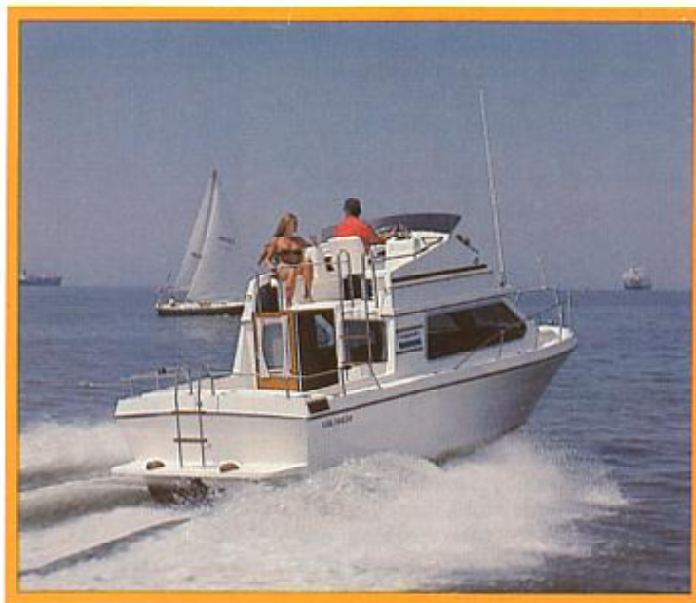


## REVIEWED:

# Commander 26 - cruiser

High standards from a British Columbia power boat manufacturer.

by Peter Vassilopoulos



The Commander 26 cuts a fine wake during a test run in Howe Sound.

Local manufacturers are up to putting out as good a product as some of the more highly respected imports. A top example is the new Commander 26.

The evolution of the Commander is a story in itself but could be summed up in brief reference to her builder, John Maitland. Maitland has been building vessels of this type and dimension for some years, but under certain duress because of the limitations under which he had to work. These included lower than ideal quality and standards in some of the hulls and materials with which he had to work. Now, free of the past inhibitions, Maitland is building his own boat, the way he always wanted to and to the standards he has always wanted.

Of course, in doing so the price between his own complete work and that of previous boats is going to dif-

fer, and at about \$38,000 for a 26 ft boat Maitland had to come up with a lot of value. This value can be seen in the finish, extras and types of materials that have gone into the construction of the Commander 26.

To put it simply and bluntly — I like the Commander 26. And could find literally no cause for adverse comment. At a glance she looks somewhat austere — but this makes for highly acceptable aesthetics to most would-be owners. The model I was shown was equipped with twin Mer-Cruiser 165 hp stern-drive units — probably the most favourable combination and most suitable power — I opened and closed every hatch, drawer, locker and other device which could be removed without sinking the boat. The engine room hatch covering the cockpit floor swung up on its hinges (good quality stainless steel)

and rested solidly against the top of the transom. The guttering to drain off water from the cockpit was smooth and clean with scuppering outlets at the rear. All very neatly affixed and finished. Plenty of access room into the engine compartment allowed standing space between the two black Mercs nestled below. A twin 15 amp 110 volt plug was fitted to the forward bulkhead allowing the use of power tools and/or light inside the engine room. A bus heater was fitted for interior comfort and plumbed to the hot water tank which in turn was plumbed to the power cooling system, again all very neat and readily accessible. The bus heater, incidentally, has a concertina pipe connected to an external air duct which means it blows only clean air from outside the boat into the interior. The cabin duct is located beneath the entrance doorway alongside the battery switch.

The Commander is a lot of boat in a 26. She has a beam of 10 ft 2-in. and her overall length is actually 3-in. short of her title length. But for a 26 she carries a lot of fuel for long range running. Two tanks have a capacity of 130 gal (I guess a range of about 150 miles in a 26 footer of this type is good and I believe her range will be about that).

I went into the main cabin of the Commander 26 and left no finishing unnoticed. Immediately to port through the doorway which opens off the cockpit is the head. Here I found spaciousness in a small area. A through pumping toilet, drained shower basin of moulded fibreglass, a vanity and a plastic washbasin, fitted with hot and cold pressure running



Well laid out interior. Finishing touches include pinrails around hold-alls and louvred teak fore door.

water. The hot was optional and fitted in the test boat. This meant in addition to the 40 gal water capacity about 6 gal in the hot water tank. The pressure hot water is repeated at the sink and galley immediately to starboard, opposite the head. Still in the head, with its very adequate finish and stainless steel curtain rail is a 12 volt courtesy light, a razor outlet and sliding door cabinet for toiletries.

The living room space in the main cabin comprises a dinette for four comfortably to port and helm station to starboard and forward of the galley. The dinette converts to a double bunk suitable for overnighting, and locker space below the bunks is utilized to maximum advantage with very impressively finished cut-outs. Here the manufacturers have taken the trouble to fit either aluminum extrusion mouldings or plastic edging. Inside, the lockers are also finished instead of



**The bridge. Skipper Bruce Smith gets a friendly pat on the shoulder from Debbie.**

being left rough bare fibreglass or ply. All doors, locker covers and panels that open and close have high quality stainless steel hinges and hardware, with emphasis on the use of Perko equipment.

Teak and fabric have been combined very tastefully in the rest of the interior to please most viewers. I believe John Maitland studies boats and yachtsmen very carefully and knows what they want. Curtains as standard, fitted in easy working runners, pin-rails around the chart table (although charts spread out would overlap), seat positioning, leg room, all the best possible effect for the picky, or discerning, yachtsman. I like Mercury products. The controls in the Commander 26 are standard equipment with Mercruiser installations. And the array of instruments on the dash panel is a feast for the eye of one who enjoys plenty of gadgets, "kloks und knobshen."

The quality of finish is repeated in the foc'sle. Cushions fit well. Lockers and drawers are finished immaculately, the compartment is lighted adequately by natural or artificial light, through 12 volt fluorescent DC cour-

tesy lamps or the strong fibreglass hatch, with Perko stainless steel fittings.

The windscreen is comprised of radius windows — I was told. What are radius windows? That was my question and I was pleased to learn that they are windows which are not used in any way to support any part of the structure or superstructure. Also in the type of installation water leaks are entirely eliminated.

Other aspects of the boat's finish I liked included the slatted teak door to the foc'sle, the Bosch wipers on both front windows, the nylon and cotton finished bulkhead and wall material, the choice of carpeting and curtains throughout and the use of fluorescent lighting throughout.

The bridge is large for a 26 footer but this is due to her generous beam. Twin sets of fold-down, back-to-back, vinyl-covered seats are mounted either side in the flying bridge with a captain's helm seat directly between and behind the wheel. Mounted dead-centre, the wheel is canted at the right angle for good operational control either seated or standing, giving good handling while docking. Mercruiser controls are all duplicated above and below, except for the ignition system which has press buttons instead of keys at the upper station — a system which reduces water incursion problems.

Stainless steel railings around the bridge are as sturdily fitted as the ones at the bow and around the stern. The ladder to the bridge is of formed stainless steel with teak rungs as is the boarding ladder which sweeps over the transom to the swim grid. Either side of the transom are bait wells (or tackle hatches). These are, like other such components in the boat, heavy and sturdy with robust Perko stainless steel hinges.

I think I have said every good thing possible about a boat, but as I said earlier, I could not find a thing to criticize in this fine 26 foot locally built command bridge cruiser.

Running the boat I was pleased with her performance. She tracked well, felt sturdy and rode comfortably smooth. Noise levels were very low, and all-round visibility was good from both upper and lower helms. Lying dead in the water her roll was by no means excessive even when washed abeam by the ferry wake. And, as one of the crew, Debbie, proved the Commander 26 makes a fine swimming platform. The vessel is handled by Marineland Yacht Sales in Richmond and the test model was made available through Dave Wiens and Bruce Smith. It is available with a variety of engine options including diesel. 