

A different tack but our car guy is hardly at sea



The name of this section is Ride, and it has been pointed out to me by multiple readers and several editors that it is possible to ride things that are not necessarily four-wheeled. Motorcycles, for instance. Boats. Recreational vehicles. Scooters. Airplanes, even.

Perhaps, suggest my helpful correspondents, it is time to expand both my horizons and the horizons of readers, who may be growing weary of five straight years of "instruments and controls fall nicely to hand," and "the rear seat is suitable only for circus dwarves," and "peppy engines" and "smooth-shifting transmissions" and "crisp handling" and "supple ride on all but the most abrupt surfaces."

Increasing coverage of non-car/truck/SUV/van products moves me, in varying degrees, out of my comfort zone. You want an opinion on the Bitter SC? I tested one. The La-Forza? Terrible brakes. The Sterling? Leaked a puddle of gas every time I parked it. The Yugo? In three blocks, I counted six things that weren't working. Sure, I can tell you about the third-generation Chevrolet Corvette. And the fourth. And fifth, and sixth. In a couple of weeks, I'll tell you about the 2008 model, possibly before any other newspaper in the country.

But this other stuff? I dunno. I'm fine with motorcycles, as I've been riding for 35 years, have not fallen off one in weeks, and in fact have several bikes, one I've owned since 1975. Scooters? They're little, slow motorcycles. Recreational vehicles? Great

big vans. Airplanes? I used to be an editor for *Aviation Digest*.

Boats? I'm in trouble. Which is why I decided to test a boat. And plan to do so periodically.

The people at Dealer's Choice Marine, a boat store at 5980 Lakehurst Drive in Orlando that is so packed with boats I had to park my car next door, were remarkably helpful, and while they may well have laughed at me behind my back, and deservedly

PLEASE SEE **SMITH, F4**

so, they did not at least laugh in my presence. This despite my request that they cease technical nautical terms that no one understands, such as "starboard" and "bow" and "stern," and replace them with "front" or "right side" or "back there."

The boat was a gorgeous **Ebttide** 2600 Cuddy Bow Rider, 26 feet long, with a 375-horsepower engine, air conditioning, stereo, television and excellent "pop-up cleats," which I agreed were a nice feature, whatever they are. Ebttide boats are sort of the BMWs of the boat world, built in Tennessee by a company owned by Tom Trabue, who races vintage Porsches, which probably have pop-up cleats. I may not know boats, but I know solid welds and fine interior stitching and careful fiberglass workmanship, and this boat was very, very nicely turned out.

We trailered the boat to Lake Downe, one of the Butler Chain of Lakes, where the rich people live, thus explaining why I had never been there before. We cruised for a half-hour, and yes, this boat is fast, and sounds great, and seems really smooth, even as I steered it across our own wake. I was impressed and thought \$90,000 didn't sound that bad for something this cool.

Once back at the office, I did additional market research. I called a friend who knows a whole lot about boats.

"Hey," I said. "Ebttide. Good boat?"

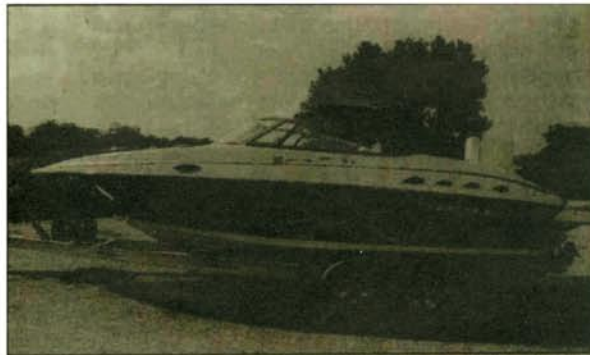
"Yeah, great boat," he said.

And there you have it!

Boat Test One is in the books.

What's next? I have no idea. But I'll try to take better notes.

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STEVEN COLE SMITH/ORLANDO SENTINEL

The 26-foot **Ebttide** 2600 Cuddy Bow Rider is beautiful and very, very nicely turned out. Along with its powerful 375-horsepower engine, it has excellent 'pop-up cleats.'