

THE RANGER TUG R-25

A FUEL-SIPPING, COMFORTABLE-LIVING 25-FOOT MINI-TRAWLER

By Gary Kramer

A REAL-LIFE BOAT TEST OF A TRAVELING BOAT FOR TODAY

Have you got boat-trip fever but flinch every time you figure fuel costs? Do you wish you could explore new waterways that are a long way from your homeport?

If you fit either description, there is a new girl on the boating block you should take a look at. The Ranger Tug R-25 is a roomy, semi-planing, 25-foot trailerable trawler powered by a fuel-sipping single diesel. With an 8 1/2-foot beam, a 26-inch draft and a prop protected by the keel, it can be taken almost anywhere and keep you warm, dry and comfortable in the process.

True traveling boaters require different elements in a vessel than people whose boating centers around recreational lounging, entertaining and occasional light cruises. The designer of the Ranger Tug incorporated as many of those traveling requirements as possible in a 25-foot package.

The boat was known for a short time as a C-Ranger Tug but is now simply a Ranger Tug, built by the company of that name. The workers there have been building sturdy boats in the Northwest since 1958.

The boat was designed by Dave Livingston, who justifiably claims "that more people have owned a boat that he built than any other designer" during his career with Reinell, Bayliner, Regal and Wellcraft. He tapped his years



PHOTOS BY AUTHOR

of experience to pack as much room and livability in this boat as possible.

The boat looks like a mini-tug with its high bow, multi-windowed and extended pilot house-cabin and a rear cockpit. A stepped cabin roof sports a traditional tug stack, dual horns and an optional, fold-down mast able to hold electronic equipment. With the mast upright, the boat's height is 12 feet but it drops to 7 1/2 feet when the mast is locked in the lowered position for bridge clearance or towing.

That stepped roof also creates whopping 7 1/2 feet of head room at the helm, 7 feet in the forward cabin, and a full 6 1/2 feet in the aft section of cabin and in the head. Even part of the V-berth has 5 feet, 10 inches of headroom, and there's greater height by the helm. The cabin soles are teak and holly.

Access to the cabin is through a tinted Diamond Sea Glaze door in the center of the cockpit. The head sits to starboard and has an overhead hatch and a brass porthole for light and ventilation. It also has a shower and lots of teak woodwork coated with polyurethane. The finish means that woodwork maintenance is simply a matter of wiping it down.

Across from the head is a unique cuddy storage area open

to the ceiling in the rear. The storage area has foot room extending almost seven feet under the portside dinette. The dinette also converts to a sleeping area and the forward bench seat flips to either serve as dinette seating or as a forward-facing passenger seat. The optional 16,000 BTU air conditioner would be mounted under that seat.

Forward of the head is the galley area with a stove, sink and under counter AC/DC refrigerator. Six storage compartments with teak doors are under the counter. On most boats this size with a center aisle, it is hard for two people to pass. But this boat has a unique step-in notch in the countertop that allows the cook to work and not block the aisle. The stove is also unique, because it can be ordered as a combination diesel stove-heater. When the lid is raised, it is a two burner stove but it becomes a heater when the lid is closed and a blower runs.

Karen Schuler, who sells the boats along with her husband, Ken, at Trawlers Midwest Inc. in Manitowoc, Wis., said they recommend people use a cleaner-burning fuel than diesel in the six-gallon storage tank for the stove. While under way, the boat uses engine heat, like a car, to heat the cabin. The helm seat sits at the front edge of the countertop and folds forward to allow full use of the counter.

The helm station can be ordered with a complete electronics package and a 12-inch screen, or it can just be left with minimum equipment, depending on where the boat will be used. An option Ken recommends as much for its navigational value as for its recreational value, is satellite television. For traveling folks, the ability to watch local weather on TV is a valuable safety addition.

The V-berth is a step down from the helm area, and sitting headroom varies by up to 40 inches. The cushions measure seven feet down the sides and six feet down the middle.

The boat comes standard with a 75-horsepower freshwater-cooled Yanmar diesel, but so far all the boats have been ordered with the optional 110-hp engine. A normal cruising speed of 10 to 12 knots burns about four gallons per hour. On a relatively flat Lake Michigan, Ken cranked the reviewed boat up to just past 18 mph. Cruising range with the 75-gallon fuel tank could vary between 300 to 700 miles, depending on her speed and water conditions.

At seven to eight knots, she handles easily with no wandering like a traditional trawler with a displacement hull. The hull is designed so she transitions to more of a planing boat as her speed increases.

With its full keel and large rudder, Ken was able to spin the boat in just about its own length but she was also equipped with the optional bow and stern thrusters. With those in play, the boat can be turned, walked and maneuvered almost any which way, in almost any wind or current conditions.

Visibility, ventilation and lighting in the boat are superb. There is a wraparound, four-piece windshield and each section has its own wiper. There are six operable screened overhead hatches along with six sliding windows and four traditional brass portholes.

For easy communication while docking, Ken simply opened the helm window, pulled back the screen and stuck his head out to see where he was and watch Karen as she expertly handled the lines. Interior lighting comes from spotlights in the ceiling where there are also red spotlights for running at night.

On the outside, catwalks along the cabin are narrow because interior cabin room has been maximized. But from the cockpit forward, there are handrails all along the cabin side until you reach the bow area that is well protected with high, heavy railings. The standard windlass can be operated from either the helm or with the footpads.



Karen said the thrusters make handling lines easy because she can step out of the cockpit and quickly tie off the stern and then move forward on the deck while Ken holds the bow with the thruster. Another easy option she suggests is to pre-tie a line in the bow, run it alongside the cabin to the cockpit then control and secure it as you move forward on the dock.

The self-draining cockpit has a wash down, rod holders, and a walk-through to the swim platform. There is a storage compartment that sits under what converts to a rear seat with two teak doors under it that open to more storage and access to the rudder hardware. A hatch on the starboard deck conceals the optional 2.5 kW generator and the fuel container for the stove. The port floor storage holds the batteries, which are easy to service. The center hatch opens to service the diesel.

The boat weighs 5,750 pounds and with the optional dual-axle, galvanized trailer, has a total towing weight between 7,500 and 8,500 pounds, depending on how it is optioned. The base price is listed as \$119,937 but Ranger Tugs' vice president of sales and marketing, Jeff Messmer, said most end up selling in the \$140,000 range with the trailer. He has a lot of buyers who have owned boats for some time. They seem to be technically savvy and are either professional or semi-professional people. Many are moving down in the sizes of their boats.

But some of the people still want some of the room, comfort and accommodations in a seaworthy, weather-protected boat like they had in their larger boats. So far, he said, he knows of several owners planning for the Great Loop in the trawler, while another boat is heading for a cruise to Alaska.

Ken said their policy on all the boats they sell at Trawlers Midwest is to encourage buyers to spend two or three days with them so the Schulers can teach the new owners the ins

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and outs of the boat and boat handling. Ken usually shows them how to perform docking and other maneuvers and then sits back and coaches and critiques until the folks are competent and comfortable.

At a time when the June issue of a major boating business magazine said "the recreational marine market is in the midst of its worst downturn since the early 1990s" and dealerships are closing, the Ranger Tug is in an enviable position. Messmer said they "are thrilled with the sales of these boats," that entered the market just last fall and they currently have a six to seven-month backlog of orders.

"We are selling them as fast as we can build them," Messmer said happily.

The Ranger Tug R-25 is probably not the right boat for folks who spend most of their boating time tied to a dock. But those with wanderlust will find it an attractive choice to get where they want and have some room, space and comfort while getting there. 🇺🇸

