed

ACCELERATION (seconds)

0-30 mph 8.0

SOUND MEASUREMENTS (dBa)

Idle at Helm (600 rpm) 52
Idle at Transom (600 rpm) 65
Cruise at Helm (3500 rpm) 81
WOT at Helm (5900 rpm) 93