

# SUM OF ITS PARTS

*THE FLEMING 55'S CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION HAS CREATED A CLASSIC THAT JUST WON'T QUIT. BY GEORGE SASS SR.*

In my lifetime, a small handful of production boats have become true classics, if not legends. The Bertram 31, Grand Banks 42, Hinckley Bermuda 40 and Hatteras 53 come to mind and are examples of designs that enjoyed lengthy, successful production runs. Long after they were discontinued, they have remained popular on the brokerage market, sometimes commanding premium prices.

Among these recent classics, one model remains in production today. Hull No. 212 of the Fleming 55 was delivered in April 2011, and a number of new 55s are in production at Fleming's yard in Taiwan. First launched in 1985, the Fleming 55 owes its longevity not only to its successful design, but also to the company's commitment to making improvements to each hull it builds.

Duncan Cowie and Adi Shard, the talented Brits who have taken over the management of the company from its founder, Tony Fleming, say each new Fleming 55 incorporates eight to 10 improvements over the previous hull. Based on building an average of 10 55s per year, the math equates to 400 to 500 changes over just a five-year period.

Keeping this classic up to date is largely the result of the relationship among the factory, Fleming's dealers and its owners. Chuck Hovey Yachts on the West Coast and Burr Yacht Sales on

the East Coast have been Fleming's only dealers in the United States since the brand's earliest days. Along with Fleming's select dealers in Canada and Europe, they have a valuable, historical understanding of the product. "I can't remember how many times a customer has asked 'What if we did this?'" comments Ray Currey of Burr Yacht Sales. "Some of these suggestions make very good sense, and we pass them along to the factory to be considered for future production."

While Fleming embraces new ideas and technology, the company is quick to point out that it makes changes only after thorough research and sea trials, as opposed to catering to whims and fancies. For example, the 55's centerline hallway leading to three staterooms and two heads all on one level is a hallmark of Fleming's design. This arrangement eliminates steep, hard-to-negotiate stairways needed to accommodate a midships master stateroom — a feature that may seem attractive but which creates unintended design consequences. Also sacred to Fleming's design is its dedicated pilothouse, which is three steps up from the ship's living area. Because one does not pass through the pilothouse to the staterooms or heads below, the ship's operation is undisturbed while guests freely enjoy the yacht's living and sleeping areas.

Likewise, the Fleming's semidisplacement hull design, with

its sharp entry, rounded bilge sections forward, hard chines aft and moderate deadrise, has proven itself to be comfortable, seaworthy and efficient throughout its cruising-speed range of 8 to 18 knots. With so many Fleming 55s safely cruising throughout the world, the company knows it has a winner and has not changed its basic hull design

Likewise, most of Fleming's owners use their yachts the way Tony Fleming originally intended — for coastal and offshore cruising. The company keeps an open line of communication with its owners, who are only too happy to share their personal tips and tricks, the best of which have been incorporated into production. And last but not least, Tony Fleming continues to cruise the world's oceans on his personal Fleming, vigorously testing new ideas and equipment. (See [www.yachtingmagazine.com/flemingcruising](http://www.yachtingmagazine.com/flemingcruising) for several of these adventures.)

The complexity of today's Fleming 55 is a far cry from when Tony Fleming launched his first hull. To ensure that its boats comply with all current safety and construction standards, as well as federal regulations, Fleming has taken a major step

forward in having its new boats certified by the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA).

The NMMA certification process was no casual undertaking; it required rigorous inspections of the company's facility in Taiwan as well as finished boats located in Maryland and Vancouver, British Columbia. In addition, all Fleming models will now be inspected on an annual basis. NMMA-certified boats must also meet the stringent standards of ABYC (American Boat & Yacht Council), as well as comply with Environmental Protection Agency requirements for emissions and wastewater systems.

While all boats sold in the United States must meet U.S. Coast Guard minimum regulations, NMMA-certified boats, like the Fleming 55, benefit from this vigorous, third-party inspection program.

Tony Fleming must have known from the beginning that he had a winner in his Fleming 55. But only through a consistent program of upgrading, improving and refining the original has it reached its current status of a thoroughly modern living legend. □

*Fleming Yachts, 949-645-1024; [www.flemingyachts.com](http://www.flemingyachts.com)*

## ➤ A Look at the Details...

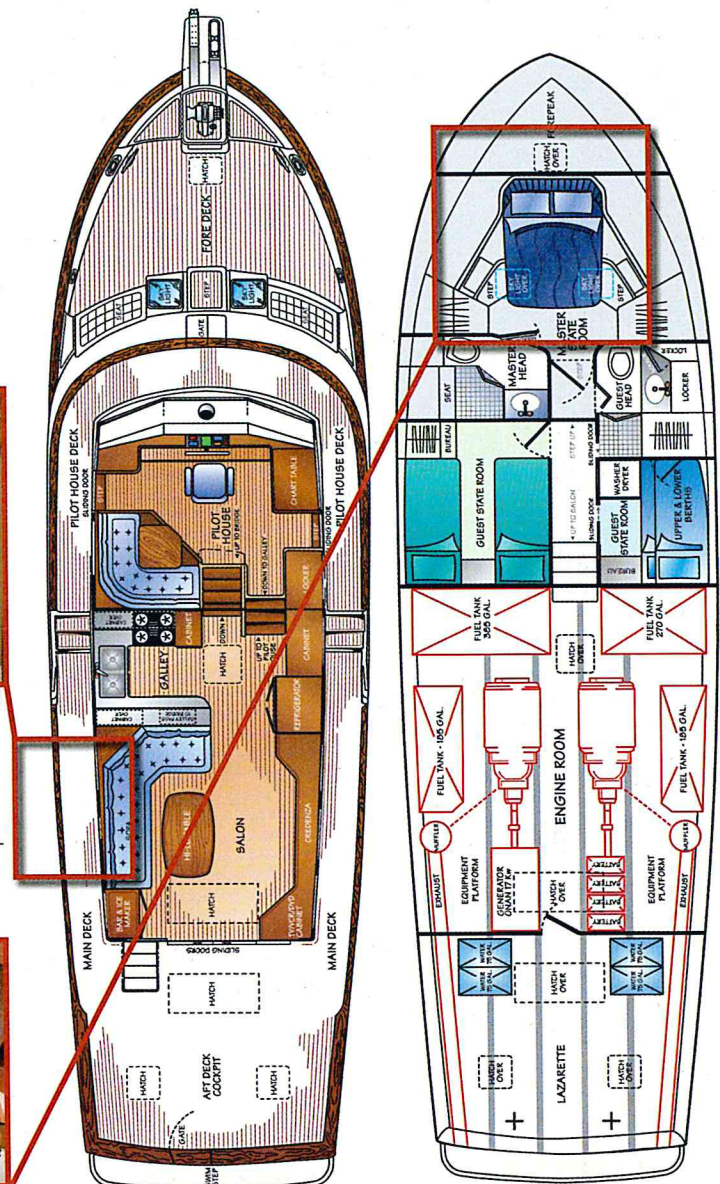
### ➤ REFINED DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

While the fundamental design of the Fleming has flourished for years, hundreds of small details have been refined. Side deck gates now swing inward instead of outward so they don't interfere with pilings, and grab rails have been added above the gates for easier boarding. Opening gates have also been added forward on the pilothouse deck, where the side decks are higher than they are aft, making it easier to board in certain docking situations. The cockpit roof deck has been lengthened to accommodate larger tenders and provide more shade.



While vinylester resin was used below the waterline to prevent blistering, beginning with hull 44, the entire vessel now features the use of this superior material, which virtually eliminates fabric print-through and creates a flawless, mirrorlike fiberglass finish.

One recent improvement is particularly clever. After some owners mentioned it was difficult making the island bed in the master stateroom, Fleming installed a slide mechanism that moves the mattress and platform 18 inches aft while the bed is being made. Once made, the bed is returned to its normal position. A hydraulic lift provides easy access to storage below. James Bond would love this stateroom.

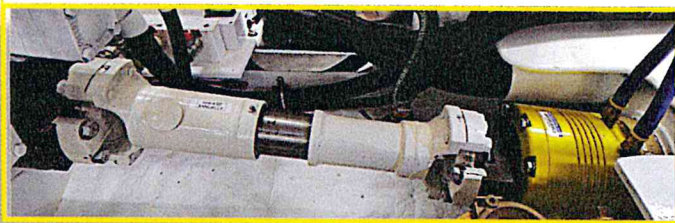


## › ELECTRICAL-MECHANICAL ADVANCEMENTS

Over the years, Fleming has taken advantage of new diesel engine technology, and after utilizing the bulletproof 375- and 435-horsepower Caterpillar 3208s in nearly 90 hulls, it offered the option of choosing the physically smaller Cummins 450-horsepower engines. Engine evolution continued, and when more advanced common-rail engines had proven themselves, the new 500-horsepower Cummins QSC 500 diesels became the standard engine, beginning with hull No. 157. Not only are these engines quieter and more efficient, but they also produce virtually no smoke or transom soot.

Fleming has always had a reputation for having a quiet, vibration-free ride, and thanks to the recent experimentation by Tony Fleming on his personal Fleming 65, the Fleming 55 now incorporates the innovative **Seatorque enclosed shaft system**. Its thrust bearing and universal joint further reduce noise and vibration, and its shafts are enclosed in oil-filled stainless steel tubes, reducing turbulence and drag. The system also minimizes maintenance; there are no cutlass bearings or shaft seals to replace.

To eliminate potential rust or corrosion, the original steel fuel tanks were replaced with Fleming's own fiberglass tanks on hull 57 in 1996. These fire-retardant units, which contain baffles and sumps for drainage, have undergone exhaustive fire and pressure testing to ensure leak-proof integrity. They are glassed into the vessel's structure on all sides, adding to the hull's rigidity.



The present Fleming 55 electrical system might be described as evolution on steroids. Not only does it include an isolation transformer, but it includes two of them, one for the forward shore-power connection and one for the aft connection. This device isolates the boat from the shore power's neutral and ground circuit, preventing deficiencies of the dock's system from causing problems aboard as well as protecting swimmers from electrocution. Most new 55s are also equipped with an optional SmartBoost, which provides up to a 13 percent voltage boost when dockside power drops below 210 VAC, a common occurrence at marinas in less populated areas. To make the ship's power management less complicated, all 55s incorporate an automatic ship/shore switching system, which allows the owner to simply plug into shore power and turn off the generator when arriving at a marina. Gone are the traditional power transfer switches that had to be activated in proper sequence to choose and distribute power.

Advanced LED interior and exterior lighting significantly reduces current draw. This is the latest generation of LEDs, which offer a warmer, more natural color and wider beam angle. Coupled with more advanced DC charging and inverter systems, the use of the vessel's generator can be significantly reduced.

One of Fleming's best examples of embracing advanced technology is the recent addition of the Böning Ship Monitoring System, a German product descended from the commercial shipping industry. Standard with every new Fleming 55 is a 6.3-inch color monitor that provides an instant overview of the yacht's vital systems, including fuel and water tank levels, bilge status, engine fluid temperatures, firefighting equipment and running light status. While the basic Böning system is now standard, an owner obsessed with high-tech gadgetry could spend another \$100,000 adding larger monitors and 100 or more additional sensors, which provide data on just about every device or system on board.

## › BUT WAIT! THERE'S EVEN MORE.

Among the many additional refinements now standard are a low-profile davit **1** that is fully hydraulic and controlled with a wireless remote, curved teak bulkheads in the master stateroom, upgraded hardware and light switches, additional soundproofing, a plumbed backup freshwater pump, double shock mounts on the genset, Kahlenberg air horns **2** (for the sound of

luxury), a Stidd helm chair and AGM Lifeline batteries.

Optional upgrades include the ingenious "Burrwood" composite cap rails **3**, which look like varnished teak and eliminate the annual varnish job. A high-tech fly-by-wire steering system, DC proportional thrusters and a new fuel polishing system are just some of the reasons the Fleming 55 can rightfully be considered a new model.

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