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Helmsman 38E Trawler Yacht

Thoughtful planning makes for a practical cruiser

by John Page Williams

The big secret to choosing a boat is thinking through exactly what you want her to do for you. That rule

applies to every watercraft, from kayaks and canoes, through runabouts and fishboats, to cruising power- and sailboats. A corollary, though, is to avoid overthinking the process and trying to build in too much—too many accommodations, too much weight, too

much power, too much stuff. It's not easy, but right-sizing pays off in time and funds expended and in satisfaction realized.

This rule especially applies to choosing a long-range cruising boat. It helps to study boats built by people who cruise their own creations. Helmsman Trawler Yachts is a good example, now seven years into ownership by a family who were owners first. Though the company is based in Seattle, it has an active Chesapeake office in Maryland, on Kent Island. We recently had an opportunity to shake out a Helmsman 38E, a pilothouse trawler that shows careful,

Helmsman 38E

LOA: 40' 10"

LOD: 37' 10"

Beam: 13'11"

Draft: 4'

Displacement:

30,000 lbs. (dry)

Fuel Capacity: 400 gal.

helmsmantrawlers.com





practical thinking reflecting both the big secret above and its corollary.

Built on a robust, full-keel, semi-displacement hull that fits in a 40-foot slip, it serves the needs of a cruising couple for comfortable sleeping, cooking, eating, reading (with abundant lighting and bookshelves), maintaining ship's systems, piloting, and just moving around without getting in each other's way. Yes, there is a way to accommodate a couple of guests overnight, but what the 38E concentrates on is providing a serious, seamanlike pilothouse, a roomy and well-lit master cabin with island queen berth; an enclosed head and shower; a full galley with granite countertops, microwave oven and refrigerator; plenty of storage; a salon with dinette and space for a reading chair; a covered cockpit with lazarette storage beneath; and a spacious upper deck with helm, lounge, folding radar mast, davit, and space to store a dinghy.

The cockpit, salon, cabin, and upper deck are particularly noteworthy because they extend across the 38E's full 13-foot, 11-inch beam, making them especially roomy for a boat of this size. There is even a day head, readily accessible from the salon. The salon dinette converts to a double guest berth beside the door to the day head, with a curtain available for privacy. Cabinetwork is teak, with a traditional teak-and-holly sole and a striking,

laminated teak-and-holly overhead beam supported by hanging knees.

Helmsman calls the 38E's bright, airy pilothouse "low rise" because it sits only two steps above the salon sole with open access between the two. Designed for passage-making, it offers great visibility at the helm with plenty of space for electronics, a teak wheel, and a comfortable pedestal chair with flip-up bolster and footrest. To port are a chart table on the forward bulkhead and an L-shaped watch settee with table. A three-

ABOVE: Ample space and floods of natural light provide comfortable living space below.

BELOW: The upper deck helm station provides excellent visibility for fair-weather cruising and maneuvering.



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panel, West Coast-style, forward-slanting windshield with center-opening panel stays clear with triple pantographic wipers. There's an opening hatch overhead. Sturdy, sliding, aluminum side-doors port and starboard open to deep side decks, with stairs aft to the upper deck, which sits amidships above the salon, extending back over the cockpit cover. Access to upper and bow decks are easy and secure. Need to hang fenders along the after part of the hull? Do it from the upper deck.

The Helmsman 38E's engine room is clearly designed with the mechanic in mind, whether it's the owner doing basic fluid checks or a technician performing maintenance. A long hatch in the salon sole rises on gas shocks for access to engine, genset, tanks, wiring, and plumbing. There's access to all of the ship's systems throughout including handy touches like easily removable ceiling panels for wiring access. Helmsman's mainland China yard has been building these trawlers for twenty years (originally under the Mariner brand), and they know their craft, whether it's overhead teak handholds, fiberglass stringers and engine mounts, or wiring harnesses.

What typically goes onto a 38E's engine mounts is a Cummins QSB 6.7-liter, electronically-controlled diesel of 250, 380, or 425 horsepower, though other brands are available. With the larger engines assisted by trim tabs (when 425-equipped,) the hull lifts partway onto plane for speeds in the upper teens, but this trawler—no surprise—is happiest and most efficient at 7 to 9 knots. A sweet spot is 1,400 rpm making a little over 7 knots with a fuel-burn just under 2 gallons per hour providing a range of more than 1,300 miles with the two 200-gallon fuel tanks filled and a 10-percent safety margin. Our

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sea trial confirmed those basic figures, and the boat handled sweetly with her big propeller, barn-door rudder, and standard bow thruster. A stern thruster is optional. Helmsman trawlers bound for the Pacific Northwest get cabin heating systems, but those coming to the Chesapeake get twin, cabin and salon, reverse-cycle air conditioning/heat systems driven by a 6-kW Northern Lights or Cummins/Onan genset. Other generator options are available. Power storage onboard lies in four Northstar AGM batteries (starting, bow thruster, and two house), along with a battery charger and twin 30-amp shorepower inlets.

Little touches mark Helmsman's 38E as a vessel meant to be lived aboard, such as a spice rack in the galley, wood blinds in the salon and pilothouse, a medicine cabinet in the master head, a tool cabinet in the engine room, and a ladder on the swim platform. Base price for the 38E with a 250-hp Cummins QSB 6.7 diesel is \$409,000 delivered to the Chesapeake and commissioned with bottom paint. With electronics, genset, A/C, and other options, figure on \$450K to \$460K. For more information, contact Paul Burbach in Stevensville, paulburbach@helmsmantrawlers.com, (240-508-8779) or online at helmsmantrawlers.com. ⚓



CBM Editor at Large and author John Page Williams is a licensed captain and Maryland fishing guide. He has been on staff at the

Chesapeake Bay Foundation as an educator, writer and senior naturalist, saving the Bay since 1973. In 2013, the State of Maryland proclaimed him an official Admiral of the Bay, something we knew all along.

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