

BY DAN ARMITAGE

# FAMILY VALUE

BENNINGTON 20SLi

If you and your family are in the market for a pontoon boat, but didn't think you could afford an upscale brand such as Bennington, it's time to look again.

The S series, targeted at value-oriented buyers, has helped earn the Elkhart, Ind.-based builder the top spot in market share, according to Susan Buff, the company's vice president of sales. And after a cruise aboard Bennington's 20SLi, it's apparent why.

As we walked its deck, Buff pointed out that the SLi incorporates most of the same high-quality materials that have made Bennington one of the most desirable—and pricey—pontoon brands on the water.

The standard frame for the 10-foot-long bimini top, for example, is the same square, anodized aluminum used on Bennington's top-of-the-line pontoon boat models. And it uses the same SureLast fabric overhead.

Other examples of the commitment to quality materials are literally underfoot. The premium marine carpeting on the deck and the SoftTouch vinyl featured in furniture coverings and wraps are the same as offered on the more expensive models.

Yet there are areas that have been cut back. For example, rather than extending the upholstery vinyl down to the deck, the material is trimmed back on Bennington's S series boats, revealing the roto-molded



**The 20SLi from Bennington offers a variety of high-quality materials in a pontoon boat that has value written all over it.**

plastic on the seat bases. The seat bases and the one-piece fiberglass helm console, which sports quality Faria gauges and a Sony AM/FM/CD/MP3 stereo system as standard equipment, are through-bolted to the deck.

The deck itself is built of high-quality, marine-grade plywood fitted with stainless-steel hardware, including the protective corner castings that are through-bolted to their respective fore and aft crossmembers.

Three pinch-proof, lift-and-lock gates offer access to and from the model's deck, and the gate aft leads to a swim platform with a sturdy boarding ladder.

Our test boat was propelled by an F70 Yamaha 16-valve four-stroke outboard (an upgrade from the base Yamaha F50), and the Bennington skated to a top speed of nearly 23 mph.

Handling was typical for a pontoon—it has a broad turning radius and surges

through wakes and waves, but the overriding feel of the boat was very solid and secure.

Ultimately, we truly enjoyed the 20SLi. For a Bennington, it is plain and simple, yet it is a quality boat throughout. With a base price of less than \$15K, this is one pontoon you can't afford to ignore. **TB**

## SPECIFICATIONS

Base price (w/Yamaha F50)	\$14,995
Price as tested	\$16,905
Length/beam	19'9"/8'6"
Weight (boat only)	1,536 lbs.
Fuel capacity	24 gals.
Maximum horsepower	70

## ENGINE AS TESTED

Make	Yamaha F70LA
Horsepower/no. of cylinders	70/1-4
Displacement	996cc (60.8 cid)
Induction	EFI four-stroke
Weight	257 lbs.
Gear ratio	2.33:1
WOT rpm range	5300-6300
Propeller	13" x 13" aluminum three-blade

## TEST RESULTS

Top speed (mph)	22.6
0-20-mph acceleration (seconds)	n/a

ENGINE RPM	SPEED MPH	FUEL GPH	FUEL MPG	RANGE/MILES <sup>1</sup>
1000	3.1	0.3	10.3	222
1500	4.3	0.5	8.6	185
2000	5.4	0.8	6.7	144
2500	7.3	1.0	7.3	157
3000	9.0	1.6	5.6	120
3500	12.4	2.0	6.2	133
4000	14.9	2.5	5.9	120
4500	17.1	3.3	5.1	110
5000	19.2	4.2	4.5	97
5500	21.7	5.4	4.086	
5700 (WOT)	22.6	5.6	4.0	86

<sup>1</sup> Optimum cruising speed <sup>2</sup>Based on 90 percent fuel capacity

## FENCE RISERS

**A**lso known as deck stands, fence risers (right) are often-overlooked features on pontoon boats. Yet these are well worth the minimal expense if offered as an option when buying a new boat. Or you can add fence risers when retrofitting a boat's deck or railing.

The stands, made of plastic or aluminum, serve as simple bushings between the bottom of the rail and the deck, usually secured at points where the railing is bolted to the deck.

By creating a gap between the deck and

railing, the risers allow water to drain off and air to circulate between the components to keep the deck material dry and mildew-free.

Fence risers also make it much easier to sweep or rinse dirt off the deck at the end of a day on the water. If you want to retrofit your pontoon railing with fence risers, they are available at marine retailers and websites such as [cabelas.com](http://cabelas.com) and [pontoonstuff.com](http://pontoonstuff.com). **DA**

