

SPECIAL DELIVERY

THE HELMSMAN 38E IS A THRIFTY, SOLID COASTAL CRUISER.



LOA: 40 feet, 10 inches
BEAM: 13 feet, 11 inches
WEIGHT: 30,000 pounds (dry weight)
DRAFT: 4 feet
POWER: single 250-hp Cummins QSB 6.7 diesel
SPEED: 10 knots top, 8 knots cruise (standard power)
TANKAGE: 400 gallons fuel, 145 gallons water, 45 gallons waste
PRICE: \$409,000
LOCATION: Helmsman Trawlers, Seattle, Washington, (206) 282-0110. helmsmantrawlers.com

BY GARY REICH

Nearly 20 years ago I moved off my 30-foot sailboat and started developing a fancy for stout-looking pilothouse trawlers and other full-displacement vessels. Since then, I've been dreaming about a boat that could deliver my spouse and me up and down the U.S. coastline, and maybe to the Bahamas or the Caribbean when weather windows present themselves.

Maybe that's why the specifications placard on the dock behind a Helmsman 38E Pilothouse caught my attention at the U.S. Powerboat Show in Annapolis, Maryland, last fall. It wasn't the length overall, beam or draft on that placard that caught my eye; it was the 38E's starting price, just north of \$400,000.

I quickly hopped aboard the display model at the boat show, a 38E recently delivered from China, and the first Helmsman delivered to the East Coast. In the main saloon, the L-shaped galley was free of overhead cabinets and bulkheads, creating a seamless flow between the meal preparer and folks in the adjacent L-shaped dinette and lounge chair. An enclosed guest head/shower feels oddly placed at first (it's down two steps in the forward port corner of the main saloon), but I confess that situating it here offers a feeling of privacy.

A combination of teak and other hardwoods in the joinery below give the interior a genuinely shippy look without being overly utilitarian. An especially nice touch is the expansive, thick teak dinette table — ours had an inlaid compass rose at its center. Also

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thoughtful is how specific wood surfaces throughout are finished in gloss or satin varnish, depending on the type of wear the area will receive.

Up two steps from the main saloon is the pilothouse. Here, behind the helm's elegant teak ship's wheel, is a sturdy captain's chair with flip-up bolster. To starboard of the wheel is a sliding door that leads to a side deck and stair access to the flybridge. (There's identical access to port.) Plenty of forward-looking glass and a clear line of sight aft provide excellent visibility.

The forward port side of the wheelhouse features a chart table with a hinged stowage space for those of us who still use chart guides and paper charts. Behind it is an L-shaped lounge with teak table for companions or guests. The helm's side-to-side position reduces dash space, which will limit prospective buyers to one display — not a big deal, given the amazing multifunction options available these days.

Forward and on centerline from the pilothouse is the master stateroom, which features a queen-sized island berth flanked by shelf stowage and large hanging lockers abaft. An opening hatch above and polished traditional stainless-steel opening ports enhance lighting



The Helmsman 38E's pilothouse has an L-shaped lounge with plenty of space for guests.

and ventilation. There's an enclosed shower to starboard and an enclosed, standalone head with sink to port. The beautiful joinery work continues into this spacious, comfortable cabin.

On the outside, the 38E provides plenty of space for relaxing and enjoying the scenery. The most commanding view of the world around you is from the flybridge and upper helm. It has two swiveling captain's chairs,

engine and bow thruster controls, and an engine panel/electronics bay protected by Plexi-glass. Guests can join the skipper on the adjacent companion seating to port. Aft of this area is an expanse of deck that will be used by most owners for dinghy stowage (which will require the installation of an optional powered crane).

The Chesapeake Bay was whipped up into a frothy, choppy mess as I drove across

the Bay Bridge to sea trial the 38E from Bay Bridge Marina in Stevensville, Maryland. These were perfect conditions to test the Helmsman's mettle. Once on the Bay, we met a stiff, 20- to 30-knot breeze that kicked up a 3- to 4-foot chop with an occasional 5-footer. Small-craft-advisory stuff, for sure, and the 38E handled it in style.

Bashing into the 3- to 4-footers produced a solid and substantial "thud" from the bow, but the steep waves didn't impede our forward progress or make for a particularly uncomfortable ride. The pilothouse remained quiet and cozy as we motored along at around 7 knots.

Running beam-to the waves with the throttle firmly mashed down gave us about 10 knots from the standard 250-hp Cummins QSB6.7 inboard diesel, with a 10 to 12 gph fuel burn. Throttling down to 7 or 8 knots — this boat's "sweet spot" — reduces the fuel burn to about 3 gallons per hour. If you're really looking to stretch your cruising budget, 5 to 6 knots will boost range significantly. Optional engine choices include single 380- and 550-hp Cummins diesels with 12- to 18-knot top ends, respectively, and an 8-knot cruise. I could tell that Helmsman paid a lot of attention



The forward master stateroom includes a queen-sized berth, an enclosed shower to starboard and an enclosed head and sink to port.

to sound-proofing the engine room — the Cummins diesel purred quietly below our feet in the pilothouse, regardless of how hard we pushed it.

I was worried about docking a boat with plenty of windage and a single screw in such a big breeze, but the 38E handled predictably as we backed her into her slip, and the bow thruster eased both the docking

and the stress level.

I found our review boat to be extremely well built, thoughtfully designed and a great value for the price. No wonder it sold to a married couple only a few hours after I ran it.

If you're looking for a capable and solidly built coastal trawler in the 35- to 40-foot range, this one's worth a serious look. ■



A bright, well-positioned galley puts the cook between the helmsman and those in the main saloon.



The flybridge has two chairs and companion seating to port. Add an optional powered crane and take advantage of room for dinghy stowage abaft the helm area.