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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.

BUILDER

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www.cruisingyachts.net

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.