

Trawler Talk

By Ken and Karen Schuler



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“FLYBRIDGE OR PILOTHOUSE TRAWLERS”

As a boat dealer selling live-aboard, long range cruising trawlers, we often hear comments like, “I have to have a flybridge” or the opposite, “I much prefer a pilothouse boat”. As part of growing our business and adding more choices, we have intentionally taken the dealership for both flybridge boats and pilothouse boats. The Camano and PDQ Power Catamaran trawlers both feature flybridges, whereas, the American Tugs and the Ranger Tugs are pilothouse trawlers.



Camano trawler featuring a flybridge



American Tug pilothouse trawler

Having said that, American Tugs has been in production for many years and has recently added a flybridge option. This came about as a strong demand for the flybridge from the Florida market. We recall a conversation with one of the manufacturers from the Northwest who said he thought that folks there ran about 70% from the lower station and only 30% from the bridge. Another person from Florida said they run 70% from the bridge and 30% from the lower station. It really changes depending on what part of the country you do your boating.

So what are the influences or experiences that determine which type of trawler to choose? Why do some have such strong opinions in either direction? For this discussion, let's imagine taking a trawler that has a flybridge out for a day cruise.

The weather forecast is for a sunny day with temps in the 70's. We like to get an early start but the morning greets us with overcast skies and just a little on the cool side. We dressed with warmer clothes and headed up on the flybridge to enjoy the cruise.



Early morning cruising



By noon it's sunny & warm

The sun is getting up higher (10:20 am) now and the time has come to head back down and change into different clothes to take advantage of the sun's warmth.

Getting back on top I realize the binoculars would be nice to have. Just guess how many times you have to go up and down before everything is just where you need it. Some boats have lots of storage on the bridge for items like charts to back up your GPS, guide books listing bridge opening times, sun screen, caps, sunglasses, etc. Others have very limited dry storage and you have to remember to bring it all up with you.

Good thing the steps are easy to walk but I suppose if I had a few more years on these legs it would be a different story. And that is another item that makes a big difference accessing the bridge. Wide steps at a good angle are the best. But some trawlers have to compromise due to space considerations and the steps may even be vertical. That can make it a challenge to carry things and navigate the steps at the same time.



Easy-walking steps to bridge

The water is calm and the 360 degree view is great! There's a bridge coming up and being right on top sure makes it easy to see if we can squeeze under. A flybridge does add considerable height to any boat and must be considered when bridge clearance is an issue. The pilothouse trawlers without a bridge usually have 10 to 12 feet of height whereas a flybridge trawler will be 14 to 16 feet or greater. Many bridges have scheduled openings if you are in a high road traffic area and you may end up waiting a half hour or more. Other bridges will open on demand. It can be a great advantage to be able to cruise right through without waiting for a bridge tender.



Vertical steps to bridge



High bridges have plenty of clearance



Very low fixed bridges on Erie Canal

Have been thinking of closing in the flybridge because of too much sun at times and being chased down below by the rain. Not sure where we could find the space to fold all that stuff up when we want it open. Then I'm thinking the visibility isn't so good looking through that plastic stuff. No windshield wiper either when you need them the most. Guess it would make the whole boat higher for those bridges too.



Full enclosure adds windage and height

Time to stop at that nice waterside restraint for a noon lunch. I can see 360 degrees out here but when I back into that slip the back two corners of the boat disappear. I either have to leave the controls for a second or two or just listen for my mate to call out the clearances. Those who are at the helm in a pilot house trawler often appreciate the fact that they can see the corners of the stern as they back into a slip or come up to a dock.

Two sets of electronics to shut down, oh well! Generally, the electronics are powered up from the lower station (if there is one) so they also have to be shut down from there as well. Electronics exposed on the bridge will need to be covered when not in use. A full enclosure will take care of this but if you don't have one then covering them separately with a snap-on canvas will also work.

Trawler Talk

Flybridge or Pilothouse Trawler, continued



Electronics exposed on flybridge



Canvas covers to protect electronics



Comfortable captain's chair



Easy to read electronics



Bimini gives sun-protection

As we enjoyed lunch right near our boat on the outside patio the discussion turned to the pending flybridge enclosure. We reasoned that if it would have been windy the extra windage added by all that canvas would have made our landing a different story. But if we don't add the enclosure, we should really consider a bimini. With all the warnings about skin cancer, it could be a great addition.

That idea led to a further discussion regarding pilot house trawlers really

solving the sun, visibility, and clearance issues. The pilothouse usually features a very comfortable captain's chair. Many flybridge boats have very compromised seating for the second interior helm (if there is one). In a pilothouse there's lots of space for electronics which can be at a minimum on the flybridge. Technology keeps improving but generally, it is easier to read the screens in the pilothouse versus out in the sun on the bridge.

My mate chimed in with the thought of how important it is with this design to make

sure that the manufacturer did a good job with sound proofing because you are always operating from the pilot house. We know some pilothouse trawlers that are so quiet you can hardly hear the engine at all! There are other trawlers with flybridges that have very poor lower station comfort (seating & noise level). Guess they expect you to run from the bridge all the time.

Between sips of martini and a tasty sandwich we reminisced about the time we had a bunch of friends on the trawler. Everybody was with the captain on the flybridge until they got thirsty or hungry or the weather changed a bit and gradually the captain was left all alone on the bridge. In a pilothouse trawler there is usually lots of extra seating so the whole crew can be engaged in navigating and watching the scenery. Speaking of scenery, without my 1st mate knowing what I was thinking I recalled how nice the view was from the bridge last week as we passed so many boats with the bikini clad sun worshipers on deck!

Tummy full, it's time to push off and enjoy the afternoon cruise. When it comes right down to it, what does it matter flybridge or pilothouse trawler! No boat is perfect. There will always be pros and cons to every choice we make. When buying that trawler you just have to do what is right for how you want to use the boat. We've talked to many folks that said they should have done it sooner but have not heard anyone say they did it too soon! It's your life.....enjoy!

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Brokerage

At Manitowoc location:

42 Nordic Tug 2001	\$425,000
42 Nordic Tug 1999	\$389,000
38 Holiday Mansion 1991	\$69,900
37 Great Harbour 1996	\$299,000
34 PDQ Power Catamaran 2004.....	\$250,000
32 Nordic Tug 1996	\$159,900
31 Camano 2003	\$179,000

31 Camano 2001	\$164,000
29 Prairie Coastal 1979	\$35,000
21 Ranger 2001	\$26,000

At owner's location:

40 Island Gypsy 1986	\$139,000
31 Blue Sea Trawler 1988.....	\$115,000
30 LM Pilothouse 1984.....	\$64,500

Conserve fuel - buy a trawler!