



# **BOAT REPORT** **FLEMING** **50**

Conceived in Britain, designed in the States and built in Taiwan, the Fleming 50 is aimed at those who prefer comfort to velocity.



NOT everyone wants to go boating at 30 knots. After all, most sailing boat owners never see more than 5 or 6 knots on their logs, yet they still make up the majority of craft on the water.

Many motorboaters also appreciate the benefits of travelling at more modest speeds, but the number of models available to them is swamped by the high-speed planing options on the market, so it is always good when a new displacement-speed boat comes our way to test. The Fleming 50 is a good example of the breed.

What are the benefits of low-speed cruising? Well, they would appear initially to be reduced fuel consumption, plus smaller and hence cheaper engines, but you also quickly get to appreciate the peace and comfort of a slower ride. No matter how good the design, a lightweight planing boat bangs and crashes when the sea gets choppy — fine when you are out on the flybridge on a sunny day, but less so down below when the weather closes in.

At the same time, it appears that, despite the soundproofing technology available, most boats

with powerful high-speed diesels are noisy in the saloon. Again, this is bearable on the shorter trips, but can get wearing on long passages. At 10 or 12 knots the motion is easier, sound-levels reduced, and your whole progress more elegant and refined. You develop a certain disdain for the faster craft dashing past, and begin to appreciate your surroundings.

The Fleming matches its sedate speed with a sturdy styling which speaks of long passages and serious cruising. The boat is the brainchild of Englishman Tony Fleming and his colleague Anton Emmerton. For 20 years yard manager of the Grand Banks range, there is no doubting Fleming's qualifications for producing a practical displacement-speed craft.

For the design they went to Larry Drake in California, and for the construction to Tung Hwa Marine in Taiwan. Selling the boats under the name of Falmouth of California, over the last four years they have delivered some 28 craft, based on the same hull, in lengths of 50ft, 53ft and 55ft (15.3m, 16.1m and 16.8m).

**There is no shortage of space in the inside helm position, which also has good views forward and to the sides. A dividing pier provides a useful worktop and serving area, while a laundry centre is fitted into the bulkhead in the guest bathroom. One feature of the saloon is a cleverly-designed table, with a pantograph high/low setting.**

## Design and construction

The Fleming actually has a planing hull form, with shallow-to-medium vee sections of 18° deadrise amidships, 9° at the transom. The bottom panels are slightly convex, to improve stiffness.

No sprayrails are needed at these speeds, nor does the boat have a chine flat. What it does have is a substantial deep keel, extending nearly 1ft (300mm) below the bottom of the propellers and rudders, and giving excellent protection to the sterngear in the event of grounding. The keel also gives directional stability under all conditions.

The basic 50ft hull is extended to make the 53ft and 55ft versions, with the superstructure unchanged, giving a longer aft deck. The extra length in the engine room also allows larger versions of the Caterpillar 3208 diesels to be fitted, increasing the speed potential of these models to 18 knots.

Above the waterline, the Fleming is massively proportioned, with tall bulwarks all round, and the flared bow giving excellent foredeck space. A



simulated plank-effect in the topsides reinforces the 'traditional' feeling, as does the 'eyebrow' over the pilothouse windscreen.

## Exterior

The Fleming is a spacious boat. The side decks are wide and well protected, and teak-laid as standard. Forward, two steps up, is what is termed the pilothouse deck, which continues right around the front of the wheelhouse, from which there is sliding-door access on both sides.

A central gate leads out onto the foredeck, which has ample space for working the vessel or sunbathing, plus well-sited lockers and seats, again all finished in teak. The stemhead platform has stowages for a main and kedge anchor, handled by a substantial Lofrane chain and rope windlass. Side lockers will take small items. Fresh and saltwater taps mounted on the face of the platform are a handy feature, though they could have been less obtrusively sited.

Substantial cleats and fairleads forward, midships and aft take care of mooring. However,

the Fleming is a tall boat, and the only way off for even the most agile is via opening gates in the bulwarks towards the stern.

The flybridge is reached via either a ladder from the aft deck or stairs from the back of the pilothouse. Up here you find a lot of room. Forward is a helm position with a generous two-person seat, and comprehensive set of repeater instruments. The view forward when you are sitting down is restricted, particularly with the heavily-tinted screen. Behind you is a four- or six-person settee to starboard and a three-person seat to port, the latter lifting to give access to the dumb-waiter from below.

A good-size top deck aft will take up to a 4m tender on chocks, with an electric crane to lift it off, though we noticed the cable on this was only of mild steel, and already starting to rust.

The forward section of the flybridge is teak-decked, the aft having a rubber non-slip.



## Accommodation

The standard layout provides berths for four people in two double cabins, but a second, twin-bedded guest cabin can be specified as an option, and this was the configuration on our test boat. To this is added a comfortable deck saloon, plus a large pilothouse forward, with full-width helm console, and a four-person dinette.

If this sounds somewhat limited for a 50ft boat, you should also remember that you have an aft deck outside, excellent-width side decks all-round, a spacious foredeck, plus flybridge and sundeck on top. The engine room is twice as long as that found on craft of a similar overall length, and likewise the lazarette.

## Fleming 50

**Engines:** twin Caterpillar 3208NA diesels, 210hp at 2800rpm, V8, 10.41lt.

**Conditions:** wind light, sea calm. **Load:** fuel 50%, water 30%, crew 4.

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	trim	Sound levels dB(A)			
							saln	fwlcb	wlhse	flybdg
1000	5.4	—	—	—	—	0.5	61	58	57	60
1250	6.2	—	—	—	—	0.5	64	62	61	64
1500	7.1	4.2	19	1.69	1408	0.5	67	64	64	66
1750	8.8	5.3	25	1.66	1383	1.0	70	67	65	66
2000	9.4	7.8	36	1.20	1004	1.5	72	71	66	67
2250	10.1	10.9	50	0.93	772	2.0	75	71	68	69
2500	11.0	14.9	68	0.74	612	3.5	76	72	70	71
2600	11.4	18.7	85	0.61	507	4.0	77	73	71	73

**Loa** 54ft 9in (16.70m) **Displacement** 27 tonnes

**Hull length** 50ft 9in (15.47m) **Fuel** 833gal (3780lt)

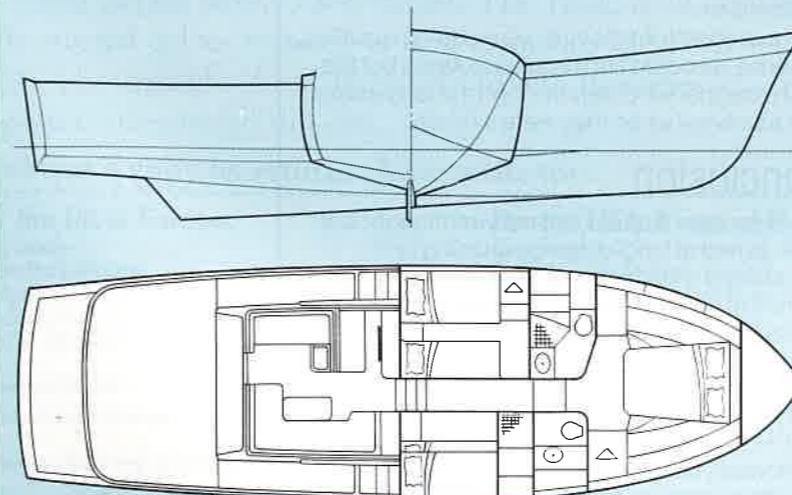
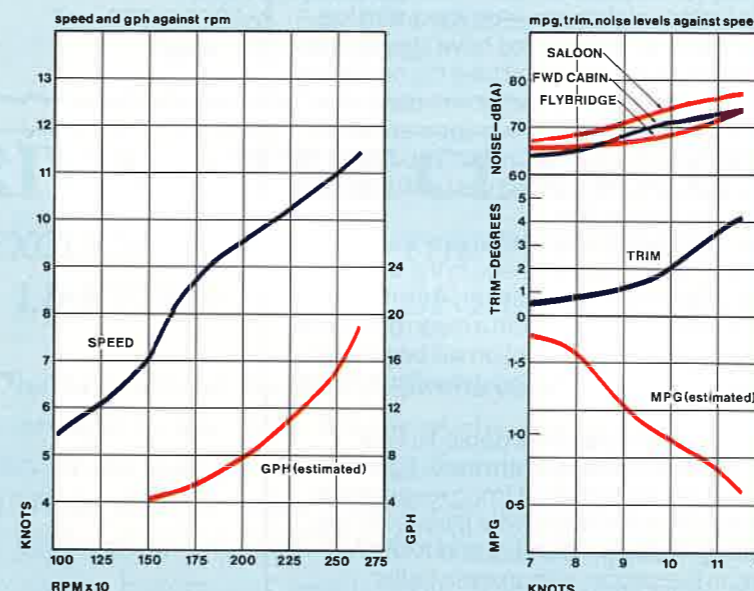
**Beam** 16ft 0in (4.88m) **Water** 250gal (1135lt)

**Draught** 5ft 0in (1.52m) **Price ex VAT** US\$502,215

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Fax: (1) 714 723 4093.

**UK Suppliers** Alan Taylor Marine, Hamble Point Marina, Hamble, Southampton SO3 5NB. Tel: 0703 453918.



The saloon is comfortably proportioned and well laid-out, with double sliding doors onto the aft deck. An L-shaped settee to port will seat five or six people, and has small lockers underneath for lifejackets or similar items. The settee faces a cleverly-designed table, with a pantograph high/low setting. Opposite, you can either specify a full-length sideboard, with room for an entertainments centre, or a single television cabinet and loose armchairs. In the aft corner is a cocktail bar and ice-maker.

The saloon windows are deep and wide, with two sliding sections each side, flyscreens over the opening portions, Venetian blinds and curtains, and deep teak channels to catch condensation and leaks.

Forward to port in the saloon is the galley. This is a good size, with a useful dividing pier which provides a worktop and serving area. The comprehensive standard equipment includes double stainless steel sink, triple electric hob, oven, microwave, trash compactor, waste disposer, and a three-quarter-height Norcold fridge/freezer.

Storage space is reasonable, with lockers below and overhead. Further lockers are found opposite for crockery, and in the pilothouse. Overall the amount of storage space is sufficient, but rather scattered.

An excellent feature we have never seen before is the 'dumb waiter' connecting the galley with the flybridge. This enables you to send food and drinks to al-fresco diners above without climbing the stairs.

Three steps to starboard lead to the pilothouse forward. This is spacious and practical, with plenty of room for the helmsman plus enough seating for the rest of the passengers to sit up here on long passages, or use the area as a breakfast room.

The helm console forward is full-width, with ample space for optional electronics, and a three-quarter-size chart table to starboard, complete with a stack of drawers for instruments and charts. Ready-use switches across the face of the console look old-fashioned, and were already going rusty, but the AC and DC distribution panels to port and starboard are good, though they could do with doors in front to protect them. Engine controls are twin-lever, and gave smooth precise control, with an rpm synchroniser fitted as standard.

The view forward and to the sides is good, with three pantograph wipers fitted, plus powerful washers, though the size and stroke of the wiper blades means the cleared area is small and too high.

In the port aft corner of the pilothouse is a four-person dinette, which can convert to a single pilot berth. Lockers underneath provide useful stowage, while a clever recessed bookshelf above hinges out to give access to the back of the flybridge instrument console.

In common with most Taiwanese boats, the Fleming makes extensive use of honey-coloured teak throughout the accommodation, and in general this is all of a good standard. However, scratches and rough corners, plus the sloppy fit of some of the drawers, lets it down in places.

A flight of stairs from the forward end of the saloon leads down to the cabins. To port is the main guest cabin, with two generous berths, a

half-height hanging locker, several smaller lockers, and drawers between and underneath the berths.

Opposite is the optional second guest cabin. This has two narrow bunks, one above the other, plus a moderate number of lockers and drawers. Headroom is a generous 6ft 6in (1.98m), but floorspace is restricted. The cramped feeling is not helped by feeble lights, which barely relieve the gloom.

Forward to starboard is the guest toilet containing WC, Corian worktop and sink, and a separate shower stall. It is also the home for a laundry centre, with combined washer/drier set into the bulkhead. Several good lockers are found here, plus a manually-switched extractor fan. Unfortunately the switch for this is not in the same place as the light switch, and the whole effect is very disjointed.

Hatches in the sole here and out in the passageway give good access to skin-fittings, pumps and pipes, though the standard of fit-out revealed here is not good, with straggly wiring, rough edges, and silicone rubber splashed all around the pipes where they pass through bulkheads. The toilet system comprises electric WCs and holding tank, plus macerator pump for the discharge.

Forward again is the master cabin. This is a good size, with a double berth and a bathroom en-suite. Drawers and lockers take care of small items but you only have a half-height hanging locker, the normal wardrobe space being taken by the second guest cabin option.

The bathroom makes good use of the available space, and incorporates a separate shower stall, with a neatly-designed moulded interior including a clever shelf for soap and shampoo. However, the general finish, with the WC not enclosed and the liberal use of sealer to fill the joints, is functional rather than sophisticated, a comment that could also be applied to the teak-trimmed 'formica' used down here for all bulkheads.

A double door in the forward bulkhead gives access to the split chain/rope locker, though it has no seal to keep out damp and smells.

## Engines

Power for all the versions of the Fleming comes from a pair of Caterpillar 3208s: the 210hp naturally-aspirated variants on the 50, and either these or 375hp or 425hp turbocharged units on the 53 and 55. In all cases they drive through Aquadrive constant-velocity joints, allowing the use of softer engine mounts and further reducing vibration and noise.

The engines are located under the saloon, with normal access from the lazarette aft. The lazarette is entered through a large hatch in the aft deck, and contains the stainless steel water tanks port and starboard. These are mounted straight onto the GRP stringers, and held in place by some rough wooden chocks, neither of which constitute a good arrangement. Similar comments apply to the steering system, with massive bronze and stainless steel rudder stocks and gear, but exposed hydraulic hoses and strong but basic glassfibre work.

A doorway forward leads into the engineroom, which has 4ft 6in (1.37m) headroom and space to move around the outside of the engines. Fuel is

held in four separate tanks, each with its own filler on deck, and a useful plate alongside these indicating the capacity of the tank, though unfortunately in US gallons. Fuel reaches the engines through a complicated day-tank system, using a standpipe arrangement and shut-off valves from each tank. A sight gauge alongside the standpipe shows the contents of the tank in use at the time.

Large Racor filters are fitted in the line to each engine and the generator, though these are hard to reach behind the access ladder up to the saloon hatch. The seawater inlet strainers are similarly inaccessible in front of the motors, though here the guards over the drive belts (supplied with the Caterpillar engines) come into their own.

Sound insulation is extensive, and covered in perforated aluminium for protection. Bilge pumps are large Rule 2000s, one in each compartment plus a manual back-up. Batteries are mounted in substantial GRP boxes, with two for engine starting and two for domestic use. A remote or automatically-operated fire-extinguishing system is fitted. The engine and generator exhausts have GRP water-lift silencers in the line.

## Handling and performance

Our photographer, lucky fellow that he is, drew a sunny day for his pictures, but on our test day we had the tester's nightmare — no wind, and fog.

Fortunately, at 11 knots you have time to make out the blips on the radar and take the necessary action. Another benefit of the slower pace, the lack of noise, quickly becomes apparent when the helmsman can stay up on the flybridge for the best visibility, yet still be in contact with the man on the radar down below.

Maximum speed on our radar gun was 11.4 knots, from a boat that has been in the water six months, which compares suitably with the maker's claimed 12 knots with a clean bottom. At this speed the fuel consumption will be around 18.7gph, giving 0.61mpg and a maximum range of 507 miles.

Dropping back to a comfortable 10-knot cruising speed, and 2250rpm, these figures improve to 10.1gph and 0.93mpg respectively. As predicted, noise levels were pleasantly low, registering 77dB(A) maximum and 73dB(A) cruising in the saloon, and an even better 71dB(A) maximum and 67dB(A) cruising in the pilothouse.

It is academic to discuss seakeeping qualities, because we could find no seas to keep, but the boat ploughed sedately through the ferry wakes, with a slow roll when they were side-on.

## Conclusion

The Fleming is a spacious and well thought-out boat, aimed at long-distance cruising and live-aboard situations, but still able to double in the role of comfortable day cruiser, with room for a dozen or more guests. The finish is generally good, though with some untidy points, and will appeal to the traditionalist who still wants teak and plenty of it.

At 11 knots you will set no records, but are likely to arrive at your destination in a better frame of mind than your speedier neighbours, and you will probably have burned a lot less fuel. □