

## Helmsman 43E Pilothouse

*This China-built trawler offers it all in one sweet package*





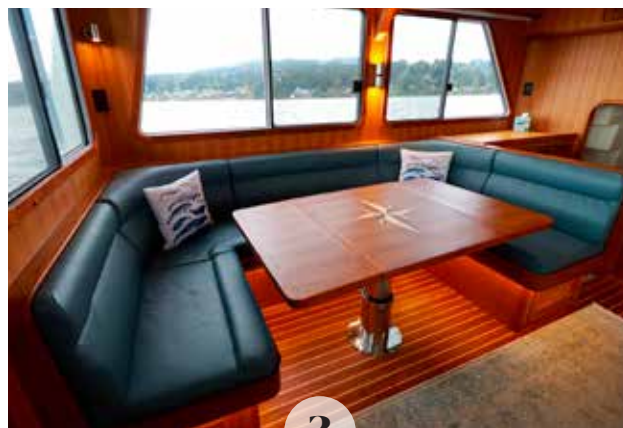
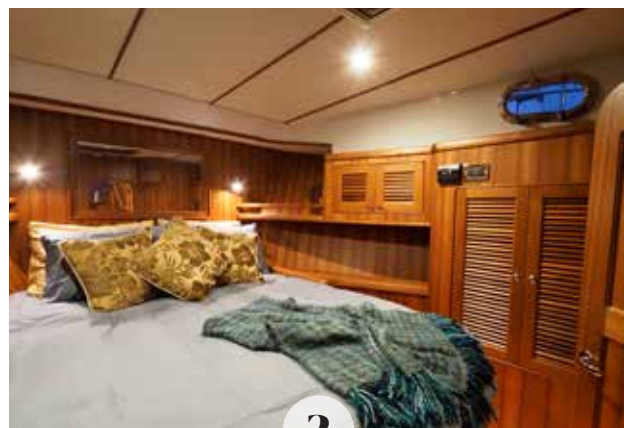
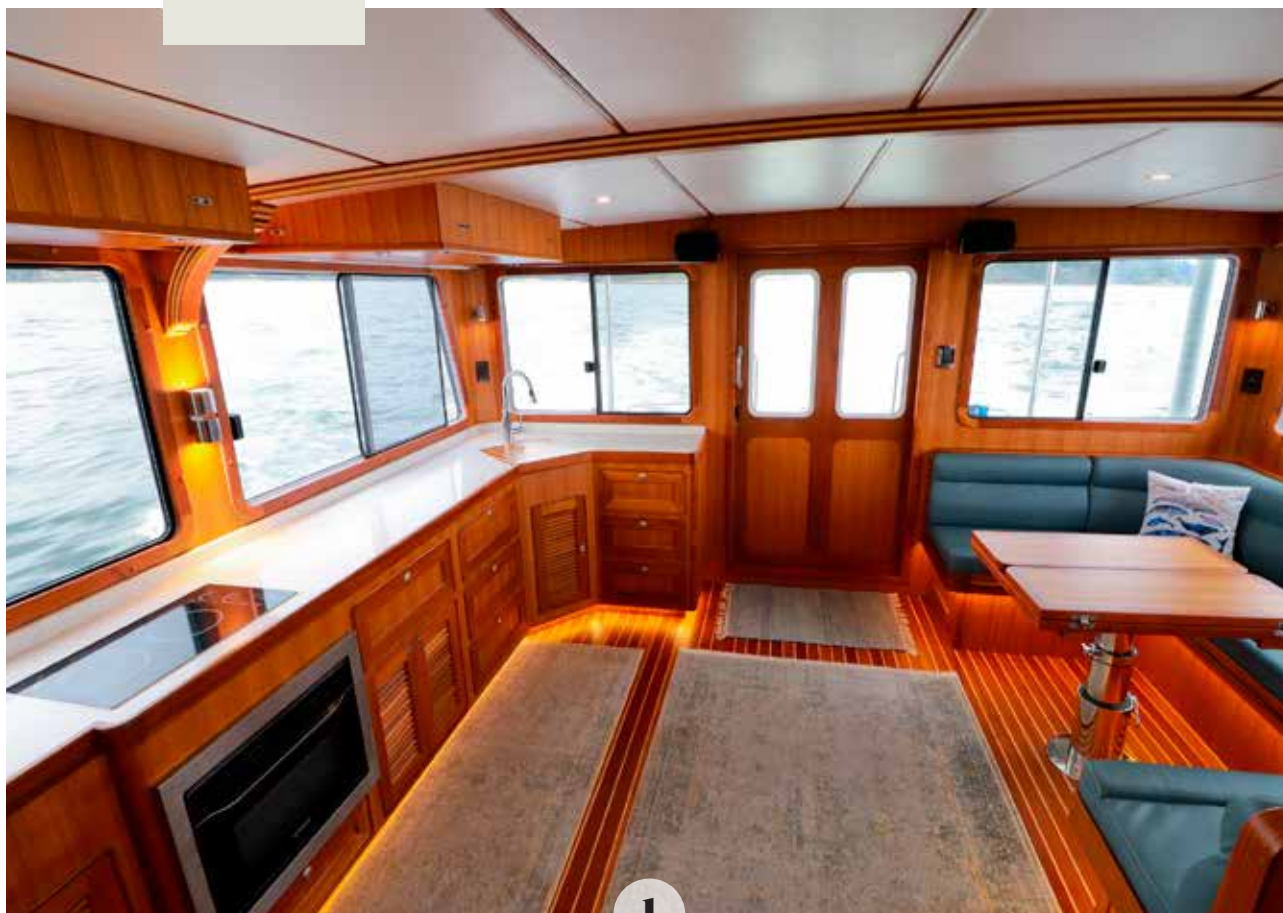
BY PETER A. ROBSON

# I

I normally sea trial a new boat with a broker before it is sold. If sold, I prefer the owners not to be aboard. I worry that owners won't let me put the vessel through its paces: ie. running it at full throttle, doing abrupt manoeuvres and poking around everywhere. However, when I boarded the Helmsman 43 Pilot-house, *Miles to Go* (after the Robert Frost poem) at the Mill Bay Marina on Vancouver Island with Calibre's Rob Ksnyiuk, owner Gordon Smith proved to be a delightful host and completely accommodating. In fact, he added valuable insight for the review.

**BACKGROUND** Scott and Lisa Helker are the principals of Helmsman Trawlers. They are experienced cruisers who came to the business as trawler owners and enthusiasts who opened a Seattle brokerage, Waterline Boats, in 2008. They were selling mostly trawlers, predecessors to the Helmsman line, and when the manufacturer failed, they decided to carry on building trawlers at the same Chinese boatyard. They began introducing new designs and new models and today the company manufactures pilothouse trawlers from 31 to 43 feet, with a 46-foot model arriving this fall. These are wide-beam fibre-glass designs with soft chines, full keels, deep forefoots with ▶





broader sections aft and large rudders. They are built by expert craftsmen using real teak throughout. They offer roomy and comfortable interiors, ample headroom, capable sea-keeping ability and single diesel engines for economical long-range performance.

Owner Gordon Smith and his wife Leslie first came to appreciate the sin-

*1. The saloon's solid-as-a-rock teak-and-holly sole is seldom seen these days. 2. Cedar lined hanging lockers, overhead storage and under berth drawers offer ample room for clothes. 3. The U-shaped dining area is cosy with plush seating and a beautifully crafted folding leaf table.*

gle-stateroom Helmsman 38 which they owned for several years before purchasing the larger two-stateroom Helmsman 43. Theirs is the second edition of the 43, designated 43E. The new version has the pilothouse moved back a foot or so to give more room below and in the guest cabin. Helmsman also offers a wide range of

customization, and the Smith's had a few ideas of their own.

As the owner of a very successful Vancouver Island cabinetry and millwork company, Smith is an expert in judging fit and finish. Helmsman's sturdy good looks and warm, timeless "yacht" interior are two factors that kept him with the brand.

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS** The Helmsman 43 has a lot more to offer than its teak interior. It also looks great, from its gently sweeping sheer to its low-slung forward-sloping pilothouse, to its unobtrusive flybridge and aft to its covered cockpit. It all blends together as a serious looking, almost workboat-like, yacht. Its single 380-horsepower Cummins diesel and standard bow and stern thrusters makes it simple to operate while no exterior woodwork means less maintenance. All systems appear straightforward and simple to operate, while good access to all the plumbing and electrical wiring make maintenance so much easier.

**ON DECK** Its 14' 2" (4.55-metre) full-beam saloon maximizes interior space and offers the volume of a much larger vessel. Although the saloon's wide beam eliminates outside walkways between the cockpit and midships, forward of this, wide side decks, accessed through port and starboard opening pilothouse doors, are more than adequate to move forward to the bow and aft to the flybridge via external steps. A bulwark door and an adjacent hawse pipe cleat will make it simple to moor with a midship line. Sturdy railings, higher than most, provide safe access to the bow and anchoring gear.

I like that the chariot-style flybridge is low and unobtrusive. It's barely noticeable from a side profile. A 13-foot (four-metre) rigid-hull dinghy fits nicely at the aft end of the flybridge deck and is launched via a Nick Jackson davit, while forward a U-shaped lounge area and starboard helm station are protected by a folding Bimini top.


The swim platform reveals the first of

the Smiths' unique custom features—double doors centred in the transom. This took some careful engineering to beef up the transom and fabricate hinges to compensate for the transom's slight aft rake. The benefit though, is that the owners can sit on their deck chairs in the covered cockpit with unobstructed views of the water through the wide opening.

**INTERIOR** Between the cockpit and saloon, a heavy aluminum-framed sliding door, flanked by large opening windows, helps blur the transition between the saloon and the cockpit. The craftsmanship throughout the interior is outstanding, with rounded corners at multiple angles, arched doorways, louvred doors and cabinets throughout. The saloon's solid-as-a-rock teak-and-holly sole is


seldom seen these days as most builders are going with engineered plank flooring, but this, combined with the extensive use of teak, is a heck of a lot warmer, in this reviewers' mind, than many of the "modern" European-styled offerings.

Instead of the standard U-shaped galley forward with an upholstered armchair aft, the Smiths wanted a full-length linear galley. Their features acres of quartz countertop and tons of storage in undercounter drawers and cabinets. Overhead are two hinged, drop-down lockers. One is for cup/plate storage while the other faces the dinette and opens to a flat screen TV. Saloon windows, most of which open, provide excellent light, views outside and ventilation. Storage is abundant not only here, but throughout the entire vessel—▶




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enough to meet the demands of serious long-distance cruisers.

The U-shaped dining area is cosy with plush seating and a beautifully crafted folding leaf table. It can be lowered to provide a third additional berth. Forward of the dining area is a nook, perfect for use as a wet bar, as well as providing access to the day head which is down a few steps.

The pilothouse, two steps up from the saloon, is another cosy space for guests to socialize. In addition to the traditional L-shaped settee (which can become a fourth berth), and the starboard side helm station, a chart table is great for storing guidebooks, and is large enough to lay out paper charts. The forward-sloping wheelhouse windows and overhead brow reduce glare and the impact of rain. Despite wide teak frames around the windows, visibility remains good. With side windows and opening side doors, it's a bright and airy space. The helm console itself is uncluttered with a beautifully crafted teak steering wheel. The comfy helm seat is fully adjustable for both standing and sitting.

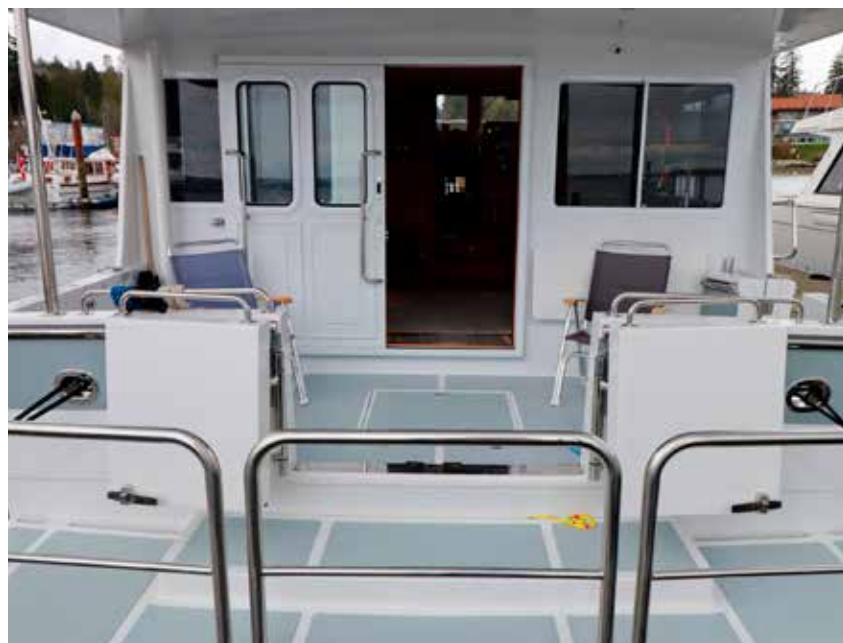
**ACCOMMODATION** The accommodation area forward consists of two

cabins: the master in the bow, with shared head compartment, and the guest cabin. Again, the use of teak throughout provides a warm cosy feel. The Smiths had the bow master berth lowered by a foot to make it easier to get in and out of—another smart idea. I liked the bookshelves and bedside shelves with fiddles. Cedar lined hanging lockers, overhead storage and under berth drawers offer ample room for clothes. As noted earlier, most, if not all, cupboards are louvred, which is excellent for air circulation.

The guest cabin is another inviting space, with teak finishing everywhere, a double berth tucked partially under the pilothouse and ample drawer and hanging locker storage.

The shared head is nicely fitted out and like the molded day head is largely gloss white fibreglass, which makes perfect sense in a wet area. A separate shower compartment, fitted with a teak seat and plexiglass door, was relatively easy to get into.

**SYSTEMS** When it comes to systems, all appliances and equipment such as pumps, hardware, reverse cycle air, the six-kW generator, heaters and such are



## SPECS

**LOA** 13.72 m / 45'

**Length on deck** 12.95 m / 42' 6"

**Beam** 4.55 m / 14' 2"

**Draft** 1.37 m / 4' 6"

**Dry weight** 15,876 kg / 35,000 lbs

**Fuel** 1,893 L / 500 USG

**Water** 757 L / 200 USG

**Holding** 170 L / 45 USG

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sent over to China in shipping containers so that all components can be serviced and warranted and replaced, if necessary, with easily available replacements and parts. The only components of the test boat not installed at the factory were the watermaker and the helm electronics, as the latter is typically decided on by the owner when the boat is delivered.

To access the engine room, a large hatch in the saloon is lifted on gas struts, blocking access forward and aft while open. A short set of steps lead below where the centrally located Cummins diesel and all the plumbing, mechanical and electrical are nice and tidy and uncluttered, with good room to move around, despite limited headroom. The Smiths had fitted a two-part top loading fridge/freezer in the aft portion of the engine room for added food capacity when cruising, as well as a washer/dryer.

**ON TEST** We got underway in the early afternoon in a light drizzle. A gentle breeze was ruffling the waters


of Saanich Inlet. With Smith at the helm, we eased out of our berth. The temperature outside was only 7°C but inside we were toasty, thanks to a Webasto forced air heating system.

The 380-horsepower Cummins has plenty of power and we accelerated quickly with almost no bow rise. All-round visibility was good and the transom is visible from the helm, which will make it easier to back into a berth. At a cruise of 7.9 knots (1,730 rpm) we were sipping only 3.9 gallons per hour (GPH) or 14.9 litres per hour (LPH) of diesel. At nine knots (2,100 rpm) our fuel consumption rose to 7.3 gph (27.6 LPH). These cruising speeds are as good as, or faster, than most full displacement trawlers. The single diesel is also extremely economical. The range at 7.9

knots would be about 900 miles (with a 10 percent reserve). At wide open throttle, our speed rose to just under 11 knots, though it felt like we were pushing a lot of water and our fuel burn skyrocketed. Clearly, that isn't a speed one wants to use unless it is necessary to get somewhere in a hurry, or to fight through strong currents.

At 7.9 knots, noise levels in the pilothouse, saloon and bow master were exceptionally quiet at 60 to 62 dB due to extensive sound-deadening materials. The steering proved nicely responsive, thanks in part to the 43's large rudder. The hard-over turning radius was only about two boat lengths. Impressive. Tracking was also dead straight, thanks in part to the full keel that also protects the propeller and rudder. We didn't find any big wakes

to deal with, but when crossing our own wake and going broadside to it, the roll was minimal. If Smith's experience being in rough water with his 38 is any indication, the 43 should be a very good sea boat with no need for optional gyro stabilizers.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS** Anyone looking for a pilothouse trawler should take a very good look at the 43E. The aesthetics, build quality, fit and finish, the masses of teak, the cruising amenities, the single engine, the fuel economy and the excellent price point all combine to make this boat a top pick. Base price is US\$698,000. That figure includes US tariffs for boats sold to US customers. Canadian customers will pay approximately the same when Canadian duties are applied. 

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