SeaTrial

Californian 55 LRC

A WELL-DESIGNED CRUISER THAT SIPS FUEL

BY ROGER MCAFEE

THE NEW CALIFORNIAN 55 LONG RANGE CRUISER (LRC) is an unusual vessel. Unlike many other current offerings in the market segment it's designed and built in the United States.

The first Californians, built by California's Marshall Boat Co., splashed down in 1972 and within a decade the company expanded its line of trawlers and long-range cruisers from 30 to 52 feet. In 1982, the company was purchased by Wellcraft, which made the decision to update the line. Marshall repurchased the company in 1987 and, that same year, sold it again, this time to Carver, which moved production to North Carolina. In 1991,Genmar Industries purchased Carver and stopped making Californians.

In the late 1990s, Jule Marshall, the original owner, who continued to build yachts under the Navigator marquees, reacquired the rights to the Californian name and began once again to build Californians at his plant in Perris, California.

The new 55-footer features a nice, crisp design with hull windows providing light to the master stateroom. The straight sheer line adds to the modern look of the entire exterior and large windows, including forward deck hatches, flood the interior with natural light. Entry to the vessel is via the well positioned swim step and through a transom door into a large, uncluttered cockpit. Useful cockpit space is gained primarily because there is no access to the salon roof or the command bridge from the cockpit, thus doing away with the usual cockpit ladder. Access to these areas is via a set of interior steps to the aft of the pilothouse.

Sidedecks and stainless steel handrails allow quick and easy movement between the cockpit and the foredeck. The Portuguese bridge provides a nice touch for out-of-sight stowage of

fenders and lines and good protection for the wheelhouse should the vessel take green water over the bow. The molded nonskid pattern in the deck is sharp and provides secure footing.

The exterior glasswork was smooth and fair and showed no signs of print-through. Stanchions and other stainless items were fitted nicely and appeared to be well secured, while all the cleats have aluminum backing plates for additional strength and security.

The hull was designed with a relatively shallow V of 13 degrees at the transom allowing the vessel to plane with less power than similar-size hulls with a sharper V. The full, deep-V hulls have a deadrise of about 22 degrees. The hull has a double chine, which improves dynamic lift while the forward acts as a built-in spray rail.

According to the manufacturer the hull is built of solid glass, bottom and sides, with bi-axial glass in stress areas. For improved blister resistance and UV protection the entire hull is coated with a vinylester resin skin. A premium epoxy barrier coat is applied before bottom painting to reduce the likelihood of water wicking into the laminate.

The deck is end-grain balsa-cored fiberglass and the hull/deck joint is mechanically fastened at least every 6 inches with Sikaflex high-strength adhesive between the overlap. Then the entire inside of the joint is glassed over.

Framing for the main deck interior sole, including the forward cabin area, is made of marine-grade aluminum box channel. This type of material makes for a very light, strong and rigid structure. The aluminum itself is impervious to saltwater corrosion by the time it is installed.

Entry to the vessel is through a cockpit sliding glass door into the aft salon, or into the pilothouse through port and starboard sliding doors off either sidedeck. The Portuguese bridge provides reasonable spray protection when the wheelhouse doors are opened.

The aft salon is roomy and comfortable, complete with an L-shaped settee to port and two large, comfortable barrel chairs to starboard. A high-low table in front of the settee can be a coffee table when set in the low position or a dining table when raised. The colors selected for the interior carpet and upholstery match the varnished teak very nicely and give an overall feeling of luxury and comfort.

The U-shaped galley located to port and forward of the salon is well equipped with Corian counters, a home-sized double stainless sink, full refrigerator, microwave, electric oven and cooktop. There is plenty of storage under the counter, and a large pantry is located under the galley sole. Those on board can move to and from the salon or wheelhouse without interrupting galley operations.

The galley-forward bulkhead does not go completely to the overhead, so anyone working in the galley can easily converse with those in the salon or the wheelhouse. Access to the wheelhouse is forward and up three steps on the starboard side of the deckhouse across from the galley.

Visibility from the wheelhouse is excellent all around, and a large, flat dash area allows for the installation of

An Inside Look

TESTER'S OPINION

"The builders have created a very efficient coastal cruising-shape hull. The vessel handled our sea trial very well without skid or prop cavitation. Throughout the entire test the vessel responded well to the helm."

The aft salon is roomy and comfortable, complete with an L-shaped settee to port and two large inviting chairs. The U-shaped galley is located to port and forward of the salon; it's well equipped with everything including stain resistant Corian countertops and a home-sized double stainless sink. The master stateroom features a walk-around queen bed and plenty of stowage.

Californian 55 LRC

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	56 ft., 9 in.
Beam	15 ft.
Draft	4 ft., 7 in.
Weight	52,000 lbs.
Fuel	750 gals.
Water	240 gals.
Engine	Volvo Penta D9 diesel - 575 hp
List Price	$896,000

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

D9 575 hp Volvo inboard, modern galley with plenty of storage, cooktop, convection oven, large under-galley pantry, large flash dash are in pilothouse, full head with shower and tub, queen-sized bed in master stateroom, full walk-around, large hanging lockers, washer/dryer and much more.

OPTIONAL FEATURES

See your local dealer for a full list of options.

CONSTRUCTION

Solid fiberglass hull, above and below the waterline, deck and superstructure are end-grain balsa cored, hull to deck joints mechanically fastened at least every 4 inches, with Sikaflex hi-strength adhesive in joint, then glassed over inside, hull stringers are full-length, laminated Douglas fir plywood glass-encapsulated. Soles are aluminum 6063-T 52 box channels with sub-frame grids and structural supports, including cabin areas, secondary bonding, bi-axial fabric with hi-strength vinylester bonding resin. Water tanks are molded glass with FDA-approved resins; fuel tanks made of welded aluminum 5052-H32. Factory pressure-tested waste tank is molded glass, rails are 302L stainless 1-1/8 inch diameter with aluminum backing plates on all cleats.

the usual electronics without making the area look like the cockpit of an aircraft. There's even room for a folded paper chart. Because of the openness of the interior layout the skipper can keep in visual and voice contact with anyone in the salon or galley. The wheelhouse has a small L-shaped settee and table so others on board can comfortably keep the skipper company. However, there could be a bit more space between the helm chair and table, especially for us "huskier" boaters.

Access to the command bridge is via a stairwell from the pilothouse. Forward visibility from the command bridge may be an issue. The vessel has what is known as a chariot bridge, where the aft top of the wheelhouse is the command bridge "dash" and the upper helm "sole" is the top of the salon. This places the command bridge well aft and relatively low. As a result it is difficult to see the bow of the vessel. Visibility aft, port and starboard is excellent, though.

The staterooms are located forward and down from the wheelhouse, with a full head including a separate shower stall immediately to starboard at the bottom of the companionway. This can also double as the day head.

The master stateroom, featuring a walk-around queen bed and plenty of stowage, is located full width across the beam of the vessel under the pilothouse. Complete with its own private head and separate shower and tub this space is very comfortable and surprisingly quiet, even when under way. There is plenty of hanging locker space, more than on many liveaboards, in addition to a washer/dryer.

The VIP stateroom is located in the fo'c's'le and features a queen-sized walk-around, good storage and hanging lockers. It too is a very comfortable space. A third smaller cabin with bunks is located between the two larger staterooms. This space could easily be converted to an office.

We fired up the D9 575 hp Volvo inboard diesel and idled away from the dock, making good use of the bow thruster in the very tight quarters. The 2,370-pound in-line six-cylinder idled smoothly, quietly and smoke free. At idle, 550 rpm, we were making 3.9 miles per hour and burning .25 gallon per hour.

As we advanced the throttle the electronically controlled engine moved smoothly up to 750 rpm, and we made 6 mph burning 0.8 gph. At that speed the vessel has a range of just more than 5,060 miles, allowing a 10 percent reserve.

At 1200 rpm we moved along at 9 mph and burned 2.6 gph; with a 10 percent reserve this gives a range of 2,336 miles at about 260 hp. At 1500 rpm our speed was 11 mph and we burned 5.8 gallons per hour. Range, once again allowing a 10 percent fuel reserve, would be 1,280 miles. Clearly, the big Volvo's sweet spot is around 1,200 rpm.

Top speed, at 2,600 rpm, was 22.1 mph and the fuel burn was 2.8 gph. Range at that speed with the 10 percent reserve was 630 miles. All speed calculations were based on GPS readings.

During our speed tests those on board had no problem speaking with each other at normal conversation levels even when the Volvo was running flat out. In fact, the vessel was much quieter than expected.

After our speed runs, we stopped, cranked the helm over hard and kept it there as we slowly increased to full throttle. The vessel handled this process very well without skid or prop cavitation. Throughout the entire test the vessel responded well to the helm.

In summary, this U.S.-made vessel is well-thought-out, makes good use of interior space and the builders have created a very efficient coastal cruising hull shape. The engine is well matched to the hull, and the fuel economy at all speeds is near the top of its class for this type of vessel. There's plenty of storage space for long-range cruising and the interior is bright and cheerful: a necessity for boaters who spend a lot of time on the water and who want to be comfortable. There is plenty of headroom throughout even for those who are well over 6 feet tall.

My only concern is the starboard side of the wheelhouse sole, which is down one step from the rest of the wheelhouse. The area doubles as the companionway, from the aft salon through the wheelhouse forward to the cabin spaces below; this step-down can create a falling hazard.

I strongly suggest you put this boat on your short list. The fuel economy and design alone make this boat a must-see.

CALIFORNIAN 55
SEA TRIAL BOAT REVIEW #2

Californian 55 Long Range Cruiser

Statistics

LOA	56'
Beam:	15'
Draft:	4'7"
Deadrise:	13 degrees
Displacement:	26 tons
Generator :	15.5KW Kohler
Fuel:	750 gallons
Water:	240 gallons
Holding Tank:	70 gallons
Price as Tested:	$893,000

Timing is Everything!

Given the volatility of oil prices these days, the boating community must think in terms of fuel economy. Unfortunately, very few manufacturers are ready or willing to meet the economical priorities of their customers. That cant be said for Californian Yachts of Perris, California.

Lets face it, we cant sit around and wait for our empty politicians to stabilize the current swings in fuel prices. As expected, all they want to do is use the current crisis as a political football to further their agendas. The fact of the matter is crude oil is our most abundant natural resource and, like it or not, our powerboats will be dependent upon petroleum-based products for the foreseeable future. Its up to each one of us to make some tough choices if we want to continue our boating lifestyles. We either have to cut back on our number of boating days per year, slow down to a fuel sipping crawl or sell our boats.

The folks from Californian Yachts dont see any of the above-mentioned choices as options. Instead, they have taken matters into their own hands and have developed a sturdy, long range cruiser capable of nearly 20 knots with the fuel efficiency of a trawler. If Jule Marshall, owner of Navigator Yachts and Californian Yachts, were running for political office, he would get my vote!

Unparalleled Reputation

Long known for their fuel efficient hulls, Californian Yachts went one step further by building the 55 LRC, their first long range, single-engine cruiser. How did Californian Yachts gain an unparalleled reputation for fuel-efficient hulls? First of all, all of their hulls are designed with a deep degree in the fore foot and prominent bow flare. Both of these design features increase fuel economy while providing a comfortable ride in quartering seas. In addition, all Californian and Navigator Yachts are built with a decreased V in the aft to achieve lower planing speeds, thus increasing fuel economy.

Californian Yachts are constructed to the same rigid standards as Navigator Yachts. Every Californian has a solid fiberglass bottom and a fully encapsulated stringer system. The end grain balsa coring employed by Californian in the foredeck, bridge and superstructure provide an incredible strength-to-weight ratio and exceptional sound-insulating properties. Californian even provides an epoxy barrier coat for lasting protection prior to bottom painting. It is these attentions to detail that have given Californian Yachts an unmatched reputation.



Californians new 55 LRC is striking to say the least. From her pronounced bow flare to her classic yet contemporary lines, the LRC is unique and fresh. I especially like the attractive, yet functional, Portuguese bridge. Given todays futuristic yacht designs, the Portuguese bridge has become almost extinct.

Voluminous Design

The Californians interior is nothing less than voluminous. Given the fact that the LRC has a wide walk around, I thought that the salon would be narrow and cramped. This is not the situation. The salon is designed to make use of every square inch of room giving the feeling of a much larger space. I have spent many hours in the salon of a friends 53-foot Navigator with no walk around. The interior of the new Californian feels just as spacious. Certainly, the Californians 15-foot beam makes a vast difference.

I found the Californians interior layout to be strangely familiar. After spending a few minutes exploring, it came to me: this layout is almost identical to most Navigator models. Simple, unencumbered and functional, why should Californian change the perfect layout just for the sake of change?









There is no doubt, however, that Californian is using much-improved materials in its new LRC. The cherrywood interior in the salon, galley and pilothouse is glossy and faultless. Californians production methods are obviously improved over previous models.

The galley is sizable and features black Corian countertops that contrast wonderfully with the high-gloss cherry paneling. The galley floor hatch provides access to a separate compartment that can be used to store myriad things. One could incorporate a large freezer or build shelves for additional storage of dry goods. Better yet, how about a small workshop for tools and equipment? Regardless, it is sure inspiring to see that the manufacturer took the time to incorporate a storage compartment of this size into the new LRC.

Since most people who purchase this LRC will be spending most of their time in the pilothouse, Californian wasted no effort when designing this space. The pilothouse features great visibility, a wing door on each side for good ventilation and easy access to the Portuguese bridge and foredeck.

As is standard on most Navigators over 50 feet, Californian provides a large master stateroom amidships, a forward guest stateroom with bunks and a V.I.P. stateroom on the bow. Although, if you dont have a need for the forward stateroom, Californian can build an office or the room could be used as a storage room for provisions. This is an example of Californians willingness to please their customers.

Great Performance

David Moore from Cruising Yachts explained to me that the Californian LRC was like nothing Ive ever tested. Truer words have never been spoken. The Californians performance exceeded my expectations and has me thinking that I wish I were in the market for a new boat.

Usually, my performance figures and the publicized performance figures vary greatly. This is due to the fact that most manufacturers fudge a little to give them the advantage. However, I was astonished to see that my statistics and Californians statistics were almost identical.

Our test boat had approximately 375 gallons of fuel and 150 gallons of water the day of our test. Naturally, our speed and fuel economy numbers are slightly better than if the LRC were fully provisioned.

1,000 RPM - 7 Knots - 1.9 GPH - 3,114 Mile Range
1,500 RPM - 9 Knots - 6.6 GPH - 1,214 Mile Range
1,800 RPM - 10.5 Knots - 10 GPH - 911 Mile Range
2,000 RPM - 12 Knots - 15 GPH - 650 Mile Range
2,500 WOT RPM - 19.8 Knots - 26 GPH - 600 Mile Range

In my opinion, the 575 HP Volvo is the perfect match for Californians new LRC. Unlike many long range cruisers, the Californian never felt sluggish or underpowered. In addition, the LRC was extremely quiet, devoid of stinky diesel fumes and well balanced.

I realize that many of us are a little intimidated by yachts of this size that sport a single engine. Thats why Californian includes a 155-ton bow thruster as standard equipment. Add the optional stern thruster and maneuvering in tight quarters is a snap.

Californians new 55 LRC is the right boat introduced at the right time. The LRC offers excellent fuel economy and a comfortable ride with the ability to outrun less than perfect weather.

Also impressive is the Californians price tag. Based upon how our test boat was equipped, I would have guessed a price tag of at least $200k higher than the as tested price. Im certain that Californians new 55 LRC will be a very popular yacht in the near future.