

CHARMED

The new Hinckley T55 is a seductive marriage of beauty and brawn

BY DENNIS CAPRIO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ONNE VAN DER WAL



THE LARGEST TALARIA YET, THE NEW 55'S COCKPIT IS HUGE, THE SALOON INVITING (ABOVE). HER LINES RUNNING AT SPEED (RIGHT) ARE VERY CLOSE TO PERFECT.



Broad shoulders glistening in the sun, the Hinckley T55 hull number one *Charmer* pressed against her fenders at the company's dock in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, waiting for a chance to show that she was more than an appealing confluence of lines and shapes. Compared with her smaller siblings, especially the Picnic Boat (the graceful lines of which remind male owners to get in touch with their feminine nature), the T55 makes a brawny first impression, more decathlete than gymnast.

As it has for the rest of the Talaria fleet, Hinckley turned to Bruce King for the styling and naval architecture of the T55. Taking the concept of the Picnic Boat from a svelte 36 feet (equal to 3.65 times the beam) to a hefty 55 feet (equal to 3.1 times the beam) could have upset the equation, but King has succeeded admirably. One potential problem could have been misplaced bulk in the stern sections, because designers often run out of ways to disguise an overabundance of breadth and girth back there. But King has tapered the deck line in the after sections and employed tumblehome to reduce the visual impact of the T55's beam and freeboard. She may be a big girl, but she has fine proportions.

In fact, the T55 really doesn't have a bad side. Drawing on themes that Bunker and Ellis established in the 1930s, King has given the T55 a modestly sweeping sheerline, business-like flare in the bow and an arc of triumph in the transom. The trunk cabin, looking as though the designer pirated it from a cruising sailboat, grows from the foredeck at what seems to be exactly the correct distance aft from the stem. The arc of the trunk cabin's fascia echoes that of the transom. Elliptical portlights of delicate proportion brighten the interior and disguise the height of the trunk. The teak eyebrow, in addition to reducing the apparent height of the trunk cabin, delineates the superstructure; the Hinckley logo at its terminus is like a period at the end of a sentence.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Talaria series is the curvature at the after end of the house. Resembling a comma in repose, this line has earned a place as one of the most copied elements in recent history.

The big 800-hp Cats exhale through a whisper-quiet underwater exhaust system, which has a bypass for operation at low speeds. Spinning Hamilton 403 Waterjets, the engines burn 20 gallons per hour at a cruising speed of about 26 to 30 knots, or 2000 to 2100 rpm. *Charmer* was very happy at 30 knots—free of annoying vibration from the drive train and free of the whoosh of tortured water spewing from the hull. Her solid construction, core materials, and sound attenuation devices insulated us from the harshness that often comes with lesser yachts.

My experience with waterjets has always left me debating their pros and cons relative to propeller drives. Jets generally are free of vibration, therefore easier to keep quiet; they offer superb control and maneuverability at low speeds, and have the ability to stop on a barnacle. Accelerating, though, can seem like a waiting game compared with the instantaneous response that props provide. In this regard, the T55 surprised me. The new Hamilton 403 jets accelerate *Charmer* with an immediacy nearly the equal of propellers. Hamilton developed the 403 at Hinckley's request, and the T55 is the model's first application to pleasure boats. In this application, the 403s permit a shaft angle of zero degrees, which eases the engineering of the driveline. And, if you want props, Hinckley offers conventional drives as an option.

Charmer also didn't show any sign of the wandering I've experienced with some jet boats. She tracked upwind and down as though she were on rails. Hinckley's JetStick control offers the helmsman the option of steering with the wheel or rotating the joystick. A small black knob on the control's console lets you adjust for any steering bias port or starboard, so maintaining a straight course requires only minute input on the joystick.

Charmer is owned by Ruth and Reid Cameron and lives in Northeast, Maryland, at the head of the Chesapeake Bay. Yachting is their lifestyle, and they make a point of sharing it with their children and grandchildren. Having owned three previous Hinckleys—a Bermuda 40, a Picnic Boat and a Talaria 44, all named *Charmed* after the Charms Candy Company started

Compared with her smaller siblings, especially the Picnic Boat (the graceful lines of which remind male owners to get in touch with their feminine nature), the new T55 makes a brawny first impression, more decathlete than gymnast

And no wonder: It's a mouth-watering touch, which, in combination with the French curve at the after end of the window on each side of the house, captures the fancy of the toughest boat owner.

Notwithstanding the T55's great looks, she's a no-nonsense yacht. At more than 30 knots, fast by any cruising yachtsmen's definition, she exhibits delightfully reassuring interaction with the water. Unlike many planing yachts, which fight the water, rising above it and beating it into submission, the T55

RPM	KNOTS	GPH
600	3.9	63
900	6.4	64
1200	8.6	76
1500	10.7	72
1800	14.3	73
2100*	30.4	79

The difference in speed between 1800 rpm and 2100 rpm indicates the transition to planing speed. Test conditions: Full fuel and water, four persons on board, winds an average of 8 knots, seas less than 2 feet, low humidity and about 70 degrees ambient temperature. Depth of water averaged approximately 40 feet. *Although the Caterpillar 3406E engines top out at 2300 rpm, technicians from the company recommended using 2100 during my sea trial, because they hadn't confirmed the nature of a problem with one of the engines.

feels as though she's in cahoots with her element. She parts the small stuff with graceful abandon and rises over the larger stuff with the ease of a champion thoroughbred at a cross-country meet. Although Narragansett Bay showed us little more than a moderate chop, traversing the monster wake of a tug-and-tow promised seakindly behavior in rough going. She runs with her bow just clear of the water and Hinckley says the yacht won't need her trim tabs in anything less than four-foot seas.

by Reid's grandfather—stepping up to the T55 was a natural progression. She draws a paltry 2 feet 8 inches, allowing the owner and his family to explore over 4,000 miles of the bay's shores and never worry about wrecking a prop or rudder in the hundreds of shallows. Nudging her against a soft bottom won't be a problem: Simply use the powerful thrust of the high-volume Hamiltons to kedge her away from the shoal. These jets are like construction-grade food processors—masticating weed and sand and spitting it out the nozzle without damaging the internals.

Although most of the fun of cruising the T55 will be in the running, living aboard at the destination ought to be pure pleasure, as well. *Charmer's* interior is a happy place, filled with the warmth of cherry wood joinerwork, teak-and-tulipwood cabin soles, peaceful fabrics and large open spaces. The rattan armchairs in the saloon give the area the feel of a family room at the summerhouse. Massive windows bathe the saloon in sunlight, and sliding glass doors, curved for effect, open onto the cockpit/patio. Turn on the Mozart and pop the champagne, or watch the flat-screen television that slides from a slot in the entertainment center. Like all good sea boats, the T55 has a stout handrail along the centerline of the overhead in the saloon.

A handful of steps lead down from the saloon to the galley, a U-shaped space on the port side lighted by the windows of the pilothouse/saloon and by electric lights behind a valance above the Corian counters. It's roomy enough to prepare great meals and tight enough to be safe when the boat's negotiating a seaway. A Grunert holding-plate refrigerator and separate Grunert holding-plate freezer take care of the perishable stores.



GARY JOHN NORMAN

RUTH AND REID CAMERON RELAX IN THE COCKPIT OF THEIR HINCKLEY TALARIA 55 IN PALM BEACH (ABOVE). FLAWLESS PANELING AND CABINETRY IMBUE THE MASTER STATEROOM WITH A SENSE OF AT-HOME LIVABILITY (BOTTOM). NOTE THE LARGE WALKAROUND BED.

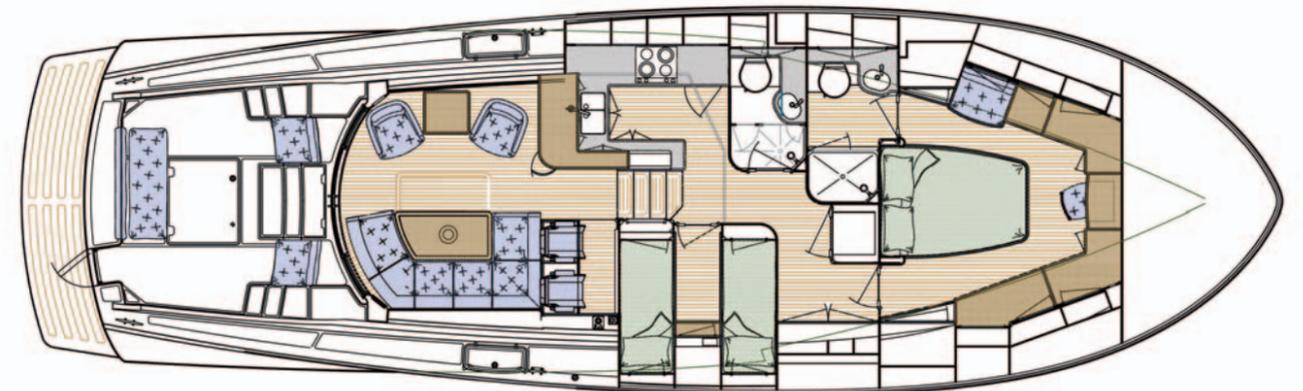




The new Hamilton 403 jets accelerate *Charmer* with an immediacy nearly the equal of propellers. Jets generally are free of vibration, therefore easier to keep quiet; they offer superb control and maneuverability at low speeds, and have the ability to stop on a barnacle. Still, you can order props if you want



BEAUTIFUL AND PRACTICAL: AN OVERHEAD TEAK GRABRAIL LEADS DOWN THE CENTER OF THE SALOON TO HANDRAIL-EQUIPPED STEPS, MAKING IT SAFE AND PLEASANT TO MOVE UP AND DOWN THE STAIRS TO THE LOWER DECK (LEFT). HUGE LOCKERS ON EACH SIDE OF THE MASSIVE MASTER STATEROOM ACCOMMODATE A WIDE ARRAY OF CLOTHING AND GEAR (RIGHT).



My favorite space is opposite the galley—a cozy office (in lieu of the standard guest stateroom) that converts to a double stateroom with upper and lower berths. Natural light from a hatch above the desk and two portlights on the side make it an appealing place; only a solid-fuel fireplace is missing. *Charmer's* single most intriguing feature belowdecks is the pocket door that closes off the office/stateroom. It slides forward and wraps around the corner and partway into the bulkhead that separates the cabin from the passageway to the master stateroom. Hinckley made the door by laminating paper-thin cherry veneer over fabric. It works as smoothly as you please.

The master stateroom in the bow has

LOA: 55'3"
LWL: 51'0"
Beam: 17'9"
Draft: 2'11"
Water: 200 gal.
Fuel: 1,000 gal.
Range: 411 mi.
Displ.: 53,700
Engines: 2x Caterpillar 3406E @ 800 hp each
Gears: ZF 325
Drives: Hamilton 403 Waterjets
Generator: 1x Westerbeke 15 kW
Holding Tank: 100 gal.
Base Price: \$2,071,000

home written in every nook and cranny. A queen-size berth sits on the centerline, its headboard nestled into a shallow alcove at the after end of the cabin. The space above the headboard and between a pair of reading lights is perfect for a painting or a photo of the family. Huge lockers on each side of the master have all the hanging space a prudent cruising couple is likely to ever need. Everywhere I looked, I saw drawers, deep near the settee on each side and shallower toward the forward-most bulkhead. A desk/vanity spans the space between the cabinets, and a flat-screen television lives in the bulkhead over it. The entire space, from the moment you enter the saloon until you stand before the vanity in the master stateroom, simply seems right. I could live there very happily.

I was sad to leave the T55. Its combination of warm, comfortable and practical interior and buttoned-down performance ought to keep her owners enthralled for many years to come. □

Contact: *The Hinckley Company*, (207) 244-5531; www.hinckley-yachts.com. Reader Service # 153.