



HELMSMAN 43

A FINE MIX OF THE MODERN AND THE TRADITIONAL

Some boats feel comfortable the instant one steps on board, and some take a bit of getting used to. The new Helmsman 43 is one of the former. Not only is the interior woodwork well fit and finished, it is warm and inviting. The cabin sides have more window glass than fiberglass, creating a bright and cheery interior even on a dull day. The pilothouse boasts plenty of window glass, too, and the daylight pouring through that glass streams down into the salon.

A BIT OF HISTORY

The Far East factory that builds Helmsman Trawlers has been building fiberglass vessels for many years and has developed a skill set producing midrange trawlers at prices that allow the vessels to be sold in North America at good value. The principals of Waterline Boats of Seattle are also principals of the builder

company and are the Helmsman importer of record. The 43 is the largest of the six Helmsman vessels and the second pilothouse in the line. Three of the other vessels are sedan trawlers and one is a Downeast style. An updated version of the Camano 31, a well-known Pacific Northwest boat, is currently under construction and will join the Waterline Boats inventory.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Designers of the new 43-footer have opted for the wide-body approach, which allows for plenty of interior space and, thanks to a cleverly designed command bridge/top deck, provides more than enough space for outdoor entertaining in good weather. Outdoor entertaining in the cockpit, even in the rain, is possible because it is fully covered by the deckhouse roof. The edges of that roof are designed so that water flowing off it does not drip into the cockpit. The cockpit can also be a great hangout for serious fishermen who want to be close to their gear while it's deployed.

The hull itself is solid hand-laid fiberglass with vinylester resin in the outer glass layers to help reduce water wicking into the laminate. Helmsman is right up to date with its internal hull structural stiffeners, which are built of glass and bonded solidly into the hull. Many glass hulls continue to use wood, glassed over, as the stringer/stiffener system. The bonded, all-glass system



Extensive use of teak and the comfortable layout of the Helmsman 43 give the yacht a traditional look and feel, especially through the salon and pilothouse. The builder's construction methods, however — hand-laid fiberglass, vinylester, bonded fiberglass stringers — are up to date and purely 21st century.

produces a very strong, lightweight, non-rotting system that is easily repairable in the unlikely event such a need should arise.

All visible glass work is well done, fair and without print-through or haze. All stainless deck hardware is top quality, as are the oversized stainless rails. The builder has specified seacocks on all underwater through-hulls, which helps reduce the cost of ongoing maintenance, since work can be done on any interior seawater system with all seacocks closed, without hauling the vessel. A zinc anode bonding system is standard.

The hull design features a full keel with a stainless steel rudder and skeg. Such a design feature has disappeared on many hulls whose designers feel that the drag created by a full keel makes hulls slower, but it does have distinct advantages when it comes to operating in rough weather. Full-keel vessels generally have a lower center of gravity, and the long keel makes

tracking better. Autopilots usually do less "hunting" on full-keel vessels, which makes longer cruises more comfortable.

ON DECK

Access to the large cockpit is off the built-in swimstep through a transom door. The cockpit has a built-in hot and cold handheld shower. Access to the top deck and the chariot-style command bridge is up a set of steps, port and starboard. The entire top deck features solid handrails that are right at the outer edge of the deck. The radar/antenna mast is hinged, making maintenance of equipment secured on it quick, safe and easy. A skipper who wants to operate the vessel from up top does not have to rush down to the main deck to deploy fenders, as they can be deployed from the flybridge. Visibility from the command bridge is, as one would expect, excellent.

All deck walking surfaces are non-skid, and the pattern is sharp

and aggressive enough to provide good footing even in a heavy rain.

INSIDE

Access to the vessel's traditional and beautifully finished interior is off the cockpit or through port and starboard sliding pilothouse doors. Teak is used extensively throughout the interior, and teak-and-holly flooring sets a traditional tone. The interior woodwork is very well fit and finished, and heavy, solid teak overhead grabrails stand out. It is clear that Helmsman designers are boaters and understand that solid, well-placed grabrails are an important safety feature.

The interior layout is fairly traditional. The dinette is along the port side of the salon opposite a seating area that features a couple of comfortable chairs. Forward of the seating area is a U-shaped galley, which has plenty of granite countertop and storage space and features overhead drop-down cabinets. The salon also features a day head.



The pilothouse is up a set of stairs forward and to the port of the galley. Visibility all around from the pilothouse is excellent, and the skipper can see right through to the cockpit by simply stepping to the port of the helm station and looking aft. A very comfortable L-shaped settee, complete with a drop-down table, provides a convenient location for guests who want to join the skipper while underway. The space doubles as a pilothouse berth.

The wheelhouse of the new Helmsman features an opening center pane in the windshield, something seldom seen anymore on modern

good storage. It has opening stainless steel ports, allowing good ventilation in the sleeping spaces.

The head includes a separate shower stall, opening ports, a freshwater toilet, a vanity and good storage.

UNDERWAY

With the owner, Lee Stiles, on board and Waterline Boats' Scott Helker at the helm, we fired up the 380 hp Cummins QSB 6.7L (408-cubic-inch) diesel, which comes with a single-lever Digital Throttle and Shift (DTS). The four-cycle six-cylinder high-pressure common-rail turbocharged after-cooled diesel flashed up instantly, without rattle, smoking or hunting.

With the engine idling, 600 rpm, and all the doors on the vessel wide open, our noise meter, placed directly over the engine space and as close to the engine as we could get it without being in the engine space, showed 70 decibels, the same level as a normal conversation.

When we exited the no-wake zone, we upped the throttle to 1100 revs and made 5.3 knots while burning 1.2 gph. At 2000 revs, we burned 4.9 gph while moving along at 8.3 knots. When we upped the engine speed to 2500 rpm, we moved along at 9.5 knots while burning 8.4 gph. At 3000 rpm, we burned 16.3 gph and made 10.5 knots.

As our speed test unfolded, we noted that the engine reached its governed top speed quickly and easily, indicating that the prop could do with a bit more pitch, which would have the effect of increasing the speed and reducing fuel

➔ SPEC BOX

LOA	45 ft.
BEAM	14 ft., 2 in.
DRAFT	4 ft., 6 in.
DISPLACEMENT (DRY)	35,000 lbs.
FUEL	500 gal.
WATER	200 gal.
PRICE (AS TESTED)	\$479,000

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Cummins QSB 6.7L 250 hp diesel, bow thruster, Lewmar windlass, 11-gal. water heater, Masterflush heads, refrigerator, propane stove and more.

OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT

Range of engine choices, upgraded electronics, stern thruster, dinghy/davit system, cabin climate control and more.

BUILDER & WEST COAST DEALER

WATERLINE BOATS, Seattle; (206) 282-0110; waterlineboats.com

Testers' Opinion

➔ It is a well-finished, solid boat, with all the modern machinery and electronics, yet the use of time-honored marine woods will appeal to many traditionalists. Helmsman has mixed the traditional and the new very well.

trawlers. When opened even slightly, the pane will provide excellent ventilation at any time other than when driving into a head sea.

ACCOMMODATION SPACE

The two staterooms are forward and down from the wheelhouse. The master, in the bow, features an island queen bed and plenty of storage. Well-positioned reading lights and opening hatches make this space very comfortable, even for longer cruises. The guest stateroom features a double bed and

consumption. (We were testing hull #1, and the fine-tuning of the vessel and its systems was not complete.) All speeds were measured on an independent GPS, and all fuel-consumption information was provided by the engine's onboard computers.

After we finished our speed runs, we stopped the vessel, put the wheel hard over, kept it there, and slowly increased engine speed to WOT. This maneuver will quickly show if there are any "bad habits" designed into the hull or running gear. The new 43 spun in almost its own length and stayed flat, without cavitation, skipping, skidding or shuddering.

During our entire test, the vessel responded smartly and precisely to all helm inputs. Going from hard astarboard to hard aport, even at top speed, was a non-event — as it should be. Unfortunately, weather and water conditions during our test were calm — great for boating but not so great for boat testing. However, the owner advised he had been out in a strong wind with seas running 2 to 3 feet, and the vessel handled solidly and performed very well. 🐾