

*“Piloting the Fleming 65 is rather like driving a Bentley:
Whatever the speed, it’s a dignified affair...”*

— Motor Boat & Yachting



Running at eight knots or eighteen, the Fleming 65 delivers a whisper quiet, smooth ride. She offers the flexibility of making offshore passages of more than 1,500 miles at displacement speeds, yet she can comfortably increase her speed to reach port ahead of bad weather or nightfall.

Beyond her superb performance is an elegant, timeless design that will win your heart and soul. Visit www.flemingyachts.com and discover what leading boating journalists and Fleming owners have to say about the ultimate cruising yacht.

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	19.8 m
LWL	18.0 m
DISPL	48,980 kg
BEAM	5.68 m
DRAFT	1.52 m
FUEL	6435 L
WATER	1515 L

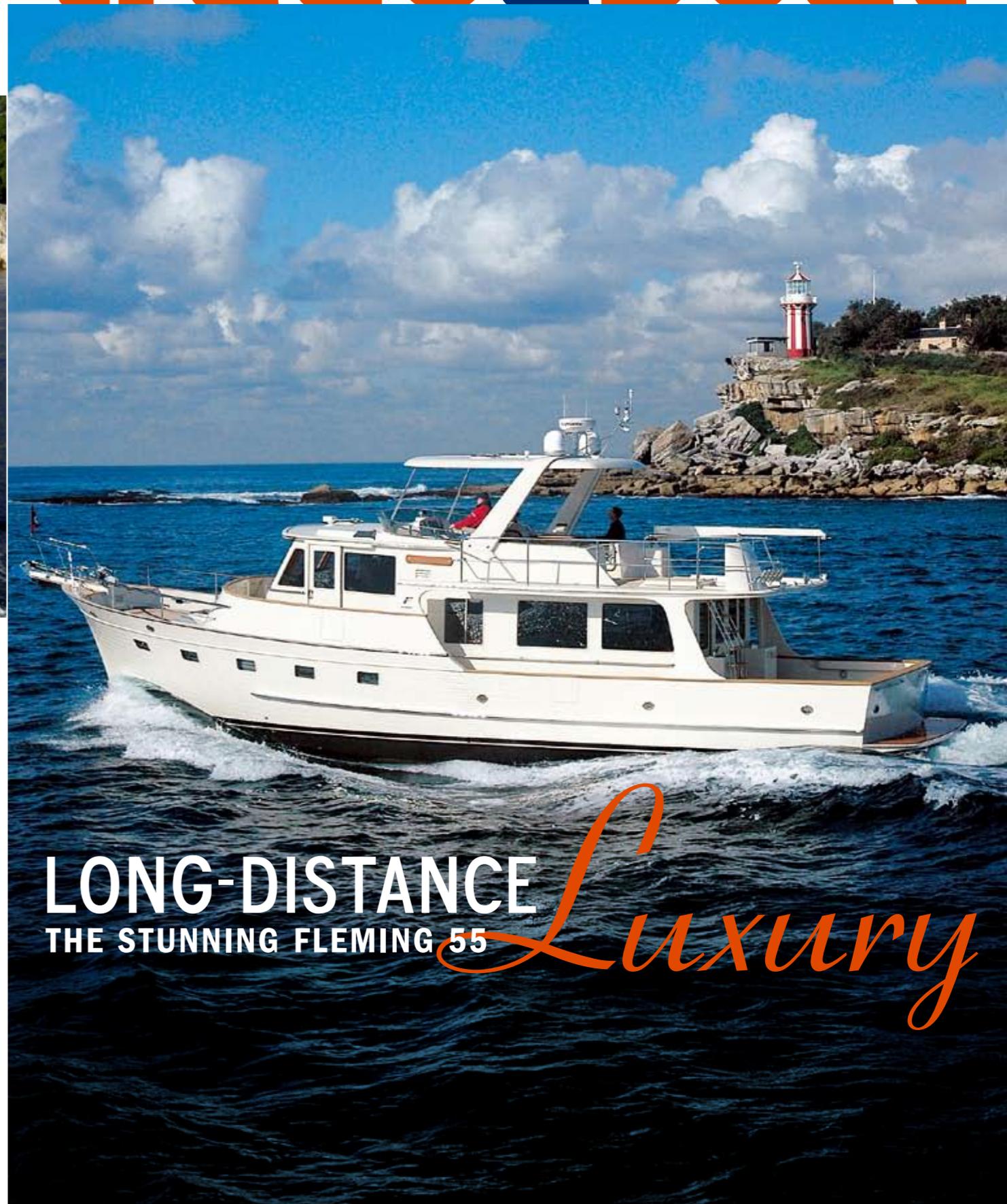


FLEMING

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**LONG-DISTANCE
THE STUNNING FLEMING 55**

Luxury

five-star LINER

Fleming yachts are built for the long haul, to make vast ocean passages in the lap of luxury and with the security of the very best in marine engineering, writes David Lockwood



STORY & PHOTOS: DAVID LOCKWOOD

Mid-morning at Sydney Heads. The ocean barely heaving and a late autumn zephyr caressing the deep blue sea. The sun beams overhead, puffs of cloud drift over the horizon and, best of all, a boat built for serious coastal cruising and voyaging is underfoot and at our beck and call.

But this was plain cruel, a tease, and a tantalising taste that left one wanting so much more. Considered by cruising buffs as the benchmark of pilothouse boats, the Flemings are made to go places for more than a fleeting

few hours. Take the 55 tested here with twin 500hp Cummins QSC8.3 electronic diesels. Its range is about 2000nm at eight knots.

All we needed to do was turn left at The Heads, pick a waypoint on the chartplotter, set up a radar alarm and call the autopilot into action. Oh, and we may as well engage the stabilisers and run a movie through the spare Raymarine E120 screen while we're at it.

Ten hours later we could be pulling into Port Stephens having used just 80 litres. The next day, it might be Coffs Harbour, then Yamba, the Gold Coast, Mooloolaba, Hervey Bay and

onto The Reef. In the Northern Hemisphere, longer voyages to Mexico, Canada, Alaska, even across the Atlantic, aren't unusual.

Enter founder Tony Fleming, a wayfaring boatbuilder aged 72 who, as I write this, has just sent a dispatch from *Venture*, the first Fleming 65 that he built and kept for himself, which at last report had 15,000 sea miles under the full-length keel.

After cruising around the Galapagos Islands for eight days *Venture* needed refuelling. Fleming took on 1550 US gallons (5867lt) of diesel in Baltra Island before arriving at

Panama City at the entrance to the eponymous canal. This was the longest passage Fleming has ever undertaken, taking four days and six hours at an average speed of 8.7kts while burning 4.54lt per mile.

But Fleming says by the time you read this, he will have passed through the Panama Canal and be headed for New York, where he will enter the Hudson River, Erie Canal and the St Lawrence Seaway en route to Nova Scotia (more at www.flemingyachts.com). See what I mean about wayfaring?

All of which augurs well for those with

itchy feet, deep pockets and a quest to own a time-proven passagemaker. Something like the Fleming 55 tugging at the reins and champing at the bit before me...

PASSAGE IN TIME

The 55 is the baby in Fleming Yacht's three-boat range, which includes a 65 and 75, all of which are manufactured at the Tung Hwa yard in Southern Taiwan.

The 55 was first released as a 50-footer in 1986, after Fleming struck out alone, leaving his job as technical director in charge of new

development at American Marine in Hong Kong, which built Grand Banks boats, after starting with them in 1961. Soon after, that initial 50 was lengthened to a 53 and then a 55 in 1996.

The 55 is by far the most popular and accounts for some 90 per cent of production. It's hull No. 194 that you see pictured hereabouts plying the waters off Sydney for its proud local owner. Such a boat takes about six months to build, the yard making 12 per year, plus six 65s and just one 75-footer.

So with all those years and water under their



Clockwise from opposite far left: Portside galley; Flybridge has seating for at least eight around a teak dinette; The Fleming 55 has serious shiplike lines; Pilothouse helm; Stateroom is in the bow and boasts a big island double bed.



“Add the fact that Fleming himself is few other yards ever would, and you are

reeling in all those sea miles, and putting his boats to the test like assured of a craft that is tried and tested”

HIGHS

- A benchmark in pilothouse boats
- The pedigree for serious passagemaking
- Tried and tested, and taken all around the world
- Huge range at displacement speeds
- Acceleration, speed and good steering for bar crossings
- Very stable at sea
- Super engineering, redundant systems and inherent safety
- Safe walkaround decks
- User-friendly internal stairwells
- Equipped as a real home-away-from-home
- Terrific spread of amenities and appliances
- Wonderful finish with a forest of Burmese teak
- Attractive price thanks to exchange rate
- Good international backing

LOWS

- Boat is inclined to throw water at higher speeds
- Expect high maintenance costs of the systems
- You might need two marina pens to berth
- Owner misses out on a full-beam stateroom
- Saloon loses space to the wide bulwarks

flybridges, Flemings are evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Add the fact that Fleming himself is reeling in all those sea miles, and putting his boats to the test like few other yards ever would, and you are assured of a craft that is tried and tested.

With a soft American market — Fleming Yachts offices are located in California and all boats are sold in, you beauty, US dollars — it appears that Fleming are putting a few feelers out in overseas markets.

Tellingly, the owners of the four Flemings in Australia, all sold since 2001, went shopping off their own bat. Some 50 per cent of all Fleming owners are ex-sailors and at least one of the local owners came out of a Swan. It's not surprising that they keep such company. However, the owner of the tested 55 arrived at his boat via a more circuitous route.

Peter McMorro arrived at his Fleming after finding himself in London four years ago. The Southampton Boat Show was running and he fell in love with the 55 on display. Flying home, he found the chap alongside was reading *Passagemaker* magazine. He borrowed that journal, liked what he saw, subscribed, and then found himself reading more and more about Flemings.

While crewing at Hamilton Island's Race Week, McMorro met a local owner of a Fleming, and another thereafter, both of

whom had nothing but praise for their boats. So he ordered his 55 with a pile of options for about \$2.5 million that would now, thanks to our dollar, cost about \$2.3 million. Either way, you sure get a lot for your buck...

TRIED AND TESTED

Fleming doesn't bend to fashion but prefers timeless pilothouse lines, conservative but serious engineering, and foolproof fuel and electrical systems. Among the good gear on the 55 pictured are 24V Sidepower bow and sternthrusters, ABT Trac stabilisers, a second Onan generator, two extra docking helm stations (cockpit and aft flybridge), a double-gypsy windlass, Reverso fuel-polishing system, flybridge hardtop and cockpit sink.

The watermaker was to be fitted locally, though the 1130lt polyethylene tanks should suffice in the interim, while the cockpit has additional floodlights, and the Steelhead Marine davit was upgraded to a 363kg number. The stainless steel rocket launcher pointed to the fact that the owner intends to fish from this boat.

Indoors, there was a Bose Lifestyle system, Foxtel and Satphone, and upgraded (all Burmese, of course) teak joinery that went beyond what American Fleming owners normally specify.

Fleming Yachts builds its boat to

international standards and they are made to CE Category Ocean Class A, for operating in seas up to seven metres and winds of Force 9, which are 41 to 47kts. While Flemings sold outside Europe don't carry the CE certificate they are still built to that standard.

Construction is the antipathy of high-tech build simply because weight at displacement speeds, where these boats spend most of their time, isn't so much of a factor. The hull is fashioned from (really) solid GRP with an epoxy barrier below the waterline and vinylester resin in the outer layers, plus clinker mouldings for good looks.

Full-length stringers and cross frames glassed to the hull, and Nidacore in the saloon floor help provide additional stiffness to the hull, as well as sound insulation, which is abundant in the engine room. The deck is (Corecell) foam cored and glassed to the hull, twice, at deck level and the top of the bulwark.

Californian naval architect, Larry Drake, designed the semi-displacement hull, but Fleming tweaked the decks and flybridge himself. There is a moderate deadrise for top speeds of 16 to 18kts, though most owners run these boats at 10 to 11kts on coastal legs and eight knots for true long-range passages.

The 55 hull has a very fine entry and rounded bilge sections forward that, despite

the flared bow, are inclined to throw water at speed, but they certainly cut a swathe through the ocean. The hard chines and modified vee sections aft generate lift and aid stability in what is a wonderfully low-profile boat with an inherently low centre of gravity.

From the waterline to the top of the signal mast is just 5.7m, while the draft is a modest 1.52m. Of course, the boat has a full-length solid keel that protects its props and running gear. And, as such, I wouldn't hesitate in taking it up skinny passages to protected anchorages on the flood tide.

ENGINEERING DIFFERENCES

I have been in many boats over the years and industry stalwarts comment on my thorough boat reviews. But the Fleming was something else again and, among the challenges I face here, are conveying the extent of its engineering in a concise way. If you are in the market, do yourself a favour and track down a Fleming for a look-see yourself.

The engine room is an engineering marvel that has evolved over more than 20 years of testing. It is accessed through a watertight door from the lazarette, which doubles as a utility room and houses the water tanks, air-con units, 3000W inverter, and the battery master switch panels.

Big-boat thinking and redundant systems,

such as a back-up battery charger, are central to Fleming's thinking. Passing through the door with window (there is also an engine room camera feeding back to the Raymarine E120s) you immediately notice the 9.5 and 13kW generators that are soft-mounted. The engine mounts are something else again.

Fleming's apparent hates are noise and vibration. There was just the faintest purr with both generators running and, underway, the Fleming 55 should be considered a class leader in respect of smoothness and quiet. This stems from the boat being fitted with Aquadrives: an anti-vibration coupling system or CV joint that transfers the thrust from the propellers directly to the hull via full-length steel bars rather than just engine mounts. The engines are actually floating on much softer mounts than could otherwise be used. The Aquadrives also negate shaft alignment.

Additionally, the engine room has abundant sound insulation while the hatches clamp on rubber gaskets and double hatches are fitted in the service openings over the engines in the saloon floor to further contain noise.

But interestingly, Fleming doesn't fit dripless shaft seals. Instead, he has old-fashioned bronze stuffing boxes with Teflon packing that — he says — are virtually dripless anyway. And with waterlines running to the boxes, sand and silt are flushed out of

tradeboat REVIEW: FLEMING 55

“Indoors, there was a Bose Lifestyle system, Foxtel and Satphone, and upgraded (all Burmese, of course) teak joinery that went beyond what American Fleming owners normally specify”

Main: The Pacific Ocean beckons the Fleming 55 as it passes Sydney's South Head. Below, left to right: The wine fridge in the wet bar; Portuguese bridge has fold-out doors to access the bow; One of two heads; The twin Cummins electronic diesel engines of 500hp each.



FLEMING 55

PRICE AS TESTED

The Fleming 55, hull No.194, would cost about \$2.30 million w/ twin Cummins QSC8.3 diesel engines, and options as tested

OPTIONS FITTED

Spare generator, bow and sternthrusters, extra docking helm stations, windlass, fuel-polishing and oil change systems, flybridge hardtop and cockpit sink, watermaker, additional cockpit lighting, Bose Lifestyle system, Foxtel and Satphone, upgraded teak joinery, Headhunter toilets, upgraded davit, stabilisers, Miele appliances, fridge and freezer, wine cooler, InSinkErator, Stidd helm chair, custom Sheets Ahoy bedding, and more

PRICED FROM

Approx. \$1.9 million w/ twin Cummins QSC8.3 diesel engines

GENERAL

Material:Solid GRP hull with closed-cell foam decks and grid stringer system
 Type:.....Semi-displacement monohull with full-length keel
 Length overall: 18.50m
 Hull length: 16.99m
 Waterline length:..... 15.50m
 Beam:4.88m
 Draft:..... 1.52m
 Weight:30,000kg (dry w/ std motors)

CAPACITIES

Berths:..... 7 + 1
 Fuel:3880lt
 Water:1135lt + desal
 Holding tank:380lt

ENGINE

Make/model: Twin Cummins QSC8.3
 Type:.....Fully electronic in-line six-cylinder four-stroke diesel with common rail fuel injection, turbocharging and aftercooling
 Rated HP:500 at 2600rpm
 Displacement:.....8.3lt
 Weight: 896kg each (dry)
 Gearboxes (Make/ratio): Twin Disc 2.53:1
 Props:Four-blade bronze

BUILT BY

Fleming Yachts Inc.
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the cutless bearings, so named because they pass abrasive materials such as sand across their surface and into a flushing groove, thereby causing little cutting and wearing of the shaft.

The 3880lt fuel system comprises two GRP wing tanks and two forward tanks, with sight gauges, remote fuel shutoffs, and a simple switching and return system. The Reverso fuel polishing system ensures the Cummins QSCs drink only pure diesel and there are Racor fuel filter sets for each donk plus a Racor oil-change system and 100lt oil tank.

The Glendinning electronic shifts include a backup system with separate microprocessors, while Trac digital stabilisers are linked to a laser gyro compass and blades that each measure 0.55m². Once engaged, the boat kind of jerks and readies itself for a few seconds before firming up noticeably on the fins.

Naturally, all seacocks are labelled, there's a fire-suppression system, 380lt blackwater



tank, and to save water the heads can be switched to saltwater.

OUTDOOR LIVING

Outdoors, the 55 taps the mindset of Australians in a way many motoryachts fail to do. The cockpit is just huge, more than 12m², and this attribute alone will help sell the boat here. A Euro-style awning will be added for shade.

The boat has a decent swim platform, ladder and hot shower, transom door, optional cockpit control station and optional cockpit sink unit. But another big part of its appeal are the wide bulwarks and moulded stairs with thoughtful rake that lead to all parts of the boat.

The boat has an extra heavy-duty double capstan anchoring system with twin stainless steel 80lb anchors and 100m of chain that feeds down a tube to deep in the hull. There is a climb-in anchor locker, fresh and saltwater deck washes, plus an automatic raw-water

anchor wash and chain counters at the helms.

An internal staircase and cockpit ladder lead to the flybridge, where there's seating for at least eight around a teak dinette. Dispatch the tender and you can use the aft deck for entertaining. The retractable Miele barbecue will doubtless win friends and family. And how many other boats can claim to have a dumbwaiter that leads down to the galley?

Owners will welcome the docking station on the aft end of the flybridge and the terrific views that extend forward from the portside helm to the ocean ahead. You get a nice big stainless steel wheel, fold-down footrest, intercom, Bennett trim tabs, Raymarine E120 screen with camera feeds including revision, emergency battery for the VHF, and more.

PILOTHOUSE CRUISING

There's a comfortable pilothouse back indoors from where the Fleming 55 will be driven



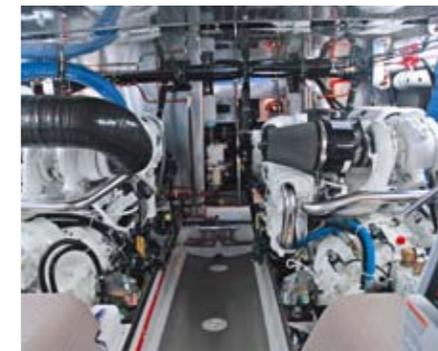
more often than not. Doors also lead back to the bulwarks, with stairs down into the saloon and forward to the accommodation.

The boat's main 12/24V DC and 240V AC panels are alongside the helm. All the items on one panel can be run off the boat's inverter, thereby allowing you to live onboard without running generators 24/7.

Though it had a lot of serious gear fitted from the Raymarine electronics to Interphase forward-facing sonar, Cummins Vesselview panels relaying engine data to the Trac stabilisers, the helm was simple and not glitzy like over-accessorised American boats. The Stidd helm chair was an upgrade, but the C-shaped lounge around the small dinette was standard.

Nice wide saloon doors and deep picture windows really bring the outdoors in. The timber blinds and teak joinery add to the salty feel and a large LCD TV was being fitted to the cabinet opposite the portside L-shaped lounge for six, set around a teak dinette that converts to a coffee table.

A domestic side-by-side fridge/freezer and dedicated crockery locker stand at the entrance to the portside galley. Amenities range from Bosch four-burner cooktop with pot holders to Miele convection microwave and matching slimline dishwasher, to twin sinks with separate drinking water and saltwater rinse, to InSinkErator and garbage compactor.



SLEEPING BEAUTY

The three cabin and two-head layout leans towards looking after owners foremost, with a stateroom in the bow that boasts a big island double berth. Hanging lockers are provided, and with opening portlights and a big escape hatch with insect and privacy screens you're set for some serious sleeping.

Both the owner's en suite and the communal head have big separate shower stalls, Headhunter heads, white Corian counters and Grohe fittings.

The VIP guest cabin to port has twin single beds with a pullout bunk, and as with the third cabin, the upper bunk mattress is half-width when not in use, sliding out to full size when needed.

DREAM RUN

At seven knots the 55 uses just 13 to 14lt/h, at 8.4kts I noted 23lt/h, and at 9.7kts it felt like we were going places using 41lt/h. Top speed is better than 18kts, which comes in handy for crossing a bar. But at 30,000kg, with the stabilisers deployed and the wipers clearing the occasional lashing of spray, the feeling on the Fleming 55 is unhurried.

The owner plans to do the Hawkesbury in July, Port Stephens, then some East Coast cruising and maybe NZ for the Rugby World Cup in 2011. And as many before him including fearless leader Tony Fleming attest, these boats know no bounds. Maybe we'll see him out there one day?