

## SEATRIAL

BY ROGER McAFEE



# HELMSMAN 37 SEDAN

AN EXCELLENT COASTAL CRUISER WITH 'WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT?' FEATURES

Every now and then, a boat tester runs across a feature that causes a “that’s a great idea” reaction. It can be something as small as a stainless steel cap on a fiberglass wear point such as the transom door sill. That example, while not significant in the overall cost of a boat, shows that either the designer or the builder has hands-on boating experience — something all boat owners like to see.

The new Helmsman 37 Sedan trawler contains two excellent examples of such features. The most significant is inside, and it amounts to a redesign of the traditional companion-seat space usually located directly across the salon from the helm station — to the port side in the case of the Helmsman. That space is usually fitted out with a padded bench seat facing forward, which works well while the vessel is under way. However, the forward-facing orientation of such a seat does not work very well when the occupants attempt to involve themselves in a conversation taking place behind them in the deckhouse.

Instead of the traditional com-

panion bench seat, Helmsman installed a very comfortable L-shaped settee, with the base of the L running fore and aft, which allows the occupants of that seat to lounge comfortably and take part in any deckhouse conversation. There is also a small slide-out table that can be used as a chart or computer table, and it creates space for an extra dinner guest. This feature adds dramatically to the “sociability” of the entire deckhouse.

The second design feature that sets the Helmsman apart is a small one but one that will make a skipper’s life easier if he opts to run the boat from the command bridge. The deckhouse roof extends to cover the side-

decks and most of the cockpit, and the handrails are fitted to the outer edges of the overhang, allowing the skipper to look over the side safely. In fact, the setup is so good that bumpers can be secured on the top-deck handrail and dropped straight down into the water.

This setup also allows for plenty of dinghy storage up top, all inside the handrails. There is also plenty of space to store other water toys, such as kayaks and canoes. A barbecue, properly secured, could also be added up top. The bridge deck has a settee that easily seats six and a pedestal table. Since the helm station is to starboard, captain and crew can sit comfortably and chat while under way. Forward visibility is excellent from the top deck, with very little bow “sight shadow.”

The 37’s hull is a fairly traditional semi-displacement style with a relatively plumb stem and displacement sections forward that flatten out to a shallow V aft. This setup allows for a



Neil Rabinowitz photos

relatively sharp entry, which is good for working through a chop, and a planing surface aft. The combination allows for good handling at slow speeds and a reasonable turn of speed — about 13 knots — with modest power. The relatively flat bottom aft provides stability in a beam sea.

The solid fiberglass hull, using vinyl ester resin and a barrier coat to help protect against wicking, is stiffened and reinforced with a grid of foam-cored stringers and a series of transverse box beams. Decks and structural bulkheads are honeycombed cored glass. The hull glasswork on our test boat is excellent — fair and without haze or print-through.

### ON BOARD

Access to the vessel is over the

built-in swim step and into the cockpit. A pair of hull gates, port and starboard, also allow easy access to the walk-around side decks, if the vessel is tied side-to-side.

From the cockpit, a set of stainless steps leads to the bridge deck and the upper helm. The deckhouse roof extends aft to cover most of the cockpit and out to cover each of the side decks, a feature that creates good weather protection from either the Pacific Northwest rain or the blazing tropical sun. The decks are wide enough to allow a complete walk-around, while coamings and beefy, well-finished, welded stainless railings provide security.

A marine-grade, weather-tight door allows access to the deckhouse off the cockpit. The well-fitted and

finished wood interior will make traditionalists happy. The deckhouse layout, except for the L-shaped companion settee noted earlier, is fairly traditional, with a galley — complete with granite countertops, a propane stove and a two-door refrigerator/freezer — along the starboard side and a dining settee to port, directly across from the galley. The galley has plenty of countertop and storage space.

The dark wood combined with the color of the soft materials gives the whole interior a warm, cozy feeling, and plenty of window glass floods



the interior with natural light, producing a cheery interior space even on cloudy days.

The two staterooms are down and forward, with the master being in the forepeak. A centerline queen bed, bookshelves with rails and plenty of storage make that space comfortable.

#### TESTER'S OPINION:

This new 37-footer would make an excellent boat for a boater switching from sail to power. It would also be a good fit for someone wanting to downsize or possibly move up from a smaller trawler. It is an excellent coastal cruiser that is as well suited to the Pacific Northwest and California as to the Caribbean.

Two large trunk cabin port lights, to port and starboard, and an overhead hatch allow plenty of natural light into the space.

The second stateroom, aft of the master, is fitted with a double berth running athwartships, similar to many express cruiser layouts. It has storage and, unlike many of the express cruisers, a dressing area with full headroom. The two staterooms share a head, complete with a toilet, a hand basin and a separate shower stall.

#### PERFORMANCE TIME

We fired up the 5.9L (359-cubic-inch) Cummins diesel, and it started, cold, without smoke, shiver or clatter. It ran smoothly and very quietly at idle. Our soundmeter read 68 decibels.

The six-cylinder, inline, turbocharged, after-cooled engine weighs

in at about 1,350 pounds and produces 380 hp, giving it a horsepower-to-weight ratio that makes it a popular choice to power smaller boats. The modern common-rail fuel-delivery system not only helps reduce fuel burn but also helps the engine run more quietly. During our entire test, the engine performed very well.

We idled away from the dock at 600 rpm making 3.5 knots and burning 0.5 gallon of diesel per hour. We made 4.3 knots at 800 revs and burned 0.7 gph. With the engine ticking over at 1100 revs, we made 5.6 knots and burned 1 gph. The noise level was just at 71 decibels. When we cranked the engine up to 1500 rpm, our fuel consumption went to 2 gph and our speed rose to 7.2 knots. Fuel consumption went to 5.6 gph at 2000 revs, and our speed moved up to 8.8 knots. An increase in engine speed to 2500 revs yielded just a hair less than 10 knots with a fuel burn of 10.2 gph. Wide-open throttle, 3050 rpm, gave us a fuel burn of 18 gph and a speed of 12.7 knots.

When we finished our speed runs, we brought the boat to a full stop, cranked the helm hard over, held it there and slowly increased the throttle setting. The vessel leaned slightly into the turn and completed the maneuver without cavitation, skid or chatter. Clearly, the hull design and driveline are well matched. All speeds during our tests were measured with an independent GPS, and fuel-consumption figures came from the engine computer.

It became clear as we ran our tests that the Helmsman 37 hull design is operationally very efficient at about 1100

## SPEC BOX

### SPECIFICATIONS

LOA 38 ft., 11 in. BEAM 13 ft., 11 in.  
 DRAFT 3 ft., 6 in.  
 DISPLACEMENT 28,000 lbs. (half load)  
 FUEL 360 gals. WATER 145 gals.  
 POWER Cummins QSB 5.9, 380 hp  
 PRICE \$390,793

### STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Cummins QSB 5.9L 230 hp diesel, bow thruster, Lewmar windlass, Nova Kool refrigerator/freezer, granite countertops, 11-gal. water heater, cockpit shower, Masterflush head, FRP radar mast w/hinge, Webasto cabin heating system, LED interior overhead lighting, propane stove w/propane locker on bridge, FRP swim platform and more.

### OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT

Engine choices to 480 hp, ice-maker, radar arch, dinghy and davit systems, navigational electronics, stern thruster, custom cabinetry, hull and superstructure color options and more.

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rpm. At that engine speed, our test vessel was making 5.6 knots, or 6.4 mph and getting 5.6 mpg. This is excellent mileage, particularly considering this is a normally built vessel, with a solid-glass hull, and not some lightweight experimental craft designed to wring the best mileage out of every drop of fuel. We also noted at that speed that the vessel was very quiet. And while that speed may seem slow to many powerboaters, a sailor who could maintain that velocity hour after hour would think all his Christmases had come at once! And it starts at around \$340,000.

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