

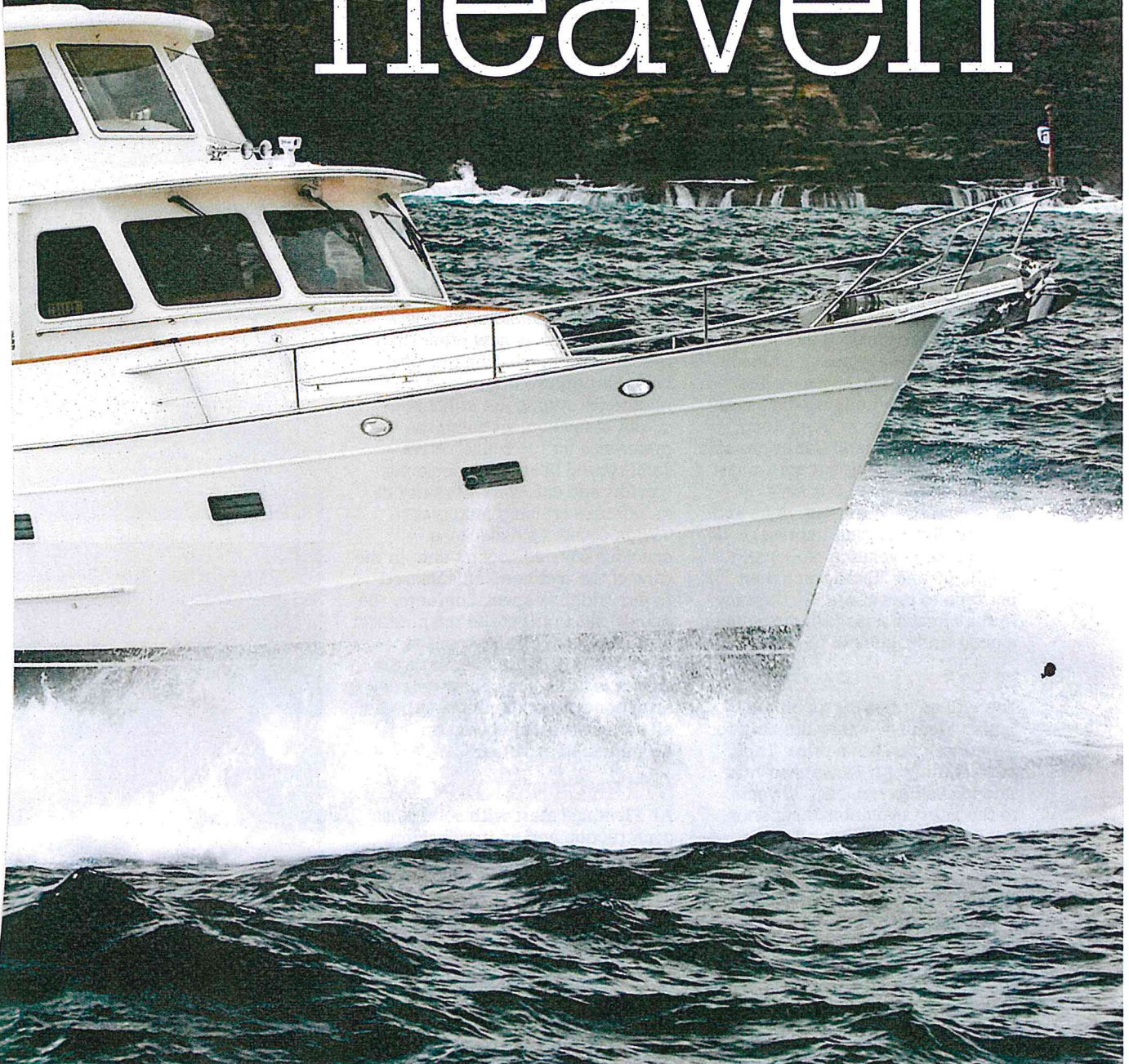
tradeboat
FEATURE TEST
FLEMING
65

TONY MACKAY runs a critical eye over the traditional-style Fleming 65 passagemaker, but is blinded by its lack of fault in form and function



PHOTOS ELLEN DEWAR VIDEO FLEMING

Seventh heaven





There are two words that ultimately define the quality and integrity of any product — repeat buyer. When

the repeat buyer has owned and extensively used another similar model for more than 10 years, has owned a serious sailing yacht of high quality, and is a person of experience and intellect, well, you know that something is right.

The new Fleming 65 tested is the new pride and joy of a very discerning owner who has no time for inferior products displayed with the patois of slick salesmanship. It was a rather fascinating insight into the world of experience. So, too, the history of the Fleming motoryachts.

Founder, Tony Fleming, trained as an aeronautical engineer and started his boatbuilding days with American Marine in Hong Kong, famous for the Grand Banks cruisers and the less-known but very smart Alaskan 49 and 53. It is very obvious that the Alaskan style and concept left a lasting impression as his ongoing evolution of Fleming 50, 55, 65 and 75 can trace their heritage to this genre. As they say in the Mortein ads, "When you're on a good thing, stick to it."

FLEMING FORMULA

You will never be disappointed with a Fleming — they are built to a standard and not a price. Their partnership with Taiwanese yard Tung Hwa has led, over 25 years, to the latest evolution of superior quality products. With all these boatbuilders, it really all boils down to a matter of "instructions". Thankfully, the Fleming team lives and breathes the concept, design and construction of their

boats. They are a top-end product. Unlike most designers and builders, Fleming and his family have cruised more than 20,000nm in his eponymous boats. The modifications and enhancements therefore come from actual use and not from a "cunning plan that can't fail". Purely and simply, they work magnificently.

Down on Sydney Harbour on a blustery, grey day with sinister swells brewing at the Heads, the Fleming 65 made good at 10kts, lightly loaded, obviously stabilised and oblivious to the prevailing conditions. It was bleak.

The classic lines are rather timeless and therefore there is nothing obviously new other than the faultless finish. The graceful bow, Portuguese bridge and pilothouse styling are unlikely to go out of fashion, all being the preference for the conservative semi-retired boater who looks for comfort and safety as a priority in an offshore cruising motoryacht.

Wide covered side decks, a spacious covered cockpit and, in the case of the test boat, an enclosed flying bridge (a special order for the owner) all contribute to the practical and functional arrangement of the boat. Where the Fleming truly shines is in the amazingly detailed attention to every function onboard, all a process of intelligent and ocean-tested evolution.

STRENGTH AND POWER

All Flemings start with solid glass construction and an interlocking matrix of frames and full-length box section stringers to give an extremely strong hull. They avoid the weight- and cost-savings of cored or composite construction

The enclosed flybridge, a Fleming 65 first, gives all-weather protection. There's more outside shelter down below with covered side decks and a flybridge overhang for the cockpit, left. The helm, below, is home to full suite of electronics, including a Fleming ship's systems touchscreen, below right.



(FEATURETEST)



Down on Sydney Harbour on a blustery, grey day with sinister swells brewing at the Heads, the Fleming 65 slid along... oblivious to the prevailing conditions





Stay put with this dual-anchoring system featuring a heavy-duty electric Lorans winch with twin gypsies, and remotely operated of course, inset.

methods, not to mention potential problems in future caused by delamination, by sticking with trusty solid fibreglass.

A full-length keel extends significantly below the rudders and running gear, protecting them in the event of the unforeseen but usual groundings that occur when cruising. It has happened to us all, but with a full keel one is more likely to back off and resume the adventure unscathed.

The hull is described as semi-displacement, a deep and fine entry forward tapering to rounded bilge sections forward and a hard-chine, moderate vee aft. This type of hull offers the best of all worlds. Planing performance, the tracking and safety of a full keel, and the stability that hard chines provide both underway and at anchor, all contributing to an extremely efficient and comfortable ride in most sea conditions. Not to mention excellent fuel economy at virtually all speeds.

Fleming finds the small "get home" engines are a poor substitute for a second, equal-sized engine. Thanks to the full keel, the Fleming will maintain her course with one motor and only a 15-degree deflection in the rudder. Twin engines also give that very desirable power required to move at higher speeds to either avoid adverse weather, traffic or an emergency situation. Not to mention the far superior handling in close quarters with the big props, big power and twin screws, plus thruster combination. Those requiring better economy can simply drop a few knots which, in many cases, will halve fuel consumption.

MICRO CHIC

Boarding the Fleming one is immediately aware (well I certainly was) of the myriad of superbly finished little details that only come with a well-founded cruiser — safe, elegant and in compliance with European CE Certification for Ocean Class.

The cockpit has laid teak decks,

chunky teak capping on the bulwarks and foredeck handrails. To an avid varnishing nut, I appreciated the forward railings being fastened to the fibreglass rather than the lower cap rail, which means all the railings and capping are unimpeded by fittings that are such a pest for the budding artisan at work. This makes all the brightwork a mere mask and light sand away from a few glistening coats — always a delightful afternoon pastime for the devoted boatie.

Back in the cockpit, there is no fixed furniture and it is a huge space awaiting some comfortable chairs and a light lunch. Perfectly conceived fairleads, cleats and electric capstan winches make mooring a breeze. An optional aft command station allows deft handling with engine start/stop, gear and throttles, and thruster controls. A wetbar provides immediate refreshments. Those wishing a swim can open the inward-swinging transom door and use the wide swimplatform, which incorporates a built-in ladder that can be deployed from the water, just in case you inadvertently fall in.

A raised plinth makes a step up to the saloon and cleverly opens to provide easy and water-resistant access to the engineroom and

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REDMOND ROSS

Chunky teak caps the bulwarks and is fitted in such a way as to assist future maintenance.



lazarette. All the exterior hatches are beautifully sealed and lockable. All the fuel tanks can be filled from either sidedeck, with a digital level gauge and a spill chamber for the less fastidious. Or in case she burps.

The sidedecks are under cover and have similar recessed cleats, fairleads and excellent handrails. The Portuguese bridge has doors on both sides and more storage. The foredeck has a cabin-style trunk, which gives the bonus of improved cabin headroom, capacious storage lockers for lines and fenders, and a sunpad for chasing the perfect tan. The 65's sunpad is the size of the 55's front deck so the whole family can toast themselves to a crisp. The bowsprit has a heavy-duty Lofrans winch with twin gypsies, twin anchors and chain, all into a self-draining locker with additional stowage.

The flybridge is accessed either from the pilothouse or a cockpit ladder. The helm station is raised on the port side and has a two-person seat for more companionable navigation. The electronics and controls are ergonomically presented and replicate most at

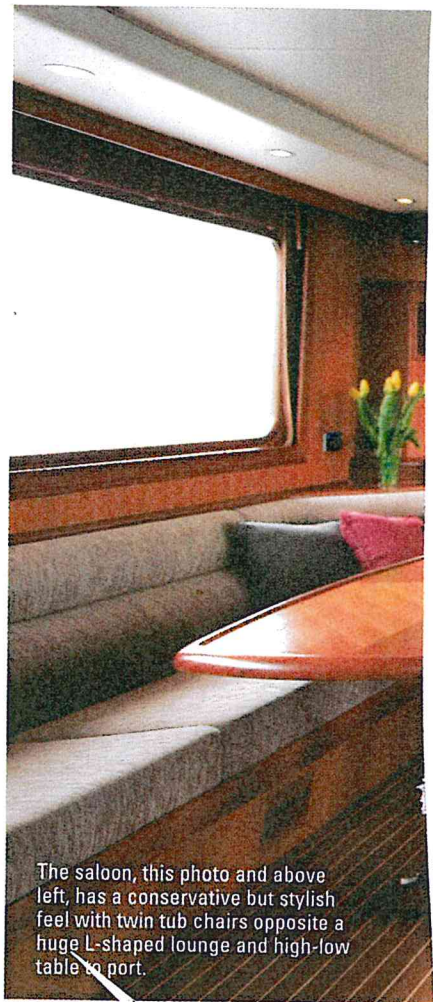
the lower-helm. To starboard, a U-shaped sofa and table will seat six for lunch or sundowner drinks, and one can opt for the barbecue and/or freezer to replace a portside sofa. The aft boat-deck will hold a large tender and water toys.

The test boat had an enclosed flybridge and, while I wasn't thrilled about the aesthetics of this addition, it certainly made such a huge space into a far more useable area in all weather. The standard open bridge has a folding bimini or optional hardtop with clear covers at the buyer's discretion.

ADMIRAL'S BRIDGE

The pilothouse is a rather magnificent bridge, where any admiral would feel at home. With a wealth of knowledge, the new owner had specified a vast array of the most impressive equipment from FLIR night-vision cameras, Boving engine and mechanical systems monitors, moveable cameras located in four locations, electronic controls with remote, bow and stern thrusters, Trac stabilisers, and every device you could possibly order. The order sheet must have been longer than the Dead Sea Scrolls. Why not though? A boat of this calibre deserves an owner prepared to honour the builder's efforts, so obviously done without compromise.

A dayhead is in the pilothouse along with a sofa and table — but who am I to bore you with all the really detailed little bits and pieces that contribute to such a thoroughly engineered package? Significantly though, the pilothouse is a dedicated area and not a through-passage to the forward cabins, access to them being gained from the



The saloon, this photo and above left, has a conservative but stylish feel with twin tub chairs opposite a huge L-shaped lounge and high-low table to port.

saloon. This is important for several reasons, particularly that navigation is crucial and not to be impaired by meandering guests. Any access forward usually involves a steep, semicircular staircase that is not safe in a seaway than the three easy centreline steps down from the saloon to the accommodation.

This companionway negates the full-width master cabins that have a certain "wow" factor in some competitors' boats, particularly with the full-width heads and showers that do impress. The Fleming logic is good, though, as those cabins in other boats do have a down-in-the-bilge feel, with so many tight steps to contend with. The Fleming's slightly conservative layout feels more split-level and the centreline companionway is certainly safer, being padded and comfortable to use.

Five accommodation plans are available in the 65. The test boat had the master cabin and en suite to port, a VIP cabin with island berth in the bow and an en suite, and a guest cabin with convertible upper and lower bunks and another en suite. A Miele washer-dryer will deal with the toils of laundry. The forward VIP berth lifts on hydraulic struts

HIGHS

- › Built for the seven seas
- › Tried and tested engineering
- › Top-quality fitout and finish
- › Beautiful motion at sea
- › Huge capacities for liveaboarding
- › Built-in redundancy
- › Brand recognition

LOWS

- › Big-ticket bluewater cruiser but you get what you pay for
- › Hardtop on flybridge is a tad bulky



for voluminous storage — perhaps a hidden cellar or linen press?

Whichever option you select, it will all be fitted out in superb low-key luxury with high-end fittings. There is literally nothing wanting and the most fastidious buyers will be hard-pressed to even think of an alteration to the Fleming specifications. Let's face it, after 20,000 sea miles of testing they would have solved every problem by now. Trust me, they have.

The saloon has two optional layouts for seating, the test boat having an L-shaped sofa and high/low table to port, and two club chairs to starboard with cabinets behind. TV and stereo units, wetbars, bottle fridges and icemaker assist the skipper with party preparations, while farther forward a comprehensive galley,



The forward galley is comprehensive and an intelligent design, with things like the above-stove pull-out drawers, above left, a prime example.

pantry and all manner of cooking, dishwashing and food storage appliances have been intelligently placed. Picture windows, double aft cockpit doors, plush upholstery and deep-pile carpeting, surrounded by luscious satin-finished teak, complete the package. When do we leave? Honestly, if you are not satisfied with all this you need to

seek specialist attention.

HOLY OF HOLIES

The "holy place" of worship is usually the engine room, certainly for most testosterone-fueled men. If Mr Fleming got the upstairs so right, would you imagine for a moment that the engineering would be of a lesser standard? Better to



The Fleming 65 has five accommodation plans, the test boat had the master cabin with athwartships bed, this photo, and its en suite, below, to port.



get home on a well-engineered boat than shoot flares off a designer-styled sofa. As funny as that sounds so many boatbuilders focus less on their crucial systems than the styling tricks that entice less-experienced buyers. So fear not, Fleming has addressed every issue.

Twin 800hp MAN R6 turbo-diesels sit level on soft Aquadrive mounts. A special Seatorque system provides a coupling to the shafts in sheathed

tubes. There is no vibration. Full stop.

Fuel is in four fibreglass tanks totaling 6435lt, the two main tanks being located at the forward end of the engine room and providing extra insulation to the guest cabins. A Fleming designed supply-and-return system is simplistic and logical compared to others. Two Onan generators provide 240V, with two high-power inverters operating silently when required. Main-engine alternators maintain battery levels at cruising speeds, even with the refrigeration and partial air-con running through the inverters.

This whole engine room space is beautifully fitted, right down to mirror-finish stainless steel panels at the back of the engines, and if it is a little warm after a day at sea, turn on the air-con. We don't want a grumpy mechanic bumping up the bill because he's hot and grotty.

The lazarette houses heat-sensitive equipment, water tanks, watermaker, pumps, etc, still leaving a vast space for storage. If you know anything about boats you will relish the practical details that abound everywhere. Even the hoseclips have little plastic covers on the tails so you don't cut yourself. Lifting the floors or opening the inspection hatches

anywhere will reveal a quality of finish that other manufacturers can barely achieve in their cocktail cabinets. As I said, it is all a matter of instructions to the builders.

ROUGHER THE BETTER

So how did she run? Well it got better. Sydney Heads was a little nasty and on our camera boat we played rodeo on the waves. The Fleming, insulated, isolated and endowed with silent surefooted confidence, sliced the waves with deft ability. My champagne flute, tragically missing, would not have spilled, and for this we should be most grateful. The Trac stabilisers are the best I have encountered and even beam on, nothing happened. It was as if we were on rails.

Our new owner is 79, has paid \$3.8 million or so and is as happy as a lark. He is off on an adventure and will enjoy every minute of his new Fleming. He will enjoy the huge satisfaction of every delicious engineering detail, will relax in the face of Mother Nature's nasty moods and, I suspect, it will be very hard to wipe the huge smile off his face. A few select guests and a tray of drinks at sunset will prompt a clink of glasses and the "life is wonderful" toast. Bon voyage. 🍷