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| **Boat Show constant: Everything's bigger**Steve Waters Outdoors Writer |
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| October 29, 2006Fort Lauderdale \* The boats at the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show just keep on getting bigger, and it's not only the superyachts.The Fort Lauderdale show is known for having the most boats 80 feet and longer, which is the definition of a superyacht. At the 47th edition of the show, which opened Thursday at six sites and runs through Monday, I also found bigger versions of everything, including center consoles, the most popular type of offshore fishing boat in South Florida.The luxurious superyachts get most of the attention at the show, and it's been that way since I covered my first Fort Lauderdale boat show in 1990. The difference now is that the sizes of the boats, and their price tags, have increased significantly.Back in the good old days, you could get a really nice boat for $10 million. At the 1991 show, the biggest boat was 143 feet and priced at $7.9 million. This year's show has a 228-footer for $70 million and a 197-footer for $90 million.(The abundance of huge, super-expensive yachts has many of the cruising and fishing destinations with exhibits at the boat show, such as Rum Cay Resort Marina in the eastern Bahamas, touting their ability to accommodate superyachts and the needs of their passengers. Rum Cay announced at the show that RockResorts will manage the luxury hotel, spa and marina village at the 870-acre property.)In a year or two, the current crop of large superyachts might be dwarfed by some of the vessels now under construction. According to Skip Zimbalist III, the new owner of Show Management, which produces the boat show, 10 boats over 300 feet are being built compared with three over 300 last year.Center consoles are keeping pace with the superyachts. In the early 1990s, most people fished in a 20- to 23-footer. A 25- or 26-footer was considered big for a center console. Strolling around the floor of the Broward County Convention Center, I was surprised to see just how much center consoles have grown.It wasn't that long ago when a handful of companies came out with 33- to 36-foot boats, and those were targeted to hard-core tournament types who traveled long distances in all kinds of weather in search of fish. Their big center consoles could better handle rough seas and carried more fuel and more people.Now it seems like every company offers big center consoles. At the convention center, Stamas has its 340 Tarpon CCC, which measures 41 feet, 2 inches with a 12-foot, 6-inch beam and holds 350 gallons of fuel for its twin Suzuki 300-horsepower four-stroke outboard motors.Hydra-Sports has its Vector 3300 CC, which measures 33-5 and is powered by triple 275-horsepower Mercury Verado four-strokes. There's a Triton 351XD that measures 34-10 and has triple 275 Verados. Grady-White has its Express 360 powered by triple Yamaha 250-horsepower four-strokes. Pursuit has its SF 345 and Century has its 3200 Offshore, both boats powered with twin Yamaha 250 four-strokes. The listed prices for the boats range from $185,900 to $266,276.Even Albury Brothers Boats has added to its product line with a 27-footer. That's small compared with those other center consoles, but big considering that the company's other two boats are 20- and 23-foot center consoles."People always ask if there's going to be a bigger boat," Jeff Lichterman said. "We're taking reservations on the 27."Albury Brothers, which builds its boats in the Bahamas and at Riviera Beach, was able to get only the 27's hull with its deck to its exhibit at the convention center. Despite that, and despite the boat not going into production for 4-6 months, Lichterman said he already had 10 deposits from people for the 27, pending a sea trial.Don Albury, who builds the boats with his father and brother at Man O'War Cay, said the 27 will feature a big console with a head and be powered by twin 200- or 225-horsepower outboards.Steve Waters can be reached at swaters@sun-sentinel.com or 954-356-4648. |

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