



RANGER

R-31 COMMAND BRIDGE

NEW FLAGSHIP ADDS BRIDGE, RETAINS TRAILERABILITY

The Seattle International Boat Show has always been an effective launching pad for any new boat model, and the 2012 show was no exception. The builder of Ranger Tugs, the Livingston family, former builder of the ubiquitous dinghies known up and down the coast, introduced the feature-laden Ranger R-31 to boaters attending the show.

The most obvious difference between the new 31-footer and the rest of the Ranger fleet is the presence of a command bridge on the R-31. Ranger, in keeping with the traditional approach it takes in styling its tugs, has added a nostalgic touch to the command bridge. Traditionally, command bridges

on working tugs were nothing more than a pipe frame with canvas fitted to block wind and spray. The new R-31 uses canvas for the same purpose, but it has an advantage: It easily collapses when the command bridge's frame piping is retracted, to reduce overall height and aid in towing or pass-

ing under a low bridge.

The drop-down command bridge is not the only new and obvious feature on Ranger's largest model yet. One of the problems with the cockpit on any trailerable vessel is its relatively small size, particularly if everyone on board is gathered for happy hour or dinner. Ranger has solved that problem with an elegant simplicity not seen on other vessels in the R-31's market segment. The builder has installed what it calls gull-wing seating in the port and starboard cockpit coamings. These flip seats deploy easily and quickly, and when they're in place they overhang the sides of the vessel. Thanks to the gull-wing seats and a comfortable transom seat, six people can sit in the cockpit and still leave plenty of room for others to move through it. On the foredeck there is another stowable double seat and a table.

The builder of the R-31 has



ABOVE The R-31's interior utilizes every inch of space, while the aft helm station and gull-wing seats make the cockpit highly versatile.

addressed one of the complaints most often leveled against smaller vessels — the lack of outside “social” space when the vessel is at rest. The solutions — a flybridge and gull-wing seating — are simple, intelligent, easily maintained and not costly.

The new R-31 has a husky, broad-shouldered look at the dock. The fiberglass work is excellent — fair with no haze or print-through — which, given the pedigree and experience of this builder, is what I expected.

ON BOARD

Access to the vessel is through a transom gate off the substantial swim step, which is positioned at the right height from the water so it's an easy, safe step across from the dock. This is an important feature on any family vessel. The swim grid itself has a built-in hidden swim ladder and solidly attached D-rings, which allow you to secure a cooler on it.

There's plenty of stowage under the cockpit sole and in side lockers. The tran-

som seat flips forward to provide access to more storage or to service the optional generator. Access to the engine space is through a hydraulically opened forward section of the cockpit sole. The engine space is well organized, and all of the machinery can be accessed easily for servicing. The opening is large enough that the engine could be removed without tearing the cockpit sole apart.

Access to the command bridge is up a set of steps from the port side of the cockpit. The command bridge itself offers excellent visibility, and even though it is retractable, its helm can handle a full set of electronic instruments.

The interior of Ranger's new offering is, in keeping with the rest of the Ranger stable, flooded with natural light, aided by four overhead glass windows and more window glass than fiberglass in the topsides.

The interior layout is fairly standard for this type and size of vessel. To starboard, the galley stretches from the aft deckhouse bulkhead to the rear of the captain's chair, and to port there is a dinette that converts to a berth. The helm station is starboard, forward of the galley, and forward of the dinette is a double-wide companion seat. The solid stainless sink and electric cooktop with an oven are fitted into the solid countertops. There is plenty of storage in cupboards and drawers, and the helm seat hinges forward, so the space under the seat can become part of the galley countertop if the cook needs more counter space. A sliding door at the helm station allows easy access to the foredeck.

To port, under the dinette, is the midship berth, complete with an electric toilet, a reasonable amount of storage and a comfortable queen bed. The electric toilet operates as a day head as well. The en suite master is located in the forepeak and contains an island queen bed, with plenty of storage underneath, a head with an electric toilet, a vanity, plenty of storage and a shower. Headroom is excellent, and there's plenty of natural light.

PERFORMANCE

Ranger's vice president, Jeff Messmer, was at the helm and fired up the 300 hp Volvo D4, which flashed up

immediately, despite the cold start, and ran without clatter or smoke. This four-cylinder, 224-cubic-inch common-rail diesel weighs just more than 1,200 pounds and, because of its relatively high horsepower-to-weight ratio, is appearing in more new boats.

With a touch of the bow and stern thrusters, Messmer moved the boat away from the dock into open water. The R-31 handled and performed very much like the other Rangers, but it was quieter. The main reason for the quiet is that the engine space, because of the hull's extra length, doesn't intrude into the space under the deckhouse sole.

During our entire test, the noise level inside never got high enough that we couldn't talk normally and easily be heard. Visibility from the helm station was good all around, and the helm instrumentation was easy to see. The vessel tracked well and responded smartly to the helm at all speeds. It handled the light chop with no problems, and slamming through our own wake was a non-event, as it should be.

Ever since I heard Ranger was coming out with a command bridge 31-footer, I had been looking forward to testing it from the bridge. You must remember that this vessel is easily towable and weighs only 10,500 pounds. Adding weight up top has to be done carefully, or the vessel can have performance issues. Then you have to con-



➔ SPEC BOX



LOA W/SWIM STEP 35 ft., 2 in.

BEAM 10 ft. DRAFT 2 ft., 4 in.

DRY WEIGHT 10,500 lbs.

FUEL 180 gals. WATER 80 gals.

HOLDING TANK 40 gals.

ENGINE Volvo D4, 300 hp

PRICE (introductory) \$279,937

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Volvo D4 300 hp engine, 50-amp battery charger, 2 bilge pumps, cabin heater, day head w/electric flush toilet, color engine control panel w/full instrumentation, hydraulic engine hatch, 11-gal. hot water tank, 2500-watt inverter, refrigerator in galley and cockpit, salon entertainment center w/19-inch overhead TV/DVD, hydraulic trim tabs, bow and stern thrusters, dual-station VHF radio and more.

OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT

Wireless thruster remote control, solar panel, Garmin navigation package, Onan 5 kw generator w/sound shield, Webasto diesel heater, aft station steering w/electronic controls, air conditioning/reverse-cycle heat in salon and master, AGM battery upgrade, ice-maker in cockpit and more.

BUILDER

RANGER TUGS, Kent, Wash.; (253) 839-5213; rangertugs.com

WEST COAST DEALERS

FARALLONE YACHT SALES, Alameda, Calif.; (510) 523-6730; faralloneyachts.com

FARALLONE YACHT SALES, Newport Beach, Calif.; (949) 610-7190; faralloneyachts.com

PORT BOAT HOUSE, Port Alberni, B.C.; (250) 724-5754; portboathouse.com

RANGER TUGS, Kent, Wash.; (253) 839-5213; rangertugs.com

top. However, it handled very well, with no overt tenderness, even at rest as I moved from side to side. At speed, we threw the helm hard over, and the vessel handled the same as it did when we were at the inside helm station.

Still on the bridge, we brought the vessel to a complete stop, cranked the wheel hard over and, keeping it there, slowly ran the engine up. The R-31 leaned slightly to the outside of the turn and then carved into the turn and maintained that attitude to WOT. Clearly, Ranger engineers have matched the powertrain to a well-designed hull.

Ranger has done an excellent job with its new flagship. The R-31 is fast and comfortable, but it can also cruise at lower, more economical speeds. The builder has addressed many of the issues that owners of small cruisers have been complaining about for years. The boat can cruise two couples for weeks on end, with each having their own private space. It can also easily accommodate 10 people for an evening cruise, without them falling over one another.

The engine in this vessel is also a plus for the builder. With maximum torque at about 2450 rpm and electronic fuel controls, the engine should last a long time. Service points on this engine are easy to reach, which means a boater will likely change filters and check the oil more often than if everything is out of reach.

The entire range has been a success story in the boating field. This latest offering should add to that success. The R-31 is a must-see for people looking for a comfortable coastal cruiser, regardless of which coast they live on. 🍷

TESTER'S OPINION:

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sider the additional weight of boaters using the command bridge.

I fully expected the vessel to be a bit tender and suffer performance issues, especially with Jeff and me up