

FWC Unleashes Unique New Rescue Airboat



Photo by CarolAnn Onstad

AAoF member Mary M. McKinney, Captain Mark Hodges, and Officer Robert Fernandez with FWC aboard the FWC's new specialty airboat.

By Laurie Hauke

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's newest addition to its fleet of service vessels is an airboat manufactured by Diamondback Airboats Inc., Cocoa, Florida. The vessel was designed specifically for FWC at its request. The commission presented Diamondback with special requirements of what it needed

and wanted in this vessel. The FWC is extremely excited about the capabilities and the different functions this airboat has. Being able to perform in a huge variety of conditions, especially deep in the Everglades where it is harder for others to get into areas that are not easily accessible are key.

Photo by Mary M. Mckinney



The FWC's new specially designed Diamondback airboat is multifunctional and has incredible maneuverability. This photo shows the speed and the action of this vessel as it makes a fast turn on the water. Driving is Officer Santi Ayala and passenger is Monroe County Public Information Officer Robert Dube.

"I have been on a couple of different types of airboats and I must say that this one is by far the most multifunctional and has incredible maneuverability. It runs like no other airboat that I have ever been on. This will be used for so many different situations and will go to so many different places that no matter how much it costs to have it built, FWC has the best tool that they could have in their fleet of vessels," said Mary M. McKinney, member of the Airboat Association of Florida, who was present for the unveiling.

This 20-ft.-long by 7-ft.-wide aluminum hull was specially designed for the FWC. The aluminum hull is 190 (3/16") 5086 marine grade aluminum and has a one-piece bottom with no splicing. The bottom of the hull is protected by UHMW marine polymer. The

Continued on page 52

Continued from page 51

bottom and side chines are turned down to aid in maneuverability. The deck and side walk-arounds have nonskid surfaces and the seats have hydraulic shocks. Passenger seats are easily removed when extra equipment transportation is needed. Powder-coated rigging provides for the FWC look and added protection and durability. Its operating system is equipped with Teleflex marine grade gauges. A Levitator 454 Chevy big block high-performance motor has approximately 500 hp at the prop.

In the past, FWC airboats typically held two people, so FWC personnel had to make multiple trips to and from a scene to transport staff, medical personnel, supplies and equipment. The Diamondback

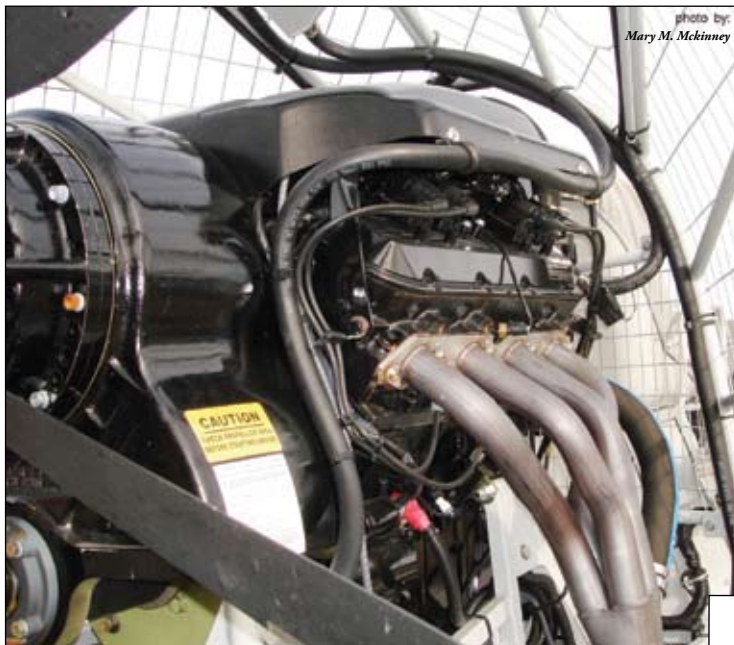


photo by:
Mary M. McKinney



The stainless steel mufflers on the 454 big block Chevy engine, and the counter rotating props with a CH-3 2.3:1 gear reduction are what make this run quieter than most other airboats.

airboat will make their duties much easier, especially with the amount of storage in the new vehicle. There is dry storage in the front of the hull in the floor and storage under the seats. Senior FWC Officer Santi Ayala said: "This vessel was not built for speed; although it has the speed and power... it is built for performance. The special features this vessel has will allow it to navigate in various conditions, including out in the Everglades. It can be used in high water or low water areas and it can even go on land. It can haul supplies to flooded areas or removal of those that are stranded. It has already been used in an emergency situation."

The two eight-blade CH-3 2.3:1 counter-rotator props with a heavy duty Black Hawk belt have a different pitch. The 16 blades are constructed of a carbon fiber material. The different pitch on each blade set helps with the craft's push as well as reduces sound. This also gives the airboat enough push to run on dry ground. "It has a sound all its own," says McKinney.

On January 7, after a media blitz the day before, Officer Bill Stiffler shows Mary McKinney, AAoF member and correspondent for Airboating Magazine; Keith Price, president of the Airboat Association of Florida; Donnie and CarolAnn Onstad also with the AAoF, just how easy this 52 Airboating Magazine

airboat moves on the water.

Stiffler is part of the Dade County unit of FWC and has 15 years of service. He has seen firsthand some of the worst situations that have happened in the Florida Everglades. He is one of the many FWC staff members who worked on the Everglades crash of Value

Continued on page 53



From left to right: Officers Robert Fernandez, Santi Ayala, and Keith Price, President of the Airboat Association of Florida at the media unveiling of the FWC's new airboat.

Continued from page 52

Jet Flight 592 on May 11, 1996 in which all 100 aboard perished. He knows how important having an airboat of this size with these types of capabilities can be in all kinds of different situations. "I must say it can and does push some water and it gets where it needs to go," says McKinney as she watches and rides this new specialty airboat.

The unique design of this grass rake is one of the many special features of this FWC airboat.

It is lightweight but very strong in performance. This grass rake has a built-in ramp that will allow an all-terrain 4-wheel



Officers Robert Fernandez (left) and Santi Ayala (right) give a demonstration on how the grass rake drops for use in loading supplies and equipment.



Officer Robert Fernandez demonstrates how a Razor all-terrain vehicle is loaded onto the front of the airboat.

vehicle or a Razor personal watercraft to drive up onto the boat with ease. This allows the captain of the airboat to drive to land and load or unload equipment, supplies or the all-terrain vehicle that may be on it at that time.

Fernandez explained that having a grass rake that drops down will benefit in the rescue or recovery operations. The need for having this special feature is for airboat rescues in the Everglades. Various



Photo by Mary AE McKinney

Officer Robert Fernandez points to a big rock that was brought up on land during the January 6, 2010 media demonstration. This rock was at the water's edge and the power of the motor and counter rotating props and the durability of the hull caused this rock to come up on land under the airboat, but the airboat remained undamaged.

agencies and personal airboats are often used in these rescues. There have been several occasions when members of the AAoF have helped the FWC and other agencies with a recovery or a rescue operation. "I'm very excited about this specially designed airboat and know how valuable it is going to be," states Price.

**NEW!
10% Off!**

**Airboat and
Hovercraft Noise
Cancellation**

noisebuster[®]

Our Active Noise Reduction Earmuff is specifically designed to reduce airboat and hovercraft propeller and engine noise. Get the highest-performing hearing protector available today.



Model PA4000

Use Coupon Code
AIRBOAT
for 10% off at www.noisebuster.net

Pro Tech Technologies, Inc. Wilton, CT 06897
Phone: 203-210-7230