

# ON BOARD POWER

by

PETER A. ROBSON



## Helmsman Trawlers 31 Camano

*The 31 Camano is back in production and better than ever*

**V**ETERAN PACIFIC YACHTING writer, Peter Vassilopoulos last wrote about the Camano 30—as it was called then—in our May 2003 issue.

The original Camano was designed and built by Vancouver naval architect Bob Warman in 1988. At first it was branded as the Camano 28 (its length on deck). However, this was later branded as the 30, and then the 31 (its overall length). Through it all though, and regardless of its designation, Warman's very successful "keelform" hull has not changed—which is a good thing.

Warman built more than 125 Camanos before selling the business. The tooling passed through several owners, including Brad Miller, and some 270 or so Camanos were built before the current owners, Scott and Lisa Helker of Seattle-based Helmsman Trawlers, purchased the name and the tooling. They have made some impressive and intelligent modifications, and the new Camano 31 looks better than ever.

**DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION**  
One of the keys to the success of the Camano is its large interior volume

in relation to its size. The saloon and accommodation spaces are what one might expect in a much larger yacht—and that's a big plus in a 28-footer. The trade off is that the cockpit was quite small, and the walk-around side decks narrow, but those certainly did not affect the yacht's functionality or appeal.

Another key to success is Warman's fuel-efficient 14-knot semi-displacement hull design. It has very good sea-keeping characteristics across a broad range of speeds. First, its fine entry and convex bow combine with a molded-in spray rail to deflect spray extremely

well and make for a gentler ride when going through a seaway. Second, its full keel is narrow at the forward end, then widens significantly and takes on a more-or-less V shape just aft of amidships, then tapers back down at the stern. This V shape provides added lift and buoyancy and keeps the stern from squatting while accelerating onto the plane. Third, the keel is mostly hollow and its width allows the engine to be placed lower in the hull—almost in the keel, which lowers the centre of gravity, adds stability and makes for a shallower, more efficient prop angle. The full keel also protects the prop from damage with a keel shoe extending back to support the large “barn door” rudder.

Under the new owners, the Camano is now being built in China at the same yard that builds the company's other offerings: a 37 Sedan, 38 Pilothouse and 43 Pilothouse.

The hull of the 31 is solid glass with outer layers of vinylester to reduce the chance of osmosis. Above the waterline, the twin parallel rub rails have been beefed up to provide added protection. A structural grid pan is laid up separately and fibreglassed into the hull. The interior structure is partially stick built and partially made of molded components. All fibreglass molding is done via resin infusion, which helps maximize resin penetration and saves weight. This weight savings, however, is offset by the additional added equipment and finishing materials so that the current weight of 12,000 pounds (5,443 kilograms), is about the same as the original 31.

**ON DECK** The design of the decks and cabin remain essentially the same, with the Camano's trademark high freeboard, gentle sheerline, rounded transom, walk-around decks and cabin with expansive windows topped by a nicely-styled flybridge.

The aluminum-framed window arrangement has been modernized, especially around the windshield, where the two outboard panels are now curved glass instead of angled. The centre panel now opens to allow for better ventilation and heavy pantograph wipers assure the windshield will be kept clear regardless of the weather. The aft end of the window arrangement has been rounded slightly, helping to modernize the look.

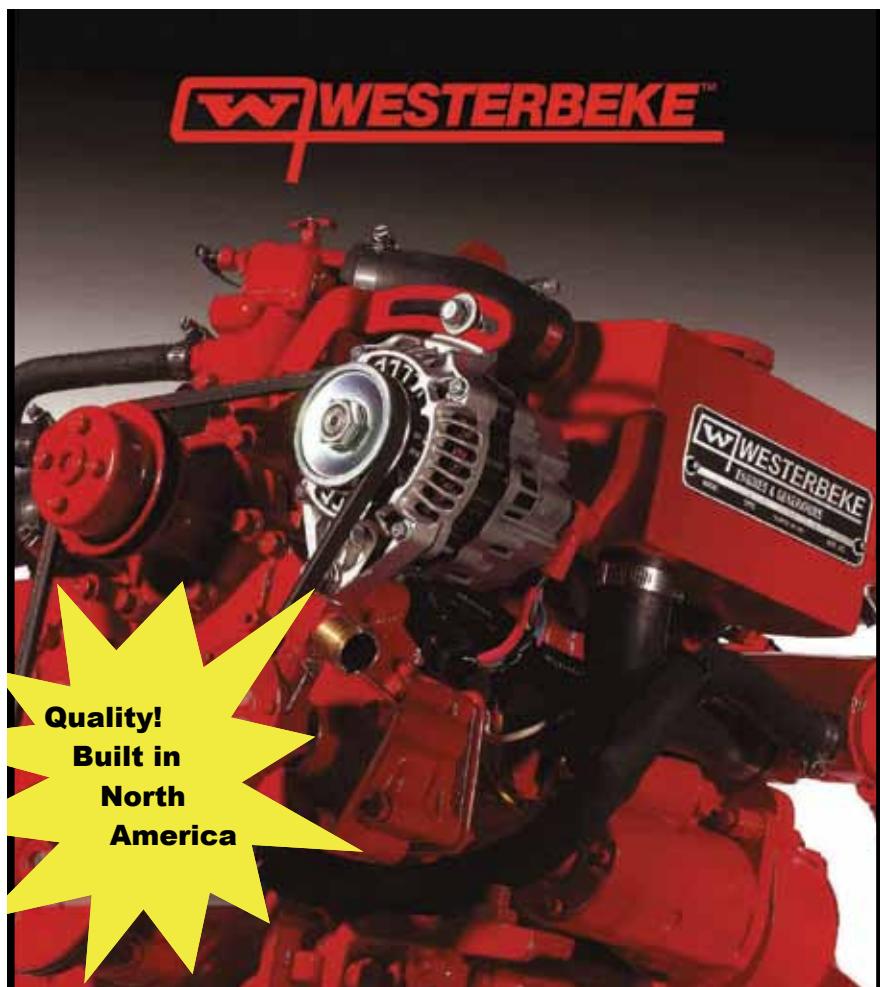
The optional hardtop extension on

the test boat covered the compact cockpit. In our opinion, this is a welcome addition as it allows for an outside space to take off wet gear and also provides protection from the sun. Below the sole is a large lazarette locker with plenty of storage and there's also fender storage in a cutout rack in the transom. A centre transom door leads out to a swim platform, which will be the most practical place for dinghy storage.

Up on the flybridge, a solid, folding radar/antenna arch means the radome

can now be mounted up out of the way (previously it was mounted low on the front of the flybridge coaming). Two pedestal seats flank the central helm station and there's good storage aft of this to tie down fishing gear and water toys. The flybridge drain system has been reconfigured to provide better drainage than on previous models.

The narrow side decks are certainly adequate and well-placed grab rails on the cabin side make for safe passage fore and aft. In addition, the drain ▶



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system has been improved and the cockpit coaming overhang has been reduced slightly so that it is no longer necessary to lean outboard when using the side decks.

Up on the bow, the forward hatch has been enlarged to 24 inches square, which allows for escape from the forward cabin in an emergency. Previously access to the anchor locker was from inside the forepeak, but a proper access hatch was added on deck, and this also provides more storage alongside the standard 200 feet of chain. Instead of a bow cleat, a proper Sampson post has been added.

**INTERIOR** The interior is where most of the changes have taken place and the Helkers have definitely stepped up the interior design and functionality. The floors are teak and holly while a great deal of satin-finished teak has been added throughout. This contrasts well with the underlying white fibreglass molding and tan leather settee. Overall, the interior has a more refined and polished look with increased headroom to six feet, two inches.

The most obvious change is the new linear galley in the saloon. Previously, it was forward and belowdecks, essentially under the windshield. There's plenty of room where it is now and it fits nicely across from an L-shaped leather settee. The countertops are Corian and there's plenty of working space. We especially appreciated the cleverly crafted, drop-down cupboards tucked into the overhead. The galley features a three-burner propane stove and propane oven. Under the counter is a larger, seven cubic-foot refrigerator/freezer.

Forward of the settee is the helm console, which is nice and simple, with room for a 16-inch chart plotter/multifunction unit. The helm seat is fixed and a companion seat was added across the companionway so that the mate can now sit next to the skipper.

The other major change is to the forward accommodation space. ▶

- ① The flybridge offers the best view in the house when the weather cooperates.
- ② The dinette is comfortable and drops down to make a good size berth. ③ Visibility all around is good from the helm station.
- ④ Access to the engine room is tight but functional. ⑤ The redesigned forward stateroom feels roomy for a boat of this size with plenty of storage space.

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The cockpit isn't huge, but it's functional and access from the swimgrid is easy thanks to the large gate.

After moving the galley, the Helkers reconfigured that space for a large separate shower compartment. The nicely appointed head compartment, which is also good size for a vessel of this size, is across to starboard.

The almost-queen-size bed is now angled parallel to the port hull sides and this setup works very well and allows for more storage space. The entire accommodation area is inviting and trimmed out with masses of rich teak.

A door and sliding hatch provide complete privacy.

**ENGINE AND SYSTEMS** The first new Camano is powered by a single 270 horsepower Hyundai SeasAll V6 diesel. These smaller Hyundai diesels are just being introduced to North America, though they've been popular in the rest of the world for many years. Hyundai is the world's largest manufacturer of marine diesels and they are breaking into

the market here in a big way. There's plenty of good things to say about these Hyundai diesels, but there simply isn't room here to go into detail. Future engines for the 31 will be a toned down 240 horsepower model (using the 270 block) that will be rated for continuous duty operation.

The engine room is accessed via a hatch in the saloon floor and there's plenty of room all round. The wiring and plumbing is neat and tidy.

Webasto forced air heating is standard, as are four 100-amp-hour house batteries and an engine start battery. Helped by LEDs throughout, there should be plenty of juice when anchored for a few days.

Another systems improvement is an increase in the holding tank capacity from 12 gallons to a far more practical 30 gallons.

**UNDERWAY** With its big "barn door" rudder and bow thruster, the Camano 31 handled well in close quarters. Visibility over the bow and all around was



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excellent thanks to the expansive windows. Overall handling was very good and the motion was comfortable in the slight chop raised by a 10 to 15 knot breeze. As expected, there was almost no spray from the bow and minimal bow rise as the 31 transitioned from displacement to planing speed. The steering was responsive and tight, not surprising because of the large rudder. Engine noise levels were not much above conversational volume.

At a slow cruise of 7.6 knots (2,000 rpm) we were sipping fuel at 2.3 US gallons per hour, which translates to a very impressive 3.17 miles per gallon. At 2,500 rpm and 8.4 knots, we were burning only 4.5 gallons per hour, which equals 1.86 miles per gallon. At a fast cruise of 9.8 knots (3,000 rpm) fuel consumption was 7.4 gallons per hour (1.3 mpg) and that miles per gallon figure remained steady up to the top speed of just over 14 knots. These are great fuel numbers.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS** We are delighted that the Camano 31 is back on the market. It was hugely popular for many years and for many reasons. It was, and is, extremely roomy, fast, economical on fuel, sea-kindly and reasonably priced. The well-thought-out changes the Helkers have made were the result of both input from former Camano owners and the Helker's own long experience. The interior finishing has been stepped up a few notches and is more appealing than ever. The 31, equipped with many standard features is available for US\$269,000. ☀

## THE SPECS

LOA	9.5 m	31'
Length on Deck	8.5 m	28'
Beam	3.2 m	10' 6"
Draft	0.92 m	3'
Weight Dry	5,443 kg	12,000 lbs
Fuel	568 L	150 USG
Water	379 L	100 USG
Waste	114 L	30 USG
<b>Power:</b>	Single 270 hp, Hyundai SeasAll diesel	

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