

# MODERN CLASSIC

Hour after hour, water sluiced down the decks while spray lashed the windshield, as the Fleming 58 pushed its bow into English Channel wind and wave.

When it comes to boat reviews, there are sea trials and there are sea trials. I was initially scheduled to test and sea trial hull number one of Fleming's new design in 2013, at Fleming's US East Coast dealer, located on the Chesapeake Bay. That plan unexpectedly fell through, as the new owner was understandably anxious to head south, as winter was fast approaching. Fleming, however, offered a consolation that turned out to be far more realistic, if not tumultuous.

Cruising and living aboard a vessel, rather than the usual hour-long harbour jaunt, offers the reviewer a real-world understanding of the attributes of a design, as well as identifying areas where room for improvement exists. This alternative trial took the form of a late April, 500-nautical-mile run from Fleming's UK commissioning facility in Southampton, to Heligoland, a wave-tossed German island in the North Sea, by way of Dover and Scheveningen, a small seaport in the Netherlands. The passage revealed a great deal about the new design, and was well worth the wait.

THE FLEMING 58 IS THE RESULT OF THE AMERICAN BUILDER LISTENING TO AND ACTING UPON FEEDBACK FROM ITS CLIENTS. THIS NEW AND IMPROVED MODEL, IN THE WAKE OF A BUMPY SEA TRIAL IN EUROPE, IS A YACHT THAT HANDLES ROUGH CONDITIONS WITH EASE, OFFERS EFFICIENCY TYPICAL TO FLEMING YACHTS, AND IS AN AESTHETIC DELIGHT, WRITES **STEVE D'ANTONIO**.



**GROUND SWELL**

Clockwise from right: The main saloon leads into the helm station via stairs; The classic helm station; The galley joins the main saloon for open-plan living; A choice between two accommodation layouts is possible, with one offering a full-beam master stateroom located amidships.

**THE GENESIS OF A DESIGN**

The F58 design was born of a need for change, for variety and for greater flexibility. In 2008, the production team at Fleming Yachts recognised that the wants and desires of their customers were evolving with the times, and those of other builders. In an effort to better understand those needs, a poll was conducted to determine what existing owners liked, and what they might change about their Flemings. For the most part the results confirmed existing suspicions, including that the vast majority were very happy with the product and would buy again – in fact a large percentage of Fleming sales are to existing customers. However, three overriding features rose to the surface in the ‘if only I could have’ category. These were greater headroom in the engine compartment, a vessel larger than the F55 but not as long as the F65, and a full-beam master stateroom.

With this information, Fleming set to work creating an entirely new design: the longer, but not too long, F58. And it is completely new, rather than simply a stretched F55. They called upon the well-respected design firm of Norman Wright and Sons of Brisbane for assistance with the hull design and tank testing, which was carried out at the Australian Maritime College, Tasmania.

With a blank slate it was now possible to raise the freeboard and saloon sole slightly (all Fleming models’ low freeboard is intentional, a result of founder Tony Fleming’s aim to achieve a very low centre of gravity, thereby enhancing the hull’s natural stability and reducing windage), making a virtually stand-up engine room possible. This was done while preserving the heritage of a low centre of gravity and stability. Again, where previous Fleming designs precluded it, the tabula rasa approach made the full-beam, amidships master stateroom possible.

In addition to incorporating the required changes, the new design had two other overriding requirements. It had to look like a Fleming, and it had to be fuel efficient, preferably as fuel efficient as the F55, in spite of its significantly greater displacement.

Fleming Yachts has a long tradition of building vessels that embody in equal parts seaworthiness, sound engineering and tasteful design as well as the highest possible build quality. Having cruised aboard every model at one time or another, often in less than ideal conditions, I’ve developed a healthy respect for their seakeeping abilities and robust construction. On a bone-jarring passage between Scotland and Iceland a few years ago, the F65 I was aboard fell off eight-foot head seas for a full 12 hours. I distinctly recall, while lying in my bunk on more than one occasion, “We have to land at the bottom of this trough eventually”. The casualties were a burst bottle of beer and broken wine glass, along with the filaments in every one of the bunk-side reading lamps, the only non-LED lights aboard. If one had doubts about how solidly a Fleming is put together, this ride would have surely dispelled them.

My involvement with this vessel, and this model line, began in June 2013 at Fleming’s Tung Hwa yard, located in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Tung Hwa has been the exclusive builder of Fleming Yachts for over two decades. Over the course of two days I was able to review virtually every aspect of the Fleming design, engineering and construction process for the F58 as well as their other models, the F55, F65 and F78.







**HANDS ON**

Clockwise from left: A helm station located on the Flybridge; Joystick control on the main deck; The spacious F58's cockpit, aft on the main deck.

On the 25th anniversary of the founding of Fleming Yachts, the announcement regarding the new model was made. Three years later in late 2013, nearly five years after the project began, the first F58, which I saw under construction at the yard, was delivered. To date, eight F58s have shipped, and hull 16 was sold while this article was being written. Eight of the first 10 orders were placed by existing F55 owners, and they did so before hull number one was completed. An impressive showing for a new design, and one that says a great deal about Fleming Yachts, and the trust it has built with its customers.

**CONSTRUCTION DETAILS**

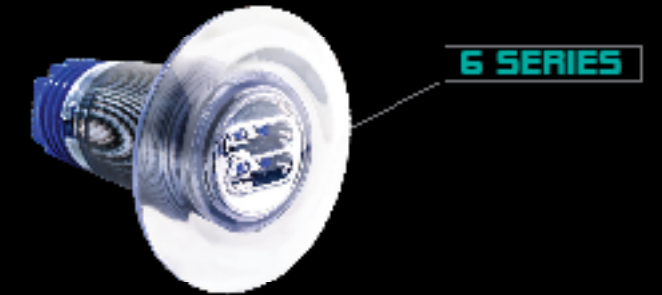
The hull, deck and cabin components retain Fleming's tried and proven manufacturing techniques. These include a solid polyester resin, handlaid hull with vinyl ester skin coat, and full-length stringers and athwartship frames, both of which are notably laminated over foam rather than wood. In fact, the core material used on all Flemings is synthetic throughout, precluding any possibility of rot in the unlikely event water makes its way into the fibreglass sandwich construction. In keeping with Fleming's belt and suspenders approach, gelcoat isn't used below the waterline – it's purely cosmetic and more of an osmosis liability than an asset in this area. In its place, five coats of two-part epoxy barrier coat is applied which, with the vinyl ester skin coat, is welcomed as a second line of defence against osmotic blistering.

It's this sort of technical, forward-thinking approach that sets Fleming apart. Virtually every time I've asked a technical question regarding a design, installation technique or material selection, the answer I receive is detailed, and always backed up with sound engineering principles. The keel extends below the running gear and is capped with a stainless steel shoe. Speaking of running gear, the F58 relies on an enclosed, oil lubricated, self-aligning, thrust and roller-bearing supported arrangement made by Seatorque. With this approach, propeller thrust is transferred from the engine mounts directly to the hull, enabling the former to more effectively absorb engine vibration.

Superstructure and deck components are made using Corecell foam, and all parts are made using moulds, which means they are smoother and less likely to delaminate. The cabin and hull are finished in Cook Composites 'Fleming White' gelcoat. The F58's cockpit is large, noticeably larger than that of the F55, while cleats and hawse pipes are located in such a way as to make line handling quick and easy. The cap rail is teak, however, an optional fibreglass faux teak version is available. This maintenance-free material has been available from Fleming for several years; it is virtually indistinguishable from varnished teak. Teak decks are glued rather than screwed in place. Deck access is via four inward opening gates, two aft and two forward.

The cabin will be familiar to those who know Flemings, with warm satin-finished teak bulkheads and furniture, teak and holly soles, large windows and tasteful hardware, door handles, hinges, light fixtures and so on. All countertops are equipped with fiddles, as it should be for vessels that venture offshore.

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As per the design mandate, two accommodation space choices are available. One features three staterooms, two heads with a central passageway, a starboard cabin with up/over berths, a port cabin twin (or queen), and a master cabin forward with queen berth. Access is from the saloon, which means the pilothouse does not need to be transited to reach the berthing area. A day head is optional with this layout. The other option is three staterooms, two heads, a full-beam master cabin amidships, a port cabin with upper and lower berths, and a forward cabin with queen berth (or v-berths). Access to the accommodation spaces is via the pilothouse. This arrangement also includes a day head in the pilothouse.

For those who often make night passages, the first layout is more practical, and it's the one Fleming believes makes the best use of space. However, the amidships full-width master stateroom has proven very popular, indeed, of the first 11 F58s, five have been built with this configuration.

**IN A SEAWAY**

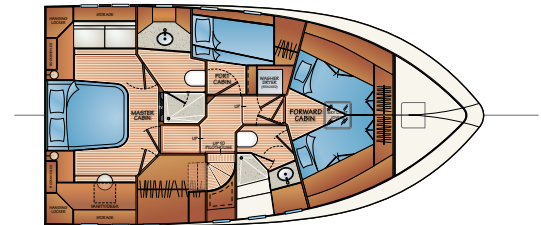
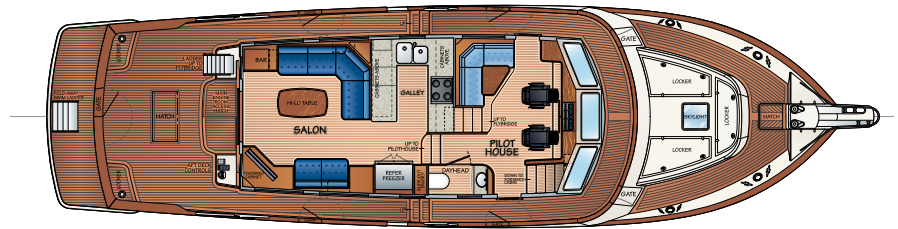
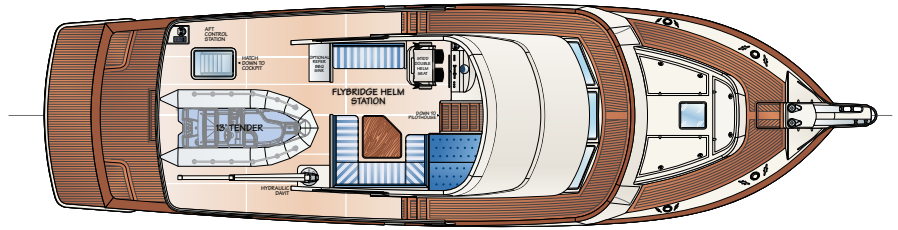
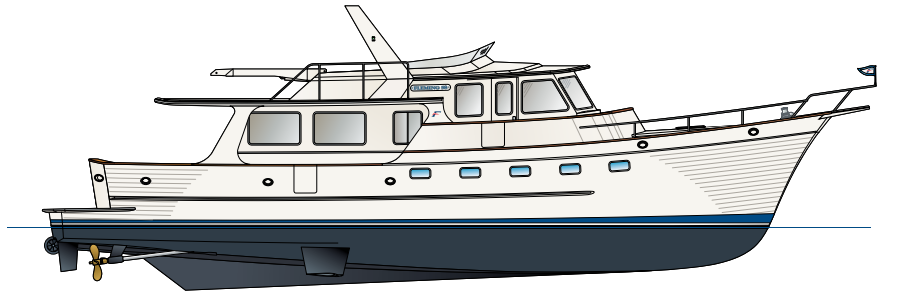
The passage I made aboard F58 number three was completed over the course of four days with a crew of three. The route took us over placid seas from Southampton to Dover, where the vessel's water maker was commissioned. We ran much of the time from the curtained flybridge. At a comfortable cruising speed of 11 knots, the boat, equipped with its optional MAN 800 horsepower engines, burned 54 litres per hour. After overnighting in Dover we ventured back out into the Channel, however, the conditions were far different, with steep one-metre seas and 20 knots of wind, which later increased to 1.5-metre seas and 30 knots of wind. The boat handled these conditions magnificently, taking each wave gracefully and predictably with no pounding whatsoever.

The crew, on the other hand, was flagging, and after enduring this for half a day we sought refuge in the Dutch port of Scheveningen. Departing the next day, and rounding the corner over the Frisian coast, our heading made for a more comfortable ride to Heligoland. I had one disappointment whilst underway; I'm a stickler for preservation of night vision, and the F58's steaming light reflects off the bow. Each F58 mast is different, depending upon the electronics package, which means there is no standard steaming light location, exacerbating this issue. Fleming's commissioning manager tells me, however, a directive is in the works that will resolve this problem.

**IN THE END**

Fleming owners spoke and Fleming Yachts listened. The result is an improvement on an already admirable and proven design. It should be remembered that the entire F58 project occurred in the midst of the great recession, one that hit the marine industry like no other in recent memory. Fleming Yachts is to be commended for keeping its eye on the goal, rather than conserving resources during a time when most boatbuilders were in survival mode. Based on my passage, and the order book, the gamble appears to have paid off. ○

[www.flemingyachts.com.au](http://www.flemingyachts.com.au)



MODEL	Fleming 58
BUILDER	Fleming Yachts
COUNTRY OF BUILD	Taiwan
YEAR OF BUILD	2014
DESIGNER	Fleming Yachts
NAVAL ARCHITECT	Norman R Wright & Sons
INTERIOR DESIGNER	Fleming Yachts
PROJECT MANAGER	Fleming Yachts
LENGTH OVERALL	19.9 meters
WATERLINE LENGTH	17.3 meters
BEAM	5.33 meters
DRAFT	1.52 meters
DISPLACEMENT	fully laden 48,000kg
HULL CONSTRUCTION	Fibreglass – Solid Laminated
SUPERSTRUCTURE	Fibreglass with Corecell M Foam Core
ENGINE	MAN R6-800
PROPELLERS	ZF Faster (36" diameter, 4 blade)
DRIVE TRAIN	Seatorque Bolt on Shaft System
STABILISATION SYSTEMS	ABT Trac stabilisers
GEAR BOX	ZF 360A
SPEED MAX	20 knots

SPEED CRUISE	10 knots / fast 17.5 knots
RANGE	1,700 nm @ 8.5 knots 1,250 nm @ 10 knots
FUEL CAPACITY	5,488 litres
FRESHWATER CAPACITY	1,211 litres
BLACKWATER CAPACITY	625 litres
GENERATORS	Onan eQD
GEN-SET SIZE	17.5 Kw (50Hz)
THRUSTERS	ABT Hydraulic
NAVIGATION ELECTRONICS	Seacross
DEPTH SOUNDER	Seacross
RADIOS	Sailor
COMMUNICATIONS	KVH VSAT
ENTERTAINMENT	KVH Sat TV, Samsung TVs & Bluray, Fusion & Sonos audio
GALLEY APPLIANCES	Miele, Neff, Bosch
OWNER & GUEST BERTHS	6
CLASSIFICATION	CE Cat A "Ocean"
MAXIMUM PEOPLE ON BOARD	15
PAINT	No paint – exterior finish is Cook Gelcoat
TENDERS	Boston Whaler 110 Sport
PRICE	Base AU\$3,300,000 tested AU\$3,800,000