

SECRET FORMULA



KNOWN FOR ITS CRUISERS AND CROSSOVERS, FORMULA'S 387 CCF, MARKS THE COMPANY'S RETURN TO THE CENTER CONSOLE MARKET. IT'S SET TO MAKE A BIG SPLASH. BY [REDACTED]



Writing about boats and fish for a living is an amazing gig. Like any job, it has some less glorious moments, but I've always felt that I have one of the best jobs in the world. That is until I stepped aboard Formula's first center console since the 1980s and met Abe Haines, the company's product specialist who had a heavy hand in designing the 387 CCF.

Haines is from Indiana, where Formula builds its boats. Indiana is not exactly known for saltwater fishing, but you wouldn't know that by looking at the 387. The boat is stacked with fishing features and laid out with an emphasis on deck space to battle gamefish. This center console does not look like it was conceived in the Midwest.

"Do you do a lot of saltwater fishing?" I asked Haines.

"I do now!" he said.

Turns out Haines and his colleagues have been on a multi-year fishing crash course. When Formula decided to re-enter the center console market, the company sent Haines and some other product development folks on a fishing tour across the country. They went to Louisiana, the Florida Keys, the Carolinas and up the East Coast as far north as Cape Cod. On each trip they learned about a different style of fishing and how anglers in each region use their boats. The time spent fishing around the country wasn't just fun, it played a big role in the layout and fishability of the 387, and it speaks to Formula's approach to boatbuilding.

"We had a factory in Miami for many years," says Formula President Scott Porter, who operated the Miami plant from 1981 to '86. "I did a lot of fishing down there, but we knew things had changed and felt it would be a great experience for our team to get out and learn what they could."

Offshore fishing is a gear-driven endeavor. You might be trolling lures along the edge of the continental shelf one day and carrying hundreds of live baits the next. You don't just take a couple of fishing rods when you go offshore, you carry a full armada of light rigs on up to heavy outfits and full range of spinning rods. A fishing boat must have a spot for all this gear but more importantly, it must also be quick and stable. It's a tall, challenging order but one that Formula executed well.

To make sure they designed a boat with enough room for anglers to move about the deck without bumping into each other, the Formula team built a plywood mockup to scale, complete with hardtop and outriggers, on the floor of their prototype shop. The hardtop on the 387 is massive, which provides shade and protection but can be a problem when fishing. If it's too long aft, the tips of the rods will bump into it all day. To combat such issues, the Formula design team, including Porter, spent hours in the plywood boat, making adjustments and noting where to put things like cup holders and phone chargers.

"That is what we do for every project," Porter said. "We want to make sure everything is correct when the boat's complete."

To get a sense of how the 387 CCF fishes, we planned to spend half a day fishing off Miami. We were greeted by 3- to 4-footers and a





LOA: 41'2"
Beam: 12'
Draft: 3'10"
Fuel: 500 gal.
Water: 55 gal.
Displ.: 23,500 lbs.
Power: 3/450-hp Mercury outboards
Base Price: \$1.4 million

RPM	Knots	GPH	Range
1000	5	5.2	528
2000	8.7	15	283
3000	11	37	164
4000	27	50	285
5000	39	74	295
6300	53	126	221

Seas: 1-2 feet Fuel: 3/4 full

Abe Haines (left) and the author with a pair of blackbelly rosefish caught on the bottom in 800 feet. The Formula 387 CCF is well equipped for all facets of offshore fishing.





stiff north wind as we powered up and blasted off through the notorious Haulover Inlet. There was no bow-stuffing for the YouTubers filming on the breakwater, we just waved as we motored past.

The 387 weighs more than 23,000 pounds loaded, which is heavier than many center consoles of this size. To me, that additional weight is not a bad thing, it helps the twin-stepped hull cut down the chop and land softly. We comfortably cruised at 35 knots with the triple 450-hp Mercury Racing outboards running at roughly 75 percent load. We didn't even get a drop of spray on the windshield but that's because we had the windshield up on the run out the inlet. Yes, the windshield opens with the push of a button to give you a nice breeze when idling through no-wake zones, but once we got up to speed, we shut it so we could comfortably have a conversation. The air-conditioning vents on the helm kept us comfortable, minus the breeze.

Center consoles are popular with anglers because you can fish from anywhere on the boat. The cockpit, however, is ground zero. This is where baits get rigged, rods get deployed, fish get gaffed and live bait swim in tanks. You need room to do these tasks without stepping on each other. The 387 has plenty of room and one of the smartest mezzanine/tackle centers I've seen on a boat of this size.

Formula is great at using every inch of the boat in smart, functional ways and the tackle center on the 387 CCF is a perfect example. When you're out fishing, the aft-facing tackle center has drawers, tray storage and a countertop for rigging with a small sink. Flip the sink lid upside down and you'll find a cutting board that fits right on top of a bit of decking material the company placed for ascending a ladder up through a hatch in the hard top. When you're done rigging, a cushion slides over the countertop for some mezzanine seating. There are even AC vents that blow on the small of your back when sitting there. To climb onto the mezzanine, you simply push a button that releases a massive cooler to use as a step or footrest. Formula managed to design this area for three uses: seating, tackle rigging and entertaining.

Once offshore we found some scattered weedlines, which mahimahi love to cruise under, and decided to drop down the Gemlux carbon fiber outriggers and troll some lures. Formula has forged a strong working relationship with the Gemlux team, which is based in Jacksonville. The company manufactures a long list of stainless boat hardware and fishing accessories. They also do a ton of fishing and helped educate the Midwesterners on the wants and needs of tournament anglers. One such smart idea that jumped right out at me was the use of fender clips on the outrigger halyards. These quick-connect clips are used to drop fenders into place on the gunwale. Formula added a clip to the halyards, so it only takes about five seconds to move them from the hardtop when the outriggers are stowed while underway to the gunwales when they are deployed.

The 387 trolled well with a clean propwash that won't muffle lure action, but the mahi weren't around. The north/northeast wind had broken up the weedlines and scattered the fish, though we did spook showers of flying fish as we bumped along at 7 knots. We reeled in the lures and decided to make a move south to a spot Haines had marked in 800 feet of water to do a little deep dropping.

The 387's cockpit has two lighted, pressurized livewells in the transom, one of which we had filled with live pilchards. There's also plenty of deck space around the triple 450-hp Mercury Racing outboards, thanks to wings that extend aft on either side of the engines. This extra decking makes boarding much easier and can come in handy if you need to check a prop. There's lots of seating with a full-beam aft bench that folds away to keep the area unfettered when fishing.

When we got to our location, Haines placed an electric reel in a port rodholder to drop some baits to the bottom. Offshore crews use these 12-volt Lindgren-Pitman electric reels when kite fishing, pulling dredges and deep-dropping for swords and other critters. Formula has pre-rigged

each side of the boat with electric reel plug ins. We loaded a five-hook chicken rig with squid chunks and dropped it down to the bottom hoping for some blackbelly rosefish. These large-eyed bottom dwellers fry up incredibly well and their colors would make Monet blush.

We deployed three live baits on light spinning rods from the bow while waiting for a deep bite (which did not take long). The boat stayed on our mark with little effort thanks to the north wind pushing against the current. And with the Seakeeper 3 gyro doing its thing belowdeck, the boat didn't roll much more than it would at the dock. We made four successful drops and put a dozen or so roseys in the insulated fish box.

With bottom fishing and trolling checked off my to-do list, we decided to run back toward Miami and grab lunch at Whiskey Joes on Virginia Key. That's the beauty of fishing in South Florida, civilization is never far away, especially when you have 1,350 ponies pushing you around. We passed several boats as we ran through Government Cut and made our way to the marina at the restaurant. The 387 is the first boat I've been on with a bow thruster integrated into the joystick outboard control system. By using the bow thruster and motors at the same time, the boat spins on a much tighter axis. Docking was absolutely effortless.

Once at the dock I took a minute to step into the cabin through the portside entry. This cabin is roomier than you'd expect on a center console and with an small skylight and side windows, there's plenty of natural light coming in, so you don't feel like you're in an elevator. A separate wet head has standing room and a shower. But what I loved most about this space was the hidden drawer Formula created to stow the V berth's filler cushions. These cushions always get tossed around when not in use and Formula managed to solve the issue by creating a drawer that locks in place by two fold-down storage areas. You'd never know the drawer was there.

After lunch, it was my turn to take the helm. Sliding into the center helm chair I soaked in all the classy touches on the dash. Formula used a mix of black materials and teak accents to create a yacht-like command center dominated by three 16-inch Garmin touchscreens. The visibility at the center helm chair is unobstructed, even for shorter guys like myself.

As we approached the calm, open waters of Biscayne Bay I pushed the throttles down to see how the Formula responded with the Mercury outboards. It nearly blew my hat off. The boat accelerates like a muscle car and holds tight in a turn. At wide open we managed 53 knots without touching the trim.

We blew past Stiltsville and I started to make the turn north toward Haulover when we were met with a headwind and chop. I eased up on the throttles. I'm a conservative helmsman when running someone else's boat, especially one that's valued north of \$1.5 million. I found a comfortable cruising speed of 27 knots at 4000 rpm, but I got the feeling that the Formula boys wanted me to push the center console a bit more because they knew the boat could handle it. Honestly, I wasn't in any rush for the day to end.

Formula builds its boats with a structural grid similar to that of an aircraft and all the parts are chemically bonded together and filled with foam. The finished product is a single, solid piece. There is no creaking, vibration or shuddering whatsoever. "This is the most solid boat we've ever built," Haines said.

The 387 CCF is the first center console Formula splashed and a sport model followed quick on its heels. That model switches out the livewells for more seating and includes a hi-low table in the bow, but with Formula's flex program, each owner can pick and choose whatever options they want. After all, everyone uses their boats a bit differently and Formula understands that. The company does its homework, and it shows. □



The helm of the 387 CCF provides clear sightlines and the latest in technology. The windshield opens up for a cool breeze in no-wake zones and the bow thruster is integrated into the joystick control for stress-free docking.



The mezzanine plays three roles: An aft-facing seat for two, a bait rigging station and an entertainment area complete with a massive retractable cooler (which also functions as a step).