

The Total Package

THE SEMI-DISPLACEMENT, FULL-KEEL **HELMSMAN 43E PILOTHOUSE** DOES JUST WHAT A TRAWLER IS SUPPOSED TO: SHE GOES THE DISTANCE.

story NORRIS COMER photos JONATHAN COOPER





Above: The low-rise pilothouse, which has excellent visibility and open communication with the salon, is also a social area, while underway or in port.

Trawlers are a proud family of recreational boats inspired by 20th-century working vessels. A proper trawler emphasizes classic seakeeping, strong or even overbuilt design, and a tortoise approach to long-distance cruising. In an era when the term trawler is applied liberally to light builds with over-20-knot top speeds and seven minibars, the Helmsman 43E Pilothouse is an honest-to-goodness trawler.

The E in 43E stands for evolution, and the 43E is the second generation of the builder's 43 model, which was launched in 2015 as a derivation of the hugely popular 38. Helmsmans are traditionally boxy-looking, but the 43E's additional 7 feet of overall length gives the design a more elegant look, especially at the bow. The length also allows for a second guest stateroom—a common request from original 38E owners. As testament that Helmsman owners are a satisfied and brand-loyal bunch, the 43E I stepped aboard was owned by a Puget Sound-based cruising couple who bought a 38E in 2016.

A hallmark of Helmsman trawlers is a pair of raked stairs accessible from the pilothouse and bow that lead to the open flybridge. The 43E keeps this feature. Although no side decks

lead forward from the covered cockpit, the beam-to-beam salon allows for an interior befitting a 50-foot yacht.

The galley is positioned amidships to serve the interior dinette or the cockpit. A day head is below and accessed to aft from the salon, while forward and up a few steps is the pilothouse. Large windows let in light that flatters the teak and holly joinery. Sightlines are clear. While the interior is warm and woody, there is not a scrap of wood as part of the exterior for low maintenance.

From the pilothouse, one can head out to the bow via port or starboard doors or go below to the two staterooms and head with shower. The guest stateroom with a queen berth is to port and the master is forward with an island berth. For children or surprise guests, the salon table also converts to a berth.

The molded flybridge stairs with railings are more secure than the ladder-style steps on many similarly sized yachts, and should be safer for older boaters, pets and kiddos. Up top, the flybridge has a helm station, L-shape settee, hinged radar mast, dinghy davit and tender stowage (this 43E had a Walker Bay 315 with a 20-hp Tohatsu outboard). There's also space aplenty for guests to take in a sunset or stow paddleboards. The decks



**HELMSMAN
43E PILOTHOUSE**

LOA 45ft.	Water 200 gal.
Beam 14ft. 2in.	Displacement 35,000 lbs.
Draft 4ft. 6in.	Engines (standard) 250-hp Cummins QSB 6.7
Construction FRP	Info helmsmantrawlers.com
Fuel 500 gal.	



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Above: With the additional volume achieved from a longer and wider hull, the 43E is enhanced by a high level of fit and finish in the warm, woody interior.

underfoot are cored with PVC.

The Pacific Northwest winter gifted us a break in the overcast, offering a near slack tide, calm waters and around 5 knots of wind off Bainbridge Island, Washington. We completed a few loops around Blakely Rock and put the 250-hp Cummins QSB 6.7 through its paces.

I was impressed with how nimble the hefty boat felt as I made tight donuts and the overall ride was stabilizer-free and smooth. There's no high-tech gimmick to thank, just solid design. The jumbo-size stainless-steel rudder with skeg gives the 43E more maneuverability than a standard-size rudder thanks to simple physics—a bigger rudder displaces more water. The semi-displacement full-keel design has soft chines, a classic design combination. It offers slower but smoother rides in chop versus the hard chines and planing hulls of fast sport boats meant for lake life. A deep forefoot and relatively broad aft sections also contribute to overall stability. Even the low profile of the flybridge felt like it added to the good seakeeping by keeping the center of gravity low and windage at a minimum.

All these features are of a trawler built to cruise in comfort all summer long below 10 knots. The 43E is also the first Helmsman with a standard stern thruster, a feature added because boaters want it more than as a response to an urgent need. Helmsman continues to build boats with or without stabilizers, which speaks to its confidence in the hull design.

After running her from low rpm to full throttle, I realized the 43E felt in her element at the 6- to 9-knot cruising speed, around the 1000 to 2500 rpm range, with fuel burn at 1.2 and 5.8 gallons per hour, respectively. Putting the throttle wide

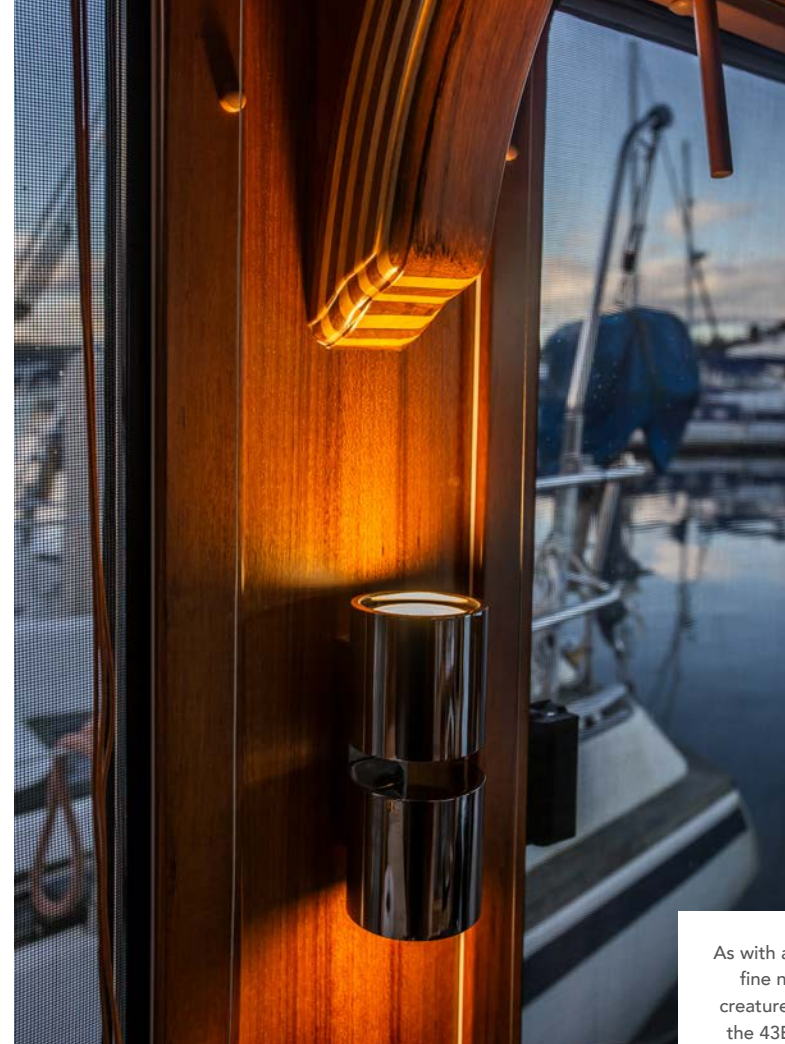
open at 3070 rpm yielded about 11 knots of top speed and a fuel burn of 10.3 gallons per hour. This sort of performance is classically trawler. The 43E, with a 500-gallon fuel capacity, should be able to cruise at 5 or 6 knots for thousands of miles between top offs.

An underway characteristic I appreciated was the low engine noise. I easily carried on conversation throughout the rpm range, even with the engine room and its access directly under the pilothouse sole. Credit the builder's multilayer composite sole construction with a rubber cork inner layer for that. That engine room also has a tooling bench—another indication that this 43E is still a Helmsman, a yachtsman's yacht.

One drawback of the engine room's location is that when the access hatch is open, the living space is rendered unpassable. Considering that path through the interior is the only way to move forward and aft due to the beam-to-beam design, keeping the engine room access open cuts you off. It's not the end of the world and shouldn't affect day-to-day boating.

The bottom line is that I tied off the docklines with an irrepressible ear-to-ear grin. The Helmsman 43E Pilothouse is just so honest. She is a 35,000-pound semi-displacement full-keel trawler doing what she is supposed to do: go the distance in a way that lets owners be comfortable and enjoy the scenery. She has a seaworthiness-first attitude in lieu of fancy gizmos, and her clever raked-stair design creates a big, beautiful salon in which to enjoy the great life afloat. It all combines into a salty ethos worthy of praise.

I'd be proud to own a Helmsman 43E Pilothouse. The standard price is competitive at \$635,000. ❁



As with all Helmsman models, fine nautical details and creature comforts abound in the 43E. The owner of Hull No. 1, who is moving up from a Helmsman 38, preferred the larger all-around configuration of the 43E, including the bigger guest stateroom. Hull No. 1 will cruise in the Pacific Northwest.

