

POWER & MOTOR YACHT



Offshore 54 Pilothouse

Photography by Robert Holland

EASTERN STAR

A TRUE BLUEWATER CRUISER LAYS TO REST ANY DOUBTS ABOUT TAIWANESE-BUILT YACHTS.



Above: The 54's spacious cockpit is protected by big bulwarks. Right: The flying bridge, with superb sightlines, can be accessed from the saloon or cockpit. Opposite page: The 54's Crealock-designed hull revels in the rough stuff.

Boats built in Taiwan have always had something of an image problem. It began in the '70s, when the first Taiwanese sailboats appeared in California. While they were generally well built and sturdy (and often heavy), they were, well, crude. Their fiberglass may have been thick and well laid up, but their finish was often uneven. Inside, superb joinery frequently masked systems that simply weren't up to American standards. Perception was another problem. Thanks to a low hourly wage in Taiwan, boats built there also tended to be priced well below their American competitors. This combined with the lack of sophistication to

create the impression that Taiwanese-built boats were cheap.

Today Taiwanese labor rates remain lower than those in the United States, but by a considerably smaller margin, so much (but not all) of the price advantage is gone. Gone, too, is the crudeness. Taiwanese yards have learned from the many highly regarded designers who have teamed up with them over the years, and today their vessels, bearing such prestigious names as Hood and Kroger, are equal, if not superior to, those built anywhere. If you have any doubt, you need only step aboard the Offshore 54 Pilothouse.

Everything on this boat was created with serious cruising in mind. The hull, drawn by the famed cruising sailboat designer Bill Crealock, is a moderate-V (12 degrees at the transom), planing hull form that is at its best when the seas are big, as they were on test day. Double chines with a slight down-angle combine with a low center of gravity to make the 54 uncommonly stable in a seaway. Reasonably flared foresections deflect spray from both helms, and a long, shallow keel provides good directional stability and—especially when the optional propeller



BY RICHARD THIEL



Above left: A U-shape galley provides security in a seaway and easy access to the pilothouse. **Above right:** An all-glass pilothouse has virtually 360 degrees of visibility. **Below right:** The midship master is only marginally larger than the forward stateroom.

pockets are ordered—protection for the running gear.

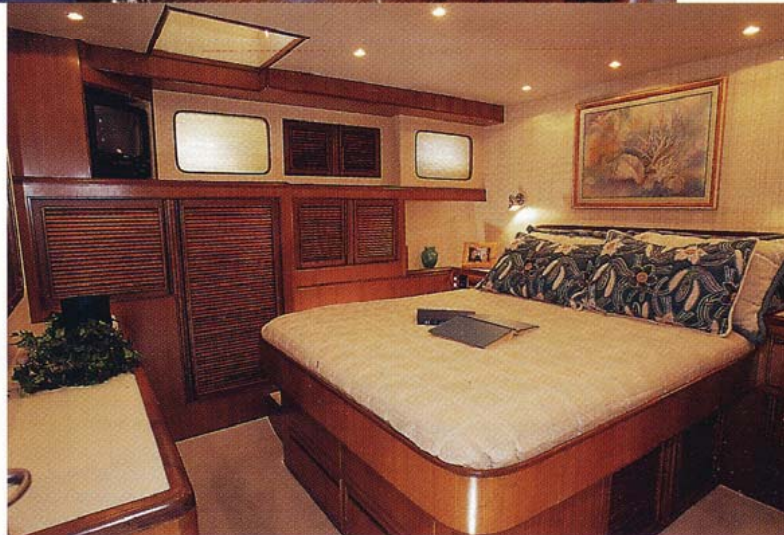
The 54 is built as seriously as she was designed. There's solid glass with uni- and bidirectional mat below the waterline, balsa coring above, and double laminations at the chines, keel, and all points of contact with the running gear. The hull is stiffened by four full-length, foam-cored stringers, numerous athwartship members, and three $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick, foam-cored, watertight bulkheads (fluid lines pass through them via watertight glands) that are padded at the hull and fully bonded.

The hull-to-deck joint is a work of art. First, mirror-image horizontal flanges are squished together against an interstitial layer of wetted-out mat. Then, after the bond cures and the flanges are mechanically fastened with stainless steel screws, hull and deck are again bonded with wide swathes of bidirectional fabric and resin.

The 54 was designed to be handled by a couple. Wide port and starboard doors provide ready access from the pilothouse to the 16-inch-wide, fully covered side decks. High bulwarks and rock-solid rails provide safety in a seaway, and oversized spring cleats are high on the bulwarks for easy access but recessed so you won't bang a shin rushing to get a line. There are port and starboard bulwark doors amidships for access to floating docks and rail gates forward of them for use with fixed docks.

Sightlines from the flying bridge are excellent, and they're just as good from the pilothouse. Thanks to tall saloon windows, a basically all-glass aft bulkhead, and a bulkhead between the pilothouse and galley that is open from the waist up (unless you order a standard-size refrigerator in place of the two under-counter units), there is literally nowhere on the boat the helmsman cannot see. But if you're still not satisfied, a cockpit control station is a standard option.

Perhaps the ultimate nod to the cruising couple, however, is the accommodations plan on our test boat: just two staterooms, both with private staircases and en suite heads with stall showers. (A three-stateroom plan is also available). The master, accessed



from the saloon, is naturally amidship to take maximum advantage of the 15'10" beam, but the forward stateroom, accessed from the pilothouse, is nearly its equal in volume. Both enjoy 6'7" headroom and marvelous teak cabinetry.

Regardless of whether two or three couples are aboard, the main deck offers plenty of comfort in a simple but well-thought-out layout. The dinette is in the pilothouse on the aft bulkhead and elevated for optimum viewing. Its six-person (there's room for a seventh on the second leather pedestal helm seat), trapezoidal table adjusts vertically on a crank mechanism that looks strong enough to raise the family SUV for an oil change. A galley pass-through allows for easy meal service, and there's a small hatch overhead to service the flying bridge.

The galley is U-shape with virtually everything below waist height, unless you order the aforementioned refrigerator. Either way, be careful when you get food out of the 'fridge underway; it's on the forward bulkhead, so things will tend to fall out when the 54 is on plane. Nicely accenting the beautiful teak cabinetry here is a teak and holly sole in which a hinged hatch provides secondary engine room access.

The saloon is bright and sensible: two occasional chairs to starboard and forward of the entertainment console in the corner and a large, U-shape Ultraleather couch to port with small table in the center. Access to the cockpit is through a pair of lovely, teak-frame, sliding glass doors.

The 6'8"-long cockpit is nicely shaded by the bridge overhang and sheltered by three-foot-high coamings. On either side are large, in-deck dunnage lockers/fishboxes (nondraining), and fore and aft hatches are on centerline. The after one leads to an 8'5"-long lazarette, where there's access to the steering gear, including Tides dripless rudder posts. Despite the sizable stainless steel water tank in each forward corner, there is an enormous amount of stowage space here, its utility enhanced by teak grating on the sole.

Walk forward and you enter the engine room, which also can be accessed from the forward cockpit hatch. The first thing you see are a pair of polished stainless steel standpipes that you might easily mistake for railings. These are the fuel manifolds, clearly labeled, that offer you every conceivable permutation of supply and return. Next to them are fuel sight glasses with valves top and bottom so they can be isolated when not being read, a safety feature in case the glass should break. All fluid lines aboard are color-coded, and there's a plaque in here in case you forget which is which. All freshwater lines are copper with flare fittings, and there are two freshwater pumps connected in series; either is sufficient to power the system.

Considering the 54's pleasing profile and all the headroom in the saloon, the 4'6" headroom here is surprisingly generous. So are the four-inch-diameter perforated PVC pipes running fore and aft above each engine. Each is connected to an exhaust blower to draw hot air out evenly and prevent hot spots. And beneath the engine mounts, those massive caps bolted through the foam-cored stringers? Welded stainless steel.

So what about price? Judging from this boat, Taiwan still offers good value, although the 54 is by no means a steal. Considering her superb design, amazing attention to detail, and quality construction, her base price of \$785,900 looks good, although it's hard to find another boat in this class to compare it to. But note that the standard equipment list is relatively



Top: Both heads are easy to clean and have separate shower stalls. Above: A large, U-shape settee dominates the Offshore 54's saloon, which is on the same level as the galley.

sparse by design. This is a true semicustom yacht, after all, with a basic platform that offers no bow thruster, second genset, inverter, air conditioning. You essentially build your boat for the way you're going to cruise.

Regardless of how many options you pile on, however, the Offshore 54 is worth every penny. A boat this good is a real gem, regardless of where it was built.

Offshore Yachts ☎ (949) 645-4159. Fax: (949) 645-0250.

PMY TESTED: OFFSHORE 54 PILOTHOUSE

Base price: \$785,900 with 2/450-hp Cummins 6CTA8.3M3 diesel inboards

Optional power: 2/660-hp Caterpillar 3196TA

Standard equipment: 8-kW Northern Lights genset w/hushbox; complete lower helm station; pulpit for two anchors; prewiring for inverter; freshwater washdown at foredeck, aft deck, engine room, and cockpit; Bumese teak cabinetry; teak

and holly soles in galleys and staterooms; 10 s/s Hood ports; Nilsson 2,200-lb. windlass; 800 lb. davit; SeaLand toilets; Hart tank monitors; emergency tiller; 12 6-volt gel-cell batteries

Construction: hand-laminated FRP w/uni- and bidirectional mat; balsa core above waterline; double lamination at chine, keel, and running gear mounts; four foam-cored stringers; 3/4" watertight bulkheads

(3); hull-to-deck joint mechanically fastened and bonded; s/s engine beds; solid s/s rubrail

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 55'6"; **Beam:** 15'10"; **Draft:** 4'6";

Maximum headroom: 6'7"; **Weight:** 53,200

lbs.; **Fuel capacity:** 1000 gal.; **Water capacity:**

300 gal.; **Test engines:** 2/660-hp Caterpillar

3126TA diesel inboards; **Transmission:** ZF;

Ratio: 2:1; **Props:** 31x32 4-blade Nibral;

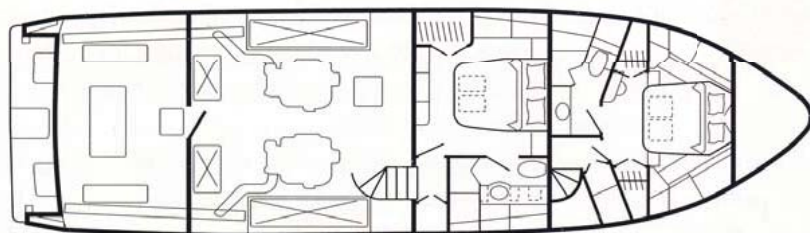
Steering: Hydraulic hydraulic; **Controls:**

Hydraulic; **Trim tabs:** Bennett

Optional equipment on test boat: Heart 3-

kW inverter; 1,000-lb. MarQuip davit; 54,000-

BTU Marine Air A/C; Wesmar bow thruster



| RPM | MPH (KNOTS) | GPH | MPG (NMPG) | SM RANGE | NM RANGE | DECIBELS |
|------|----------------|-----|---------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| 750 | 7.7(6.7) | 2 | 3.85 (3.35) | 2,426 | 2,111 | 71 |
| 1000 | 9.5(8.2) | 6 | 1.58 (1.37) | 995 | 863 | 73 |
| 1250 | 10.8(9.4) | 12 | 0.90 (0.78) | 567 | 491 | 74 |
| 1500 | 12.0(10.4) | 22 | 0.55 (0.47) | 347 | 296 | 78 |
| 1750 | 15.5(13.4) | 34 | 0.46 (0.39) | 290 | 246 | 79 |
| 2000 | 19.3(16.7) | 48 | 0.40 (0.35) | 252 | 221 | 81 |
| 2340 | 23.3(20.2) | 64 | 0.36 (0.32) | 227 | 202 | 82 |

Conditions: temperature: 72°; humidity: 45%; wind: 20-25 mph; seas: 7-8 feet; load: full fuel and water, 3 persons, moderate gear. Speeds are two-way averages measured w/Stalker radar gun. GPH measured with Caterpillar engine display. Range: 90% of advertised fuel capacity. Decibels measured on A scale. 65 dB is the level of normal conversation.

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