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MAGAZINE

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HIGH TIME

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Faraway places *on* Fleming's 55



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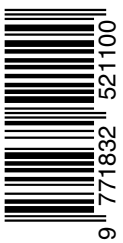
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Fleming 55 Piriothouse



Faraway places *on* Fleming's 55



Eighteen years of design evolution, attention to detail and singleness of purpose have resulted in the Fleming 55, a passagemaker that will take you safely and reliably to all the far-off places you've dreamed of going.

*words: Alexander Gilly
photos: Sergio Dionisio*





Space was an important factor for the McMorrows, who like to travel with their two beautiful golden retrievers Ziggy and Sophie, and there's nothing a dog likes better than laying its head on a sun-warmed varnished capping rail and feeling the salty breeze rush by.

Anyone can cruise into a pretty cove on a scorching summer afternoon, drop the anchor and dive into the warm water. It takes a true Corinthian, however, to go boating on a chilly mid-winter morning such as one endures in Sydney in July. Such hardy seamen deserve a real boat.

The Fleming 55 is a real boat. The marque's founder, Tony Fleming, says that his original objective was "to build the best coastal and offshore cruising yacht using the experience acquired over many years of building and operating boats." And that is exactly what he has done.

Flemings are semi-displacement boats built for travelling the world, not planing platforms for entertaining. They're little ships, really, and as if to prove the point Tony Fleming has logged thousands of sea miles in his own vessel, a Fleming 65 called *Venture*. The company website has dozens of photos of *Venture* in exotic destinations – amid ice floes in Alaska, for example, or off the white sand beaches of Mexico.

And if you need more evidence of the Fleming's sturdiness, then consider this: the first Fleming 55 was delivered in 1990 – almost 18 years ago. How many other models do you know that have survived so long? What's more, every single Fleming has been made in the same yard – the Tung Hwa yard in Taiwan.

"I chose the yard that could and would build to the highest standard, not the lowest price," says Tony Fleming. "Many of the craftsmen there have been working on our boats since the beginning."

Of course, the 55 has gone through dozens of major and hundreds of minor changes since 1990, and the latest hulls are related to hull number one in the same way that birds are related to dinosaurs. Yet even hull 194, *Wandarra*, which I saw in Sydney Harbour one bright but freezing July



morning, and which has 192 builds between it and its progenitor, has something ageless about it. It looks like the kind of boat you imagined when you were a boy – a boat built for taking you to far-off places.

We set out from a little cove in the inner west for a short cruise past



Cockatoo Island, under the Sydney Harbour Bridge, past the Sydney Opera House to Farm Cove. The Fleming was balanced and comfortable and it felt like we could've kept going all the way to New Zealand.

Indeed, *Wandarra's* owner, Peter and Bernie McMorrow, said that he plans to cruise the east coast of Australia, then take her to New Zealand for the Rugby World Cup in 2011. Even at today's fuel prices, these kind of long-range trips are still viable in a ship that drinks less than nineteen litres an hour when it's running at 1100 rpm and doing eight knots.

It's also remarkably quiet. The two Cummins QSC 8.3 diesels, which pump out 500 horses @ 2600 rpm, are fitted with Aquadrive anti-vibration systems, which absorb the vibration from the four-bladed propellers rather than letting the engines take it. This, in turn, means that the engines can float on extra soft mounts, since they don't need to be rigidly aligned for the shafts.

The engine room is roomy for a boat this length, even with the two big Cummins'. We accessed it through the lazarette (there's another access hatch through the saloon) and though there's not enough height to stand tall, it's definitely not a crawl space. The Fleming 55 has four fuel tanks, two big ones installed amidships forward of the engines, and two smaller ones running lengthwise down the hull. There's a fuel management panel mounted on the bulwark, so while you're down here you can balance out the fuel load. In all, the Fleming carries 3,880 litres of fuel, which, at eight knots, gives her a range of about 2,000 nautical miles – enough to get to New Zealand.

It should be a comfortable ride, too, even in the rough seas that sometimes rise up in the Tasman.

"The 55 Fleming hull design is extremely efficient with a very fine entry, rounded bilge sections forward and a hard chine, modified vee aft," says Tony Fleming. "The generous flare of the bow and the soft forward section make for a comfortable ride in most any sea condition ... semi-displacement hulls with twin engines generally have generous waterplane areas and low centres of gravity, which make them very stable."

Add to that the standard American Bow Thruster stabilisers, and the

Even at today's fuel prices, these kind of long-range trips are still viable in a ship that drinks less than nineteen litres an hour when it's running at 1100 RPM and doing eight knots.

Fleming is a beautifully balanced cruising vessel.

A full-length keel fitted with a stainless steel casing, or 'shoe' on the Fleming's underside is further proof that the Fleming is a serious boat that's meant to be used. That's not an invitation to run aground, by the way; it's an invitation to go to places you've never been before, whether they have channel markers or not.

Coming out of the lazarette (where the polyurethane water tanks are kept) and onto the aft deck, you realize how efficiently the 55 uses its length. In summer – and even in winter, on warmer days – people are going to be outside, and there's a lot of teak decking on this boat. This was an important factor for the McMorrows, who like to travel with their two beautiful golden retrievers Ziggy and Sophie, and there's nothing a dog likes better than laying its head on a sun-warmed varnished capping rail and feeling the salty breeze rush by. It gives new meaning to the term 'dog-watch'. One of the loveliest places to sit on the Fleming (whether you're human or canine) is the cushioned bench seats forward of the Portuguese bridge. The angle of the barrier between the bridge and the foredeck is perfect for leaning back and enjoying the sun on your face as the boat makes way, particularly if there's a bit of lift under the bow.

The Fleming has just over 23 square metres of aft deck, room enough for either a big dining table or for a couple of sun-lounges. There's an inward-opening door in the transom that leads down to the swim platform, next to which you'll find shower fittings for both cold and hot water. If you're a SCUBA diver, the step between the aft deck and platform is the perfect spot to gear up and put on your fins before stepping into the water.

Inside, the saloon is on the same level as the aft deck, so if you open up the sliding doors you get one big space, and can sit in the L-shaped sofa on the port side and look aft out over the water. There's an adjustable height timber table in front of the sofa with a lovely inlaid compass rose. Wine lovers will appreciate the wine cabinet adjacent the lounge; you can control both the temperature and humidity, which is especially important when you're carrying fine vintages between different climates. When the Wallabies win the Rugby World Cup in 2011, you don't want to uncork



a celebratory bottle of Grange in Auckland Harbour only to find that it's turned on you.

The galley, forward of the lounge on the port side, has more amenities than you see in many suburban kitchens, including a microwave, double sink, a faucet with a nozzle on a hose and an adjustable spray head, a pure-water tap for drinking water, instant hot water, InSinkErator, and even an espresso machine. Nautical features include pot-clamps on the ceramic stove-top and a seawater tap, for those long voyages when you don't want to waste fresh water.

Go up a couple of steps and you're in the pilothouse, which is loaded with all the very latest in Raymarine electronics, with plenty of redundancy, as specified by the owners.

Tony Fleming actually discourages buyers from installing electronics at the yard because "anything you buy is the old model by the time you open the box. Electronics are best purchased from, and commissioned by, a knowledgeable local dealer who will be responsible for it working correctly. In my experience, electronics are responsible for most of the teething troubles on a new boat."

There's another lounge and table in the pilothouse, on a raised platform eye-level with the helmsman in his high, optional Stidd helm chair. Sliding

"I chose the yard that could and would build to the highest standard, not the lowest price," says Tony Fleming. "Many of the craftsmen there have been working on our boats since the beginning."

doors on both sides lead out to the Portuguese deck.

Back to the saloon and down a couple of steps and you get to the cabins. *Wandarra* has three: a master suite forward with a rear-facing, king-size bed, ensuite and two skylights; a guest room with two side-by-side singles on the port side and another with two bunks on the starboard side. There's a washer-dryer in the corridor.

The Fleming 55 Pilothouse motor yacht is a boat with a lot of class and a lot of heart. It's good-looking in an old-fashioned way, while its systems, design and layout are right up to date. If you're looking for a boat to take you places safely and in comfort, then look long and hard at the Fleming 55.

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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS



16.9m	LOA (HULL)
18.5m	LOA (WITH PULPIT & SWIMSTEP)
15.4m	LENGTH WATERLINE
4.87m	BEAM
29,937kg	DISPLACEMENT
1.52m	DRAFT
	HEIGHT FROM WATERLINE TO
5.7m	TOP OF SIGNAL MAST
4.8m	TOP OF RADAR ARCH
3,880l	FUEL
1,130l	WATER
	ENGINES
	PRICE AS TESTED

Twin Cummins QSC 8.3 Diesel 500hp @ 2600 RPM

A\$2,100,000