

Fleming Yachts - 55 (2014-)



Captain's Report



At displacement speeds she has over a 2,000-mile range but around home she can cruise in the high teens. And at 10 knots she gets nearly one mile per gallon, something that's hard to beat in a boat this large.

The Mission of the Fleming 55

The Fleming 55 is designed for a cruising couple, or two couples, or even a family to make long offshore and coastal passages in comfort and safety. And that means to be able to travel to the Caribbean, or to the Pacific at trawler speeds. At 7 knots she has 2,000 nautical mile range.

But there is another side to the Fleming 55: because she is powered by twin 500-hp diesels she can get on plane and cruise in the high teens making coastal cruises in a restricted time frame. And because she has such large spaces in her salon, aft deck and on her flying bridge she is an able motoryacht for entertaining a large party.

In all ways the Fleming 55 is a purposeful motoryacht and one that looks salty, not like a floating, garish gin palace or a Ft. Lauderdale canal dredger.



The salon of the Fleming 55 is surrounded in teak, one of the hallmarks of the Fleming brand. The teak table is a hi-lo design that can be used as a cocktail table or as a formal dining table. Casual dining is done in the pilothouse at the dinette there.

Is She a Trawler or a Motoryacht?

Most boaters immediately categorized her as a "trawler" because of the shape of her bow, faux planks, and Portuguese bridge. Further, she does not have the trappings of most modern motoryachts that we see – things like a table on the bow, a low raked windshield like that of a Lamborghini, or large windows which have been cut into her hull sides with unusual shapes.

Classic Look. One glance inside and it becomes immediately obvious that she is meant for both unpretentious yet sophisticated entertaining and comfortable living. Her interior décor can only be described as traditional and classic. Her look never goes out of style, much like a man's herringbone or glen plain sport jacket or a dark pin striped business suit.

She does not have flatscreen TVs hanging everywhere like a sports bar, nor does she have square corners on her furniture or the latest flavor of the month designer fabrics from Milano. All of those things that often look so au courant at the time usually don't age well in large yachts. Go to the Ft. Lauderdale used boat show and you'll see what we mean.

In fact, the Fleming 55 is a shippy-looking pilothouse motoryacht that is capable of handsomely fulfilling many missions.



Fleming 55

The Fleming 55 in profile. There is more going on here than at first might meet the eye.

Distinguishing Features

- **Her Profile.** Undoubtedly her most distinguishing feature is her profile, with high flared bow, raked stem, molded-in faux planking, her raised pilothouse and Portuguese bridge. This look makes the heart race among serious cruising folk. Maybe that is why it has been so widely copied -- but rarely matched.

- **Large Lower Helm.** In her raised pilothouse the helm stretches all the way from the door on the port side to the huge chart table by the starboard door. In between is enough room for as many screens, gauges, electronics and instruments as Midas could afford.

(We have actually been on commercial vessels with far fewer instruments than can be put on this boat and often are.)

●**Large Cockpit.** The Fleming 55 has a cockpit that is 130 sq. ft. which is one of the largest in class, if not the largest. That puts her on a par with the size of a cockpit we see in convertibles and sportfishermen in her size range.

●**5 Coats of Epoxy Barrier Coat.** Most builders apply a coat of vinyl ester resin below the waterline to stop osmotic blistering and warranty against the problem, typically, from 2 to 5 years. Fleming goes far further and applies 5 coats of epoxy to the 55's surface below the waterline and warrants it for 10 years.

●**Heavy-Duty Keel For Protection.** The 5' deep keel of the Fleming 55 is an important part of the boat's overall design. First, it extends 12" (30. cm) below the props. Second, it is solid and is sealed across the top where it meets the bilge. Finally, there is an 8' (2.43 m) long stainless steel shoe on the bottom of the keel to protect the fiberglass in case of a hard grounding.

●**Fiberglass Fuel Tanks.** Fiberglass fuel tanks are difficult and expensive to build and that is why most boats have welded aluminum tanks. But welds can break and aluminum can corrode. Fleming eliminates these worries by installing fiberglass tanks, and goes one step further by putting a sump in the bottom of each tank into which contaminants can settle.



This Fleming 55 has a fighting chair and is rigged for big game billfishing...or, for meat fishing when on a long cruise. This was made possible both because of her large cockpit and minimal boat deck overhang that does not interfere with the rods.

●**Lavish Use of Teak.** Teak is more expensive than ever before and that is why its use has been curtailed by many builders from one degree or another. Fleming buys teak logs, ages the wood, and does all of it's own mill work. That is why on the Fleming 55 there is lots of hand-rubbed, satin-varnished teak in its interior. The tables, valances, entertainment center and cabinetry are all teak. There are teak bulkheads. All interior decks are teak and holly, both on the main deck and in the accommodations.

●**Full Teak Deck.** The cockpit, side decks, foredeck, stairs, and treads on the ladder going to the flying bridge, are all teak – as standard equipment. There are not many boats that offer that as standard. All teak decking is 5/8" thick, not the thinner option some builders use. The cap rail around the boat's gunwales and Portuguese bridge are all varnished teak.

●**12V Battery on Flying Bridge.** Most boats have house batteries in the engine room or lazarette to keep weight low and so does Fleming. However, it also has a 12V "back-up" battery on the helm along with two Mastervolt 24V to 12V DC/DC converters to provide emergency power for the radios in case the vessel is shipping water. This is rarely seen on any boat and is much appreciated.

●**Built to CE Classification A standards** which means she should be able to handle anything short of a named storm



From functionality and seakeeping standpoints there are a lot of important details on the Fleming 55 –

A – Much of the cockpit is not covered by the boat deck (F) which allows chaise lounges to be used here for sunning or providing free movement for rods when fishing. A Bimini can be installed for those wanting shade and an optional fiberglass boat deck extension can be added.

B – There are five hawse pipes on each side of the boat plus two in the transom unseen, all with integral cleats. In addition there are two 14" (35 cm) cleats on the bow and two in the stern on the bulwarks.

C – Low deadrise bottom at the transom. This is one of the secrets to her fuel efficiency at planing speeds. She is not a deep-V at the transom which serves no real purpose and makes the boat harder to push – and more roly at rest. A low deadrise provides more lift when running and more stability when at rest or traveling at displacement speeds.

D – The keel is 12" (30 cm) below the props which protects them in case of a soft grounding. Note the vertical surface on this keel is greater than on most other boats in class. This helps keep her on track in a following sea, giving her directional stability.

E – Look closely and observe the rise of the vessel's buttocks from a deeper point amidships. This design provides less drag at the transom and reduces wetted surface.

F – The boat deck can handle a 13' (3.96 m) tender which is an adequate size for this boat. A stainless steel cradle comes standard. This can be removed when the dinghy is launched in order to use the boat deck for other purposes so long as there is an added guard rail.

G – Side gates which opens in on the side deck bulwarks both port and starboard. These gates make boarding easier from floating docks. Most boats in class do not have them.

H – Stabilizers are optional on the Fleming 55 but provision has been made in the engine room for their installation. They are probably not needed unless long voyages are planned.

I – A Steelhead 1,000-lb. (454.4 kg.) hydraulic davit comes standard which has a powered telescoping boom.

J – The fiberglass radar arch is standard. Not shown here is a stainless steel mast with nav lights, anchor light, and aft-facing flood light. We like nav lights high (instead of on the bow or even on the pilothouse) because they can be seen at a greater distance. There is LED lighting under the arch.

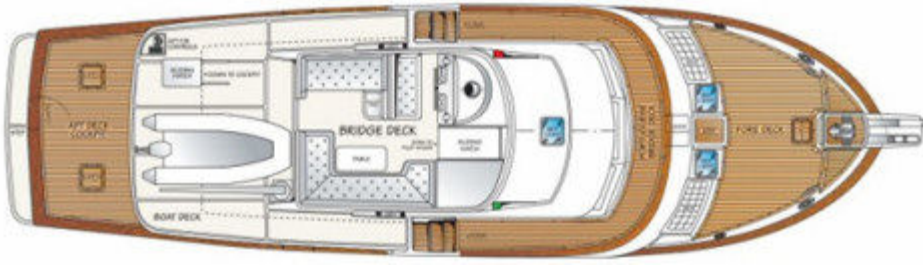
K – Fiberglass bulwarks on the flying bridge meet ABYC Standards and provide safety as well as protection from wind and spray.

L – The bridges has sliding aluminum doors both port and starboard for easy egress by the skipper or crew for docking or anchoring chores.

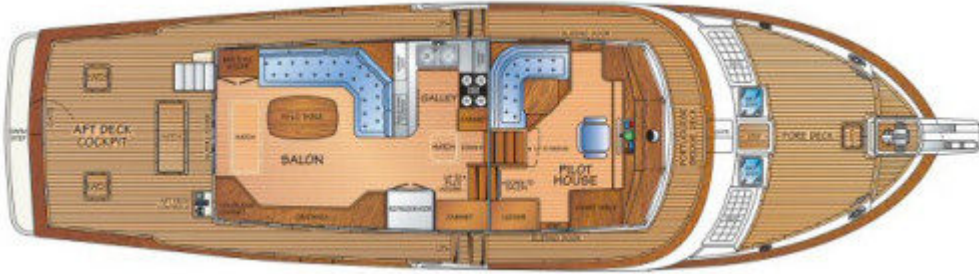
M – The Portuguese bridge provides security for guests wandering around and allows crew to cross the foredeck in sloppy conditions safely. It also protects the house if green water should be taken aboard.

N – A 15.5-hp Sidepower bow thruster comes as standard equipment.

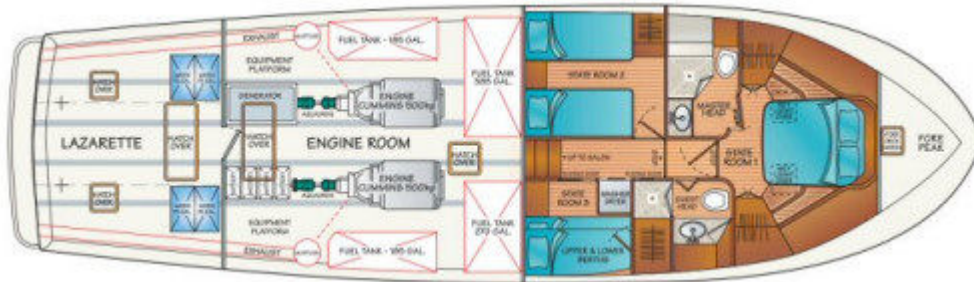
O – Deck scuppers drain water through pipes to the boot stripe so that black streaks will not appear on the hull sides.



Birds-eye view of the Fleming 55 flying bridge and deck. Note that there is seating for 11 people.



Standard main deck layout. Note the household-size refrigerator/freezer with twin doors opposite the galley.



Accommodations and mechanical space layout. Note the huge size of the engine room and the clearances outboard between the engines and tanks. Headroom in the engine room is 5' (1.59 m) forward and about 4' (1.21 m) aft.

Major Equipment

After the design and the layout, the most important category which gives a boat its utility is its list of equipment. Here are a few items that caught our eye--

- **Onan Generator.** A 17 kW Onan generator is standard. It is mounted on soft mounts to reduce vibration. It is a division of Cummins which provides the main engines, making one-stop service possible. Cummins has service shops all over the world.
- **Sidepower Bow Thruster.** A 15.5-hp Sidepower bow thruster is standard along with controls at both helm stations.
- **Lofrans Anchor Windlass.** A 24V, 1700 Watt Lofrans Falkon windlass is fitted to the bow and has a plug-in control feature as well as remotes at both helm stations.
- **Complete Ground tackle.** This includes a 77-lb. stainless steel Ultra anchor with ss Ultra swivel and 300' of 3/8" chain along with hook and bridle.
- **Cruisair reverse cycle A/C** with remote compressors (in the lazarette) and zone controls.
- **Kahlenberg Air Horn.** With twin trumpets, this is the Mercedes of boat horns.
- **Auto Fire Suppression.** This system automatically shuts down the engine, generator and blowers in addition to spraying the fire suppression foam.
- **Stidd 500 XL Helm Seat.** This brand is the Mercedes of helm seats (and costs nearly as much) and is mounted at the lower helm. We only wish there was a second one for the skipper's companion.

- **Fleming Monitoring System.** The builder has made its own central monitoring system with color display screen. It Monitors nav lights, tank levels, bilge water, engine room temperature, and engine room door, among other things.
- **Bosch Washer/Dryer.** The dryer is vented and the unit is kept behind a sliding door in the passage by the guest stateroom where it is handy.
- **Headhunter Head.** Many builders consider this brand of pressure jet toilet system to be the best in the industry.
- **2 Aluminum Helm Doors.** One port and another starboard, both doors are sliders with weather stripping, and both allow the skipper easy egress to the sides decks of singlehanded sailing.
- **Steelhead Davit.** All cruising boats need a tender and the Fleming 55 has room for a 13' (3.96 m) or larger one. The standard 1,000-lb. (454.4 kgs.) Steelhead hydraulic davit has a telescoping neck.



The owner of this Fleming 55 decided to not have the standard teak decks but have beige-colored gel coat instead. Often owners with dogs choose to avoid teak decks for the obvious reasons. We like the relatively high bulwarks for this size boat.



Here we see a standard teak and Thiokol deck. Note the freshwater and saltwater bibs for cleaning the ground tackle and deck.



The aft doors are fiberglass and have "seadog"-style latches. The console to starboard is optional and can contain most anything an owner wants. The teak deck and the teak treads on the stainless steel ladder are all standard. The hatches in the deck lead to the lazarette.



Gas assist struts lift the hatches to the lazarette. Note the battery switches to the left and the weather-proof, custom-made door to the engine room on the centerline.

Comparing General Specs with Other Boats in Class

Criteria. We studied seven other cruising boats that came quickly to mind as being in the same genre as the Fleming 55. We did not look at heavy displacement single engine boats because they are in a class by themselves. But we did find two single engine boats that met the genre criteria whose builders claim that they go planning speeds. All were raised pilothouse designs except one which was flush deck.

Other criteria being two or three staterooms and a fuel capacity of 800 gal.(3,040 L) or more.

LWL. When it comes to the crucial measurement of LWL, only two boats were longer, the others shorter by a foot. The foot is worth slightly over a knot in theoretical, easily-driven hull speed.

Displacement. In terms of displacement the Fleming 55 falls in the middle at 74,000 lbs. (33,636 kgs.). Four were less, one was the same and two were more.

Beam. The Fleming 55 has a 16' (7.27) beam. Two of our comparison boats had a few inches less beam, a couple had a few inches more, and three had 21" (53 cm) or more.

Accommodations. Like the Fleming 55 most had three staterooms and two heads. A couple had two staterooms and two heads.

Main Deck. As noted above, the helm console and the aft deck of the Fleming are the largest. Most boats in class had only one helm side-deck egress door and a number had a larger table and seating area behind the helm. The galley and salon layouts are all about the same.



This photo shows how easy it is for the skipper to pop up to the flying bridge from the lower helm and visa versa. Note the stainless steel rail above the Lexan venturi.



The hardtop is an option that we would recommend because it adds to much more utility to the boat in addition to providing UV protection. With the addition of a cruising canvas the flying bridge can be turned into another large living space quite inexpensively.



This is the VIP stateroom on the port side. Note the wood bulkheads, drawers and louvered doors. Instead of having a Pullman which can be problematic to raise and make, Fleming prefers the sliding bunk seen above which tucks under the side deck.



Alternatively Fleming can install a double bed in the VIP which also has the sliding upper bunk.

Features We Like

The thing that we like most about the Fleming 55 is that the builder is not fooling around trying to get the base price down by leaving essential stuff off the boat that will only have to be added later. Further it has added features for which only experienced cruising folks would appreciate the added utility. Here are some of those features in no particular order--

- **A dumb waiter** from the galley to the flying bridge. This is something we've dreamed about for years but never did it. The Fleming 55 has one.
- **An anchor platform for two** self-launching anchors and two compartments below, one for chain and one for line.
- **A watertight collision bulkhead** between the forepeak and the forward cabin.
- **Fresh and saltwater washdown bibs** on the foredeck and a hot and cold water shower in the cockpit.
- **A huge chart table** at the helm with several drawers under for paper charts. This is the largest one in class.
- **The master bed lifts electrically** with the touch of a button. Under is a good place to store items that are not used too often or only on special occasions.
- **Shore power outlets both bow and stern** means that extra cable is not needed when going into a slip either way. (We'd like to see a Cablemaster aboard as standard in the stern.)



Here is a forward master stateroom done right. We like the cabinets in the bow and the louvered doors for the two hanging lockers. The decks in many of these photos are covered in carpet because the owners have pets and they don't want the teak and holly sole scratched.

- **Galley and pantry windows** slide open bringing in fresh air.
- **All deck drains are piped** to the boot stripe to prevent black streaks.
- **Stainless steel saddle** for the yacht's tender.
- **Fiberglass drip pans** under the main engines.
- **LED lighting** throughout the boat both in the interior, exterior and for nav lights.



This is pretty typical of the third stateroom on boats of this size, if there is one at all. Some people turn this into an office. We like the use of the sliding upper bunk here rather than a fixed berth because it opens up the space.



This master head has a marble countertop and a matching marble sole in the shower stall. They are standard.



This guest head has a different treatment, sans teak cabinets. It also has a separate shower stall.

- An icemaker in the salon entertainment console. This is a handy location to both the cockpit and salon.
- All heads have ventilator fans. (We regret to have to mention this but some so-called "classy" yachts omit this little detail.)
- Sight glasses on all fuel and water tanks.
- Either freshwater or sea water can be used to flush Headhunter toilets.
- Ball-type seacocks are used on all through hull fittings at or below the waterline.
- The whole boat is prewired for speakers, with coax cable, CAT 5 cable, and 8-core signal cable.



A U-shaped galley is a standard layout for this class of yacht but Fleming has done as good a job as any builder at execution – and it is all in teak. Note the opening window and the granite counter tops.

The Galley

A lot of thought -- and experience -- has gone into fine-tuning the galley for the preparation of 3-star meals aboard the Fleming 55. Owners may select granite or Corian counter tops and back splashes. As standard there is a deep, composite double sink and an "Inskinkerator" in one of the sinks to dispose of garbage. A convection microwave oven and three-burner ceramic electric stove top with sea rails are installed for the cooking chores.

We like the slide-out pantry locker with three shelves making it easy to access goods even in the back. A trash compactor is standard, but a dishwasher is not, although a space has been wired and plumbed for one. (We can't imagine not having a dishwasher aboard.)

Hallelujah. What we like most about this galley is what is not actually in the U-shaped galley itself. To starboard, across the passageway from the salon to the helm, is a full-size, stand-up 20.5 cu. ft. refrigerator/freezer combination with two vertical swinging doors. The freezer is on the left side and the fridge is on the right. This is a name brand household type unit. This means there are no under counter drawers that have to be pulled out into the tight galley space.

The second thing we like is the dedicated dish locker on the starboard side that can be accessed either from the top (when offshore) or from the side (when tied up).



Here is the helm of a new 55 that has everything that a skipper needs in terms of electronics and things such as the VHF radio easy at hand.



Here is a 55 helm that is loaded to the gills with electronics. We have to admit that all of the extra electronics such as AIS, wind indicators, TV cameras, infra red, and redundancy on radar and chartplotters is compelling. This is the largest helm in class so the 55 can hold all of the electronic gadgets most anyone could want. Caution: All of these screens and information overload can be a terrible distraction, as many skippers have discovered to their dismay.

The Lower Helm

Virtually everything has been installed on the Fleming 55 except electronics. Most boaters we know go nuts on electronics and as much as we like redundancy in systems, we urge restraint on the more exotic stuff. Fleming has provided plenty of instrument console space for four screens plus other readouts including the Cummins Vesselview screens.

There is an overhead electronics console for those who have an open checkbook, but we suggest only putting things there that are infrequently used, otherwise they could literally become a pain in the neck.



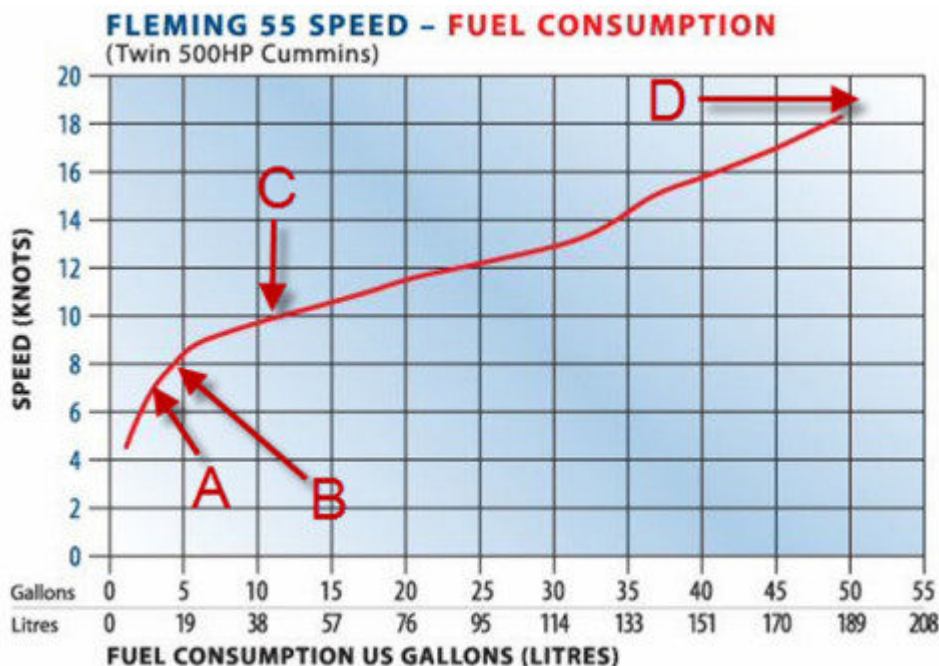
Because of the low profile of the Fleming 55 she does not have stand-up head room in the engine room. There is 5' (1.52 m) at the forward end and a foot less aft. The diamond plate covers are over the drive shafts and make it safer to crawl outboard while underway.

AC and DC panels are conveniently below the counter. Plan on using a remote autopilot. Fleming has provided a de-fogging blower for the inside of the windshields and installed self-parking, heavy-duty multi-speed windshield wipers with fresh water wash.

The Helm Layout. For any new boat we would recommend that boaters lay out the screens and instruments, and work with the boat dealer on where best to have everything placed. This is to say, we would not leave the layout of instruments, electronics and controls of all sorts to a third party without very detailed consultation.

Power and Performance

The standard and *only* power for the Fleming 55 is twin Cummins QSC 8.3 L 500-hp engines. According to the builder, putting in larger engines only makes the boat go marginally faster and is not worth the expense or the higher fuel burn. The builder says he can count on a WOT speed of 19 knots, conservatively speaking, although some new boats have gone as fast as 21 knots in a light condition. The builder states she can cruise at 17 knots all day, but most of his owners run the boat at 10 knots in coastal situations burning 11 or 12 gallons (41 to 46 L) per hour.



This is a chart that Fleming publishes on its website which gives some important insight. The boat has a 1,000 gal. (3,800 L) fuel capacity.

A—At 7 knots the boat seems to burn about 3 gph. With a 10% reserve that gives her a range of 2,100 nm.

B – At 8 knots she seems to be burning about 4.5 gph. That would give her a range of 1,600 nm.

C – At 10 knots, where the builder says most owners cruise the boat, she seems to be burning about 11.25 gph. That would give her a range of about 800 nm.

D – This chart does not show the boat going 19 knots but we are assured by the builder that the Fleming 55 will do that under normal conditions.

We have not tested the 55 so can make no comment on her speed or fuel consumption.



While the boat looks high in this picture because of the camera angle and the isinglass on the flying bridge, she has in fact a relatively low CG for this type of boat making her more stable and seaworthy. She does not carry dedicated ballast other than for balance.

Price

The Fleming 55 is not cheap. As has been pointed out, the builder has simply put the best materials and equipment into the boat and has essentially let the chips fall where they may as far as price goes.

The company has only four models and builds fewer than 20 yachts in total each year. The company's owners are boat builders and not venture capitalists, so they have no interest in doubling or tripling the yard's production by having lower prices and skimping on quality to do it. In the words of one of the owners, "We want to build quality not quantity." We believe him.

The MSRP price of the Fleming 55 landed in North America is usually just under \$2 million, depending on which options have been put on the boat.



One of the changes that have been made to the boat over the years is to add the seating forward of the Portuguese bridge. It is certainly a fun place to ride or to share a cocktail there at anchor while watching the sun go down.

Observations

We would not recommend the Fleming 55 for everyone. People who just want a boat to bang around in local waters, or just go from marina to marina, or who only use the boat a few times each year – these people would probably be just as happy with a boat that costs much less. It is easily possible to buy too much boat for the work at hand, and the Fleming 55 is a good example of that.

This is a boat that is designed and built for a connoisseur of fine yachts. The depth of experience that went into her lines and concept 27 years ago and the fact that she is essentially the same today (even though she has been re-tooled and dozens of little things have been changed), proves that she is a very special boat, indeed. She is an able vessel well-suited for many missions, and she will look good doing all of them.



To date, 228 Fleming 55s have been delivered to owners all over the world. Note that this owner has extended the boat deck almost to the transom. We like this customization because it allows the aft deck to be enclosed for three-season operation.