



THE INTREPID WAY

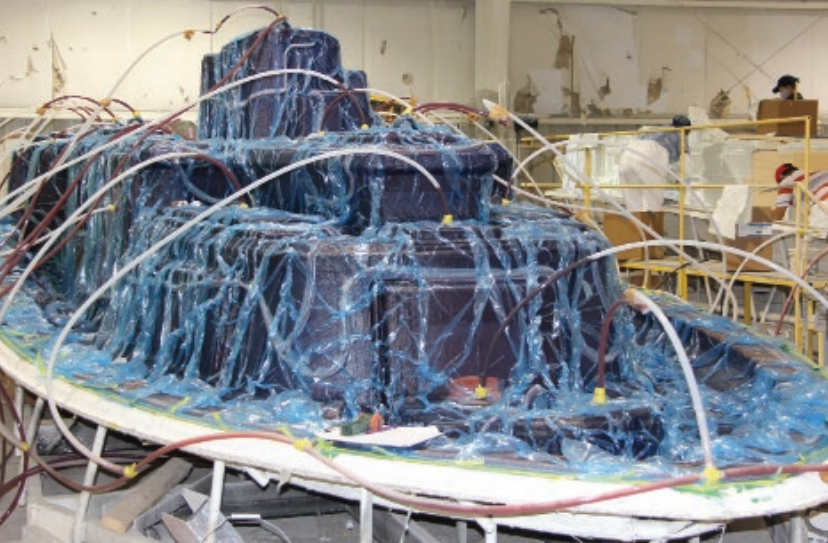
AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT THE NOMAD 427 FE, FROM RAW MATERIALS TO 58 KNOTS.
BY



LOA: 42'7"
Beam: 12'8"
Displ.: 24,000 lbs.
Draft: 3'
Fuel: 700 gal.
Water: 80 gal.
Power: 3/600-hp Mercury Verados

RPM	Knots	GPH	Range
700	4	4.6	608
1000	5.3	6.3	589
2000	9	15.5	406.5
3000	23	35.8	450
4000	35	58.3	420
5000	45.3	87.5	362
6200	58	154.5	262

Fuel: ¾ full | Seas: calm | Water: full



Walking the shop floor with Intrepid's Ken Clinton is akin to taking a class in advanced boat building.

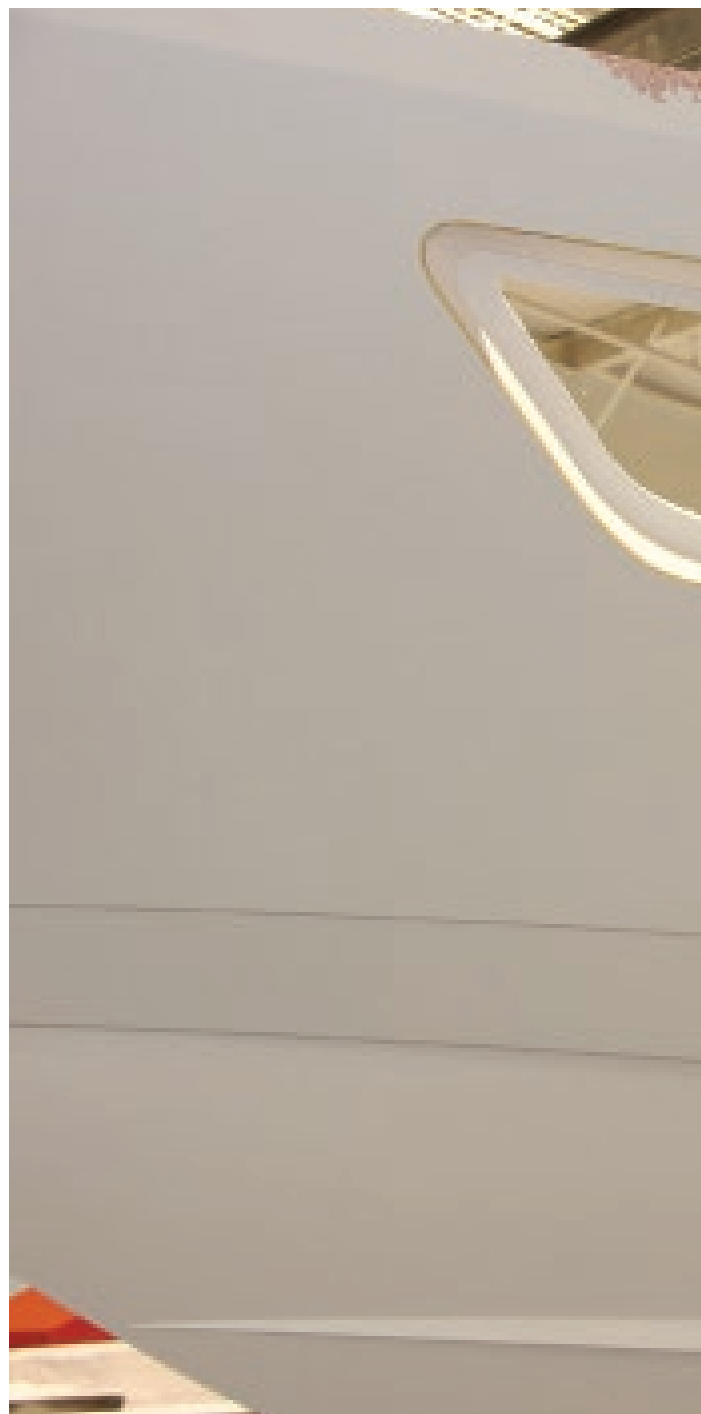
Fiberglass mat, resin and foam core: those are the three main ingredients used to build most boats. In their raw state, these materials are nothing more than stacks of sheets and barrels of crimson goo. The magic happens somewhere in the middle, taking these supplies and shaping them into a boat. The process relies on the hands, creativity and ingenuity of skilled workers as well as cutting-edge technology, tooling and machinery.

It's hard to appreciate all of the work that goes into launching a new boat, unless you lift the curtain and walk the floor of a production facility. When we were invited to take the new Intrepid, the Nomad 427 FE, out for a test ride, we asked if we could also see the factory where the boat came to life.

I meet up with Ken Clinton, president of Intrepid, and Joe Brenna who heads up customer support, in St. Petersburg, Florida. Clinton is hard to miss with his inky-black horseshoe mustache, and Brenna, while decidedly shorter, is sincerely affable and always seems to wear a smile. If you own an Intrepid or have owned one, you're probably on a first-name basis with these guys. Intrepid has no dealer network and works directly with its customers, whom they refer to as the "Intrepid family." When you call for help, they answer. It's one of their hallmarks, and you'll hear many owners espousing the company's high level of customer service. But it's a reciprocal relationship.

"The customer is our best designer," Clinton says, and the boat I'm about to board is the proof in the pudding. The idea for the 427 FE originated after speaking with a longtime Intrepid owner who wanted a center console in the 40-foot range with various elements of different Intrepid models. "He said, 'Give me this helm, that beam, this power and that seating,'" Clinton says. "It changed 50 times." Intrepid does all of its tooling in house at a 120,000-square-foot facility about 10 minutes up the road from where we were standing, and this provides them with lots of flexibility to make changes.

This 427 FE is powered by triple 600-hp Mercury Verados. The two-speed beasts are the largest outboards currently in production. The big, white powerplants stand upright on the transom like goalposts, evoking an undeniable presence with both their size and stature. With a 12-foot, 8-inch beam, you could also opt for quad



450s, achieving the same horsepower with less weight (and less cost), but these 600s sure look pretty on the transom, and they're cat-like quiet with some serious oomph.

The hull of the Nomad 427 FE is based on the 438 Evolution, a proven shape with a stepped bottom. However, they dropped the sheer and ran the transom past the deck to do away with the splash well, creating a flat space that you can walk across. It also helps carry the weight of those big outboards—3,780 pounds to be exact. The boat has a sleek



look, accentuated by its gray hull sides and clean lines.

The versatile nature of the Nomad 427 FE makes it a great fishing boat, dive boat, cruiser or superyacht tender. There's a dive door to port and a drop-down hullside platform to starboard that's operated with the push of a button and locks into place with pins. Inside the drop down platform is a recessed ladder for easy in and out access to the boat. The transom holds a bench seat that's hardly noticeable in the upright position, but when it's down it has an angled back rest so it's

actually comfortable. Two livewells live in the corners of the transom. Intrepid uses Euro-style drop-down cleats with curved lines that are stout and handsome. Clinton calls them "jewelry" that must look good because "you touch that cleat every time you're on the boat."

The entertainment center aft of the helm can be customized with drawers, tackle center, grill, fridge or ice maker. Underneath, a pull-out cooler has unique hinges; it opens from the rear like a hatch so the grabrail above it won't get in the way. A large in-deck storage area can



With twin 600-hp Verados and a versatile layout, the Nomad 427 FE has all the performance and options you need for any on-water activity.

be used for a Seakeeper. The aft shade that extends from the hardtop completely tucks away—you don't even notice it until it starts to open.

The curved windscreen at the helm has a vent that opens with a button to let air flow. The sightlines are wide open; even the curved portion of the glass does not distort the visibility. The switch panel runs in an upside-down U shape across the dash that catches your eye. Clinton said he got the idea from his C8 Corvette. Laying out the switches along the brow in this fashion gains real estate on the helm while also creating an appealing, functional design. You never lose sight of the switches or have to fumble around to find a switch on the underside of the helm. The breakers reside behind a hatch on the port side of the console.

Shorter folks can raise the helm platform and adjust the helm seat forward with buttons to improve sightlines even more. This idea

came from the suggestion of a shorter female owner. "We have all different sized customers and try to nail the design so it makes sense for everyone," Clinton says. "We make sure to put them in a position of confidence at the helm." The joystick and bowthruster reinforce that assurance when docking in windy conditions.

The FE in the model name stands for front entry, referring to the head access in the console. The forward seat slides open, revealing a tall space complete with a shower and more than enough room to clean up and change after playing on the water. An island sunpad opens to reveal a giant insulated fish box that should hold ice for days. I joke that you could fill it up with water and have a nice four-person tub. Clinton tilts his head to the side as if to suggest he doesn't think that's such a bad idea.

Heading into the Gulf of Mexico, the Nomad 427 FE shoots out



Transformative seating: The aft bench folds away while the hi-lo bow table can drop down for a cushion insert or sit flush with the deck.

of the hole smoothly with little bowrise. The dual, contra-rotating props give the boat more stern lift. The engines are powerful yet quiet, just throaty enough to make me think of a Harley-Davidson at idle. The boat cuts through the calm seas. I ran her at a quartering angle to the light chop to try and get a sense of how the boat may handle in rougher water. The boat just ate it up. We hit a top speed of 58 knots with the Mercury auto-trim. We probably could've gotten another click if we trimmed it out a bit more. The boat also has trim tabs, but Brenna, who's still smiling, says you really don't need them. According to him, these powerplants don't seem to mind if you weigh down the boat with fuel, passengers and provisions. Brenna says they had 16 people on board at a recent owner's gathering and the boat didn't lose any performance. "You can really weigh it down," he says. "That two-speed transmission helps it get up on plane. The weight is irrelevant."

I comment that the 427 FE handles like a heavy boat, which I mean as a compliment. It rides soft. No pounding. No digging. I tried to get some spray on the windscreen, but it didn't happen, though the wipers did lift off the glass a hair at wide open. The boat is truly a joy to drive, but I still had a factory tour on the schedule to see how this vessel came into existence.

Located in an industrial area in Largo, Florida, the 7.5-acre Intrepid facility was a tire recycling center when the company purchased it. Intrepid continually expanded over the years and now employs 330 people here.

Clinton, 52, has spent the majority of his adult life working at

Intrepid. He began as an assembler in the early '90s, installing tanks and everything else below the deck. Walking the floor with him, his pride and dedication to his craft is undeniable. This man loves to build boats, treats each one like it's a piece of art, and is not afraid to go the extra mile to create a vessel with the exact lines and look he wants, even if it means additional work.

The process begins with the owner customizing the vessel to their liking, choosing the colors, options and layout. Their build is assigned a number, and they will receive photos and updates as the project progresses down the line, kind of like a baby book.

Intrepid does everything in house. They design the boats, create the molds, build the wiring harnesses—all of it. And sometimes it's a painful process. Case in point is the center console. Clinton wanted to add recessed design elements to the console, but this can cause the part to lock inside the mold as it breaks the rules of geometry. So, he decided to build the mold in four pieces. This way the mold can be removed by unbolting the flanges. The console comes out as one integrated piece, although the seams must be ground and faired to give it that smooth Intrepid look. It takes more time and more labor, but to him, it's worth it. "I don't let geometry dictate our creativity," he says.

This seems to happen a lot at Intrepid. Clinton will want a part to look a certain way. He'll build a model of his idea out of cardboard, take it to one of his engineers or the machine shop and ask them to replicate it.

"There's no part we can't build, no matter the shape, but it has to be sexy," Clinton says proudly. "We're willing to take it to the next step, to give our customer something no one else will. Make it beautiful."

You often see superyachts using an Intrepid as a tender, and these vessels don't dominate that segment by accident. "No one else wanted to build tenders," Clinton says, citing the force a towed boat must sustain in 6- to 8-foot seas as it gets yanked around like a rag doll. Intrepid stepped in, and Clinton says it forced them to build a stronger boat. A win-win for everyone.

The company was an early adopter of vacuum-infusion, a process I got to see with my own eyes. The hull, decks and most other parts of the boat are bagged up with tubes running in all directions like a Frankenstein experiment. Resin is pulled in through the tubes in a very precise manner so there are no voids and a consistent amount of resin is moved throughout. This creates a stronger piece along with a weight savings, because gravity will cause resin put on with a roller to puddle up in lower areas as it dries.

The company makes the cabinetry and interiors out of fiberglass and places a wood veneer overtop. The cabinets are glassed to the superstructure, which adds more strength and integrity. "We build everything as if it's a piece of the hull or the stringer," Clinton says. "This creates a unified system. Is it overkill? Yes, it is."

As we make our way through the plant, I begin to see the boats taking form. They go from molds and pieces to hulls and decks. From miles of wires to a working console. The plant has five production lines currently going and dozens of boats springing to life. We near the finish line and I see a three-man crew sanding a hull on a boat that's just about complete. They're fairing the hull to get out any wawas caused when popping the hull out of the mold. They sand and polish the hull five times before it moves down the line toward its final stop. Another labor-intensive step that leaves a lasting look. An eye for detail, a dedication to their craft and embracing the latest technology and big power: that's what keeps the Intrepid family growing. □