

The Grand Banks 41 Europa

has everything the brand is known for, plus some addictive new tricks up its sleeve.

By George Sass, Jr.

I scratched my head when I first saw a rendering of the new Grand Banks 41 Heritage Europa about 18 months ago. In my opinion the profile just looked off—sort of scrunched up. While walking down the docks in Singapore this past summer to sea trial hull number one, I was blown away that this was the same boat I had seen in graphic renderings. The in-house design team had done an excellent job of fitting a lot of interior volume into a design that maintains the sweet lines of the Grand Banks pedigree. In the interest of full disclosure, I should point out that I am intimately familiar with Grand Banks, having worked for the company in the 1990s as the marketing director. My first impression based on the artist rendering was dead wrong.

The Grand Banks line-up now ranges from 41 to 72 feet. Indeed, up until the introduction of the 41, the smallest GB still manufactured was a 46. However, scroll back a little more than a decade and they offered the precious 32, followed by the salty 36, and on up to the now discontinued 42, and beyond. Grand Banks, like most low-volume, high-end builders, struggles with their “entry-level” offerings. However, the future of many smaller craft—a term I use with some reservation when discussing the new 41—is hindered by the basics of manufacturing economics. When a quality builder such as Grand Banks sets out to build a 41-footer, do they decide to go for quality or a price point?

Does anyone remember Cadillac’s low-price but lower-quality Cimarron? Car fans still cover their ears and make



TIMELESS: It’s roomy for an entry-level yacht, yet with all the style of a classic GB.

LOA: 41’5”
BEAM: 15’3”
DRAFT: 3’10”
FUEL: 500 gal.
WATER: 200 gal.
ENGINE OPTIONS:
 2 x 380-hp Cummins MerCruiser diesels with Zeus Drives
ENGINES TESTED:
 2 x 425-hp Cummins MerCruiser diesels with Zeus Drives
BASE PRICE (w/ 425-hp Cummins engines): \$705,300

funny noises to deny that automotive atrocity. And if the Grand Banks management team, now led by President Rob Livingston, marginalized the quality that they’re known for, they’d also risk marginalizing their whole brand.

So, Grand Banks decided to get aggressive and offer a lower entry point to its market while still maintaining their quality standards. In order to achieve this lofty goal, they focused on technology and methods of improving production efficiencies while developing the 41. The model was designed completely internally with in-house naval architect Earl Alfaro, who was formerly with naval architect Tom Fexas and helped develop the Grand Banks 64 and 72 Aleutian series. One of the most notable departures for the 41 was the use of resin infusion and a fully cored hull. Not only is resin infusion a cleaner method of fiberglass construction, the process allows for a more uniform layout with less labor. Quality control managers can also see if any voids or flaws develop during the infusion process. Better yet, it allows Alfaro and his team to control the weight of the build more easily.

This is a company that I would say, up until a decade or so ago, could be viewed as conservative. Yet it has embraced another departure in this model: the inclusion of fiberglass hull liners. In the past, Grand Banks would stick-build their boats. The liner eliminates unnecessary



RPM	KNOTS	GPH	dB(A)
1000	6.1	3.1	67
1400	8.0	5.9	67
1800	9.7	13.4	69
2200	11.9	22.0	77
2600	19.0	30.6	78
3050	23.5	44.8	81

TEST CONDITIONS:

Speeds were measured by GPS in Singapore Harbor with three-quarters fuel, no water, and 7 adults aboard. Fuel consumption was measured by the Cummins electronic engine-management system. Sound levels were measured in the salon.

ON BOARD

wood while reducing labor hours, a key step when building an “entry-level” vessel. When I worked for Grand Banks in the '90s, we wrestled with trying to continue production of the 36. However, the labor hours on a 36 were darn close to those on the company's 42. It just didn't make sense. With these types of building techniques, lower labor costs mean *problem solved*.

But the liner has other advantages, creating a smooth gelcoat finish in the engine room and utility room. While examining the engine room space, I also noticed the new fiberglass stringer system. Its liner system allows for more precise engineering and, again, a simplified production process.

Beyond these hidden innovations, one of the most noticeable aspects of the 41 is the beam. At fifteen feet, three inches, this is a beamy boat—in fact, six inches wider than the Grand Banks 46. The company's Europa styling of the aft-oriented deckhouse, covered side decks, and fashion plates does a good job of masking this girth.

The salon sees the immediate benefit of the additional beam. “We looked at where owners spend their time,” said David Hensel, marketing director for Grand Banks. “And we



HEADQUARTERS: The salon is a comfortable place to hang with the skipper, even while underway.

determined that we needed to design a model with more attention to the salon area.” Well, they succeeded. An L-shaped settee surrounds the table and a straight settee is opposite. Two barrel chairs are offered as an option instead of the settee. In my opinion, the settee is the way to go. The two chairs look nice, but another settee is a more practi-

cal use of space. What if both you and your mate want to stretch out and read the morning paper? It doesn't work with the barrel chairs.

The galley benefits from a tremendous amount of stowage and has more usable space than the discontinued 42 Europa. The standard equipment includes what

you would expect on a 41-foot boat: refrigerator, deep sink, and microwave/convection oven.

The 41 includes the company's trademark lower helm. There is enough room for a full electronics array. I would like to see the engine instruments slanted more towards the helm versus their current, nearly horizontal orientation. This would allow a better view while seated on the double helm seat.

Another significant evolution I saw at the helm was the installation of the new E-Plex system. This custom electrical system integrates the system's AC and DC supplies into one control unit situated at the helm. Grand Banks programs a set of parameters that includes functions such as shutdown, start-up, and even a night mode. The system operates the air conditioning, lighting, and all the amenities. Not only does E-Plex offer greater ease of use, but the installation of the electrical system is also much easier—yet another area where technology results in an easier build process.

There are two staterooms and a shared head forward. By industry standards, these are very comparable to similar-size boats. Over the years, especially in the last five or

so, Grand Banks has updated their styling and joinery dramatically, while still maintaining the warm teak finish. The benefit, besides the beauty, is a timeless look that will not go out of style. This is one of many reasons a Grand Banks holds its value so well.

The big boat interior, E-plex system, and resin-infused structure all combine to make the GB41EU a very good boat. But this is only a portion of the story. Grand Banks also chose the 41 project to introduce the Cummins MerCruiser Zeus drivetrain to power a modified V-hull. Now you have a truly *great* boat. If you have not driven a boat with the Zeus joystick control system, you owe it to yourself to test drive a demo at the next boat show. The maneuverability in close quarters makes you want to seek out tight docking situations just to show off!

The best part, however, is the way this new boat handles when you apply some throttle. Our test 41 was equipped with the optional 425-horsepower Cummins QSB5.9 diesels. The hole shot and top speed of 23.5 knots were impressive attributes. The ride was dry while at a running angle of about five degrees. It was odd for me after having logged thousands of miles on older Grand

Banks to be traveling at this speed, and doing it without pushing a wall of water.

Grand Banks took some flak a few years back from die-hard enthusiasts when they began to change the design of their underbody to gain speed more efficiently. But check out these numbers: a real joy was the amazing performance at 8 knots, burning approximately 5.9 gallons per hour. This equates to a range of about 550 miles. So if you want to run nonstop from Florida down to Georgetown, Exumas, on your way to the Turks and Caicos, it's not a problem.

At a cruising speed of 20 knots the burn rate was about 33 gallons per hour. This was a nice speed for the 41. I never thought I would say this about a Grand Banks, but the handling characteristics and responsiveness afforded by the Zeus drives makes this boat a blast to drive.

After spending several days on and off the 41, I was still scratching my head—and it had nothing to do with the original rendering. I was simply amazed that a builder had put so much development effort, technology, and thought into an entry-level design. □

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