



BUILDER
Chris-Craft

MODEL
Commander

L.O.A.
60' 10"

BEAM
18'

DRAFT
4'7"

HULL MATERIAL
Fiberglass

POWER
TWIN 478-hp GM 12v-71 diesels

FUEL CAPACITY
1000 gallons

PRICE
\$300,000 (more or less)

Jim Martenhoff on

CHRIS-CRAFT'S \$300,000 COMMANDER

ILLUSTRATION BY DENNIS LUCZAK



PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

□ I frankly approached evaluating the 60-foot Commander with diffidence. I was awed, I suspect, by her price tag. But after a session with Chris-Craft Engineering Coordinator Jim Poe the feeling vanished and I felt as if I had slipped into a pair of comfortable shoes. The truth is, she's just a damn big boat.

I say that as a compliment. While she is 60'10" down her carpeted length, 18' on the beam and has three staterooms plus crew quarters, she is nevertheless remarkably easy to handle. A competent couple can skipper the yacht without paid hands. Imposing twin screws insure excel-

Continued on next page

Main salon houses AC panel, color TV, stereo tape player

Owner's stateroom has dresser, vanity, choice of beds

Gauges at helm are neatly divided overhead and forward

CHRIS-CRAFT COMMANDER

Continued

lent maneuverability. The 4'7" draft and 73,000-pound gross weight help offset windage and with practice you can dock her on a dime . . . well, a dollar. Her electrical and mechanical systems are—once they've been explained—not complex and easily maintained. The Commander, in short, is packed with marvelous meaningful systems and touches which show you how good a boat can be when price isn't breathing down your neck! Let's take a close look. Prices listed for optional items include installation and in most cases all the available accessories.

THE DECK DEPARTMENT. Decks are fiberglass but look so much like teak you try to dig a fingernail in to tell. Deck hardware is of the highest quality and amply dimensioned. Heavy duty bitts are located on the quarters and a spaced pair of substantial cleats are positioned on each side for spring lines. The laminated teak samson post on the bow extends down to the keelson for strength.

All hardware, of course, is through-bolted, but the rail stanchions especially are a safety-bug's delight: as Poe explains it, the hull topsides turn in and overlap the deck mold. In joining them, a wood "sheer shelf" is put beneath the lap and a (genuine) teak cap rail goes on top. Deck hardware bolts go through the entire join.

Forward a pair of Danforth anchors—40 (optional, \$52) and 65 pounds—is chocked down, a deck pipe leading the rode of the 65 to the locker below. An optional electric Ideal windlass (\$1180) provides 1000 pounds of muscle for weighing anchor. Two dunnage lockers are set flush in the forward deck, one on

each side, and another pair of lockers are beneath the beamy bow seat forward of the cabin. The four lockers, fitted with gutters and drains to remain dry, stow all the berthing gear you're apt to want hard by. A raw water hose outlet (optional, \$295) on the bulwark cap forward, for swabbing decks, saves the fresh water for more important things.

ACCESS AND ENTRY. The aft deck is separated from the side decks by aluminum doors fitted with high sills to stop water. The doors, held closed by their latches only, could use more security against heavy going.

The deck hatch atop the crew's head dogs down watertight. Four folding steps in this head permit the crew to make use of the hatch as a private entry or emergency exit.

Side windows in salon and bridge are large and fitted with gutters and drains so water won't accumulate in the window channels.

The windshield's panels are secured in gasketing, should remain leak-proof for a long time. Panels can be easily removed for repair or replacement. Only the center panel is power-operated (32v), with a button-switch at the helm. The lock on the port windshield panel is hard to reach without something like a boat hook.

All portlights below can be dogged down watertight. All companionways are easy to negotiate. The companionway from salon to dinette can be closed for privacy—both of the owner's party and the crew.

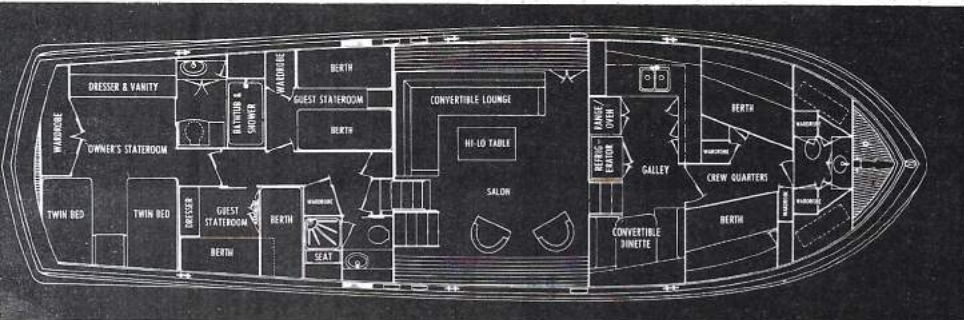
There is laudable emphasis on safety features throughout the Commander. One such item is the "escape hatch" in the owner's stateroom aft, above the hanging locker; as in the head forward, folding steps make access easy.

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1

1 Beamy aft deck with optional bar, directly abaft pilothouse. **2** Optional radar tucks into one of hideaway compartments at helm. **3** Salon (looking aft) is carpeted, air-conditioned. **4** Engine room has standing headroom, aluminum walkway. **5** Color TV and 8-track stereo tape deck in salon can be concealed with slide-down doors. **6** Galley has dishwasher, large refrigerator, garbage disposal unit in sink. **7** Dinette converts to sleep two; note silverware drawer in table. **8** Deck looks like teak, is easier-to-tend fiberglass. . . .





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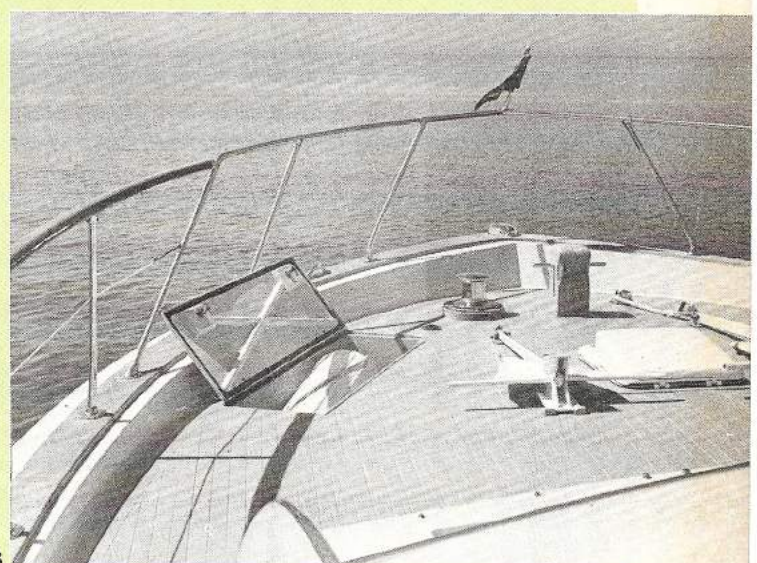


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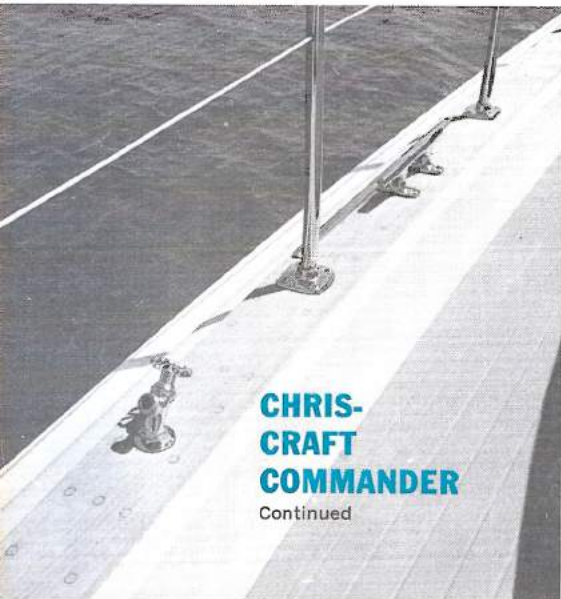


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Deck hardware is sturdy, well secured

THE BRIDGE. If there's any one thing that gives you the feeling of being in command, it's standing at the helm—on a teak platform apt to keep your callouses content—handling the large, handsome wheel. Or sitting, if you prefer, on Pompanette's comfortable, adjustable helmsman's seat.

Controls are handy, easy to reach; visibility is excellent except, on occasion, aft—about which more later. Built-in lockers on both sides of the helm make a handsome, handy console, accommodate a dazzling array of electronic gear and include, to port, a retractable chart board. Navigational instruments can be kept in a drawer under the companion seat tucked in the aft port corner of the pilothouse.

This electronic gear, of course, is not standard. Chris-Craft elected to rig this model with a 115-v AC Decca 101 radar (\$4965), a 32-v Bendix Model 14 auto-pilot (\$1700), and these additional items, all by Raytheon: a 32-v model 358-A automatic direction finder (\$2280); a Ray-42 32-v, 77-watt VHF-FM radiotelephone (\$1455); a 32-v Ray 1130 150-watt medium frequency radiotelephone (\$1595); a 32-v Ray 725B depth recorder/indicator (\$400), and a 32-v model 220 Loud-hailer (\$310). You'd choose your own equipment, of course, but you'd have no problem finding precisely the right place to put it.

There's a chart locker to starboard and the pilothouse is air-conditioned with one of the five 115-v air-conditioners installed at the factory as standard equipment. With heat reverse cycle, at that.

ACCOMMODATION AND STOWAGE. The 60-footer sleeps 12: six in the three staterooms, two in the crew quarters, two on the convertible dinette and two more on an L-shape convertible lounge in the main salon.

The owner's stateroom has two twin beds (with upholstered headboards) on the yacht evaluated but you can specify double or king. The hanging locker here is huge by boating standards, and additional stowage has been built into every accessible cranny, even behind the vanity mirror with its ring of lights. The owner's head includes a full-size bathtub with combination shower, and a linen locker.

The starboard guest stateroom, the smallest, has built-in upper and lower berths at right angles to each other; its hanging locker is adequate and, like all the wardrobes, is fitted with a "damp-chaser" to reduce humidity. The port stateroom has twin beds.

The passageway between the staterooms is fitted with glow lights at the baseboards to guide you at night. Forward of the starboard stateroom is another head, for guests.

The salon, a few steps up, is large enough to accommodate a sizable cocktail party or a small bar mitzvah. There's more stowage space behind the sliding-door paneling here port and starboard. By this time I was sure Chris had appointed a designer-in-charge-of-adequate-stowage-space, without whom nary a boat has enough.

Crew quarters—next after the galley/dinette area—houses a pair of side berths with drawer stowage beneath, two hanging lockers and a fancy, on-the-bias drawer built into an oddly shaped corner suitable for nothing else. There's stowage below deck, too. Well, you see what I mean about adequate places to put things, even allowing for boat size.

THE ELECTRICAL SYSTEM. It appears complex but is basically simple. Twin battery banks charged by the engine generators supply 32 volts to a secondary service system,

primarily for lights. The DC control panel is in the pilothouse, next to a DC-powered set of alarms (optional, \$690) that warn, both in the bridge and in the owner's cabin, of high water or fire and tell you where on the yacht to look. The DC panel tells both battery condition and charging rate; and all circuits are protected by labeled circuit breakers. A gauge here shows fuel level.

The 110/230-v AC control panel is in the salon, includes transfer switches to select shore power or one of the two 15-KW Kohler generators (115/230-v AC; 32-v start) below. The Kohlers are fitted with optional "hush covers" (\$670) as well as mufflers, and the salon deck is soundproofed. There's no vibration at all and only a whisper when a lightplant's running. Switches for the lightplants are at three places: bridge, galley and on the plants. Also on the AC panel are four main circuit breakers, a bank of 15/20-amp breakers, and heavy duty 30-amp breakers—all labeled. There are 12 spares on the main panel, six on the heavy duty side. This means you can add things without having to do major rewiring. Both the AC and DC panels hinge up for access to the wiring in back.

All wiring had been strung in advance, in harnesses, with individual wires identified before installation. Where possible, wiring was routed through PVC tubing to avoid chafing. Light fixtures served by the 32-v and the 110-v systems are separate; there are no combination fixtures with double switches. If a unit's out you know which circuit's involved. Indirect fluorescent lighting in the salon is rheostat-controlled; so are the instrument lights at the helm.

As for number of lights and electric outlets, there are too many to count. An AC outlet's everywhere you look.

NAVIGATION LIGHTS. Trying to find a major flaw in the Commander had by now become a challenge. I made slight headway when I studied the navigation lights—all, I am delighted to note, of excellent quality. Lighting is under International Rules: a 12-point sternlight, a 20-pointer on the raked mast more than the required 9 feet above the gunwales, a separate 32-point anchor

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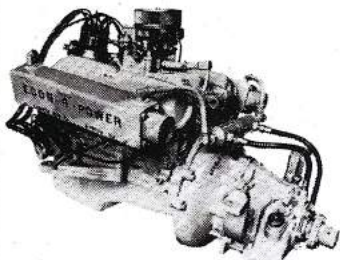
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light above that, and sidelights. But the sidelights are set below the sheer in recessed housings and angled down slightly. As readers of this series know, I fail to see the wisdom of this. Only because they are large and of good quality am I willing to admit they may be visible for the minimum one mile required. Angling the beam down, however, obviously reduces range of visibility vertically as well. These sidelights may not be visible from the bridge of a large commercial vessel less than a mile away. It is an installation mistake I find on many boats, all the more frustrating in that a simple shim is all that's needed to set it right.

GALLEY AND DINETTE. Even this only-sometime-chef flipped over the galley, fit for the preparation of the most scrumptious meal you can conjure! Everything is electric, including an automatic exhaust fan. The 115-v Admiral refrigerator-freezer with automatic ice cube maker adjoins the Magic Chef 115/220-v four-burner range and oven which is near a G.E. dishwasher which is near the G.E. food disposal in the stainless steel double sink. An optional G.E. combination washer-dryer (\$490; a Maytag dryer is standard) is a few steps away, beneath the starboard berth in the crew quarters. Except where I've noted otherwise, all of this, mind you, is standard equipment—as are the two G.E. color TV sets and the Masterwork 8-track stereo tape deck with four speakers aboard. There's good reason: too often what the buyer adds adversely affects running trim. As Poe put it, "A man simply can't make a dog of this boat."

The galley offers plenty of counter space and electric outlets for appliances. A stainless steel trash bin is installed in the galley flooring.

Locker space exceeds any apartment kitchen I've seen; in addition, there's an *enormous* galley locker in the hold, which you reach via a flush hatch to starboard.

The dinette accommodates four people comfortably.

The galley-dinette is a longish hike from the main deck aft where you'd be inclined to sip your coffee mornings or cocktails later on. This suggests that the optional aft deck bar (\$3585, including two bar stools) is highly desirable for more than the handiness of its sun-over-the-yardarm inventory. It makes a delightful breakfast headquarters: just plug in the percolator and toaster.

THE WATER SYSTEM. Fresh-water Monel tank capacity is 300 gallons. Heat exchangers on the engines provide hot water when underway as do the generators when moored. With the yacht hooked up to shore power, a thermostatically controlled electric immersion heater—selector switch is on the galley panel—kicks in on demand.

A pressure regulator in the engine room reduces the pressure of shore supply water, usually 40 or more pounds, to the 20 pounds of the ship's system. A bypass valve permits the boat's tanks to fill themselves after you've hooked up to the dock supply, which beats nursing a hose into a seemingly bottomless tank.

There's a fresh water hose in the spacious engine room for washing down the engines and the aluminum floors.

PROPULSION. A pair of 12V-71N GM diesels deliver 478 shaft hp each out of 852 cubes at 2300 rpm. Each

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weighs close to 5000 pounds. Gearing is 2:1 reduction to the four-bladed Federal Equi-Quad 30x28 wheels. The engines are fresh-water cooled via a heat exchanger and the raw water sea strainers on the system are well above the waterline so that should a sight glass break, there's no need to dive for the seacock.

Pickle iron fuel tanks, located below the guest state-rooms, hold 1080 gallons; weight of a full fuel load plus the tanks is four tons. Fuel is filtered before reaching the engines, and the fuel return line is cooled so no guest is apt to swelter in his quarters.

Somewhat slyly, since I was now pointedly hunting for a mistake in what is clearly a well-engineered boat, I asked Poe the question I held in reserve: "How do you get an engine out?" Builders sometime make no allowance for it and the owner must pay handsomely to tear the boat apart. Poe beamed and I knew I'd lost again. "There's a fidley hatch marked out on the cabin top," he said. Molded-in grooves on the top of the salon show exactly where to cut. "Put a power saw on it and she's open in minutes," Poe said. "Then lift the engine straight out with a crane." A little cosmetic fiberglass work will restore the cabin top neatly. It is another piece of convincing evidence of the experience and care that went into the Commander.

You reach the insulated engine room from the dinette area. The steps to the salon are hinged; lift and hang them by a strap to the overhead. You won't have to visit the engine room much, since so many controls are outside, but when you do you'll appreciate the standing headroom between the engines. The engine room is protected by an optional (\$905) automatic CO₂ fire extinguisher system.

Wrapping up the mechanical system, power steering is by Morse. To minimize the chances of failure, pumps supplying the system are duplicated on each engine and cross-linked. Controls operate smoothly. Instrumentation at the helm is grouped cleverly with tachs just forward of the wheel and in front of a 5-inch Danforth-White compass, and other important gauges—water temperature, oil pressure, trim tab position indicators among them—mounted overhead and slanted down just enough to be read easily. Trim tab control buttons are just to starboard of the wheel as is the compartment housing the radar.

There are two more notably nice touches in this system. One is the air shut-offs for emergencies. Diesels, which have no ignition system, have been known to "run away," which is to say, not shut off, sometimes winding up to tremendous rpm. But they can't overrun the Commander's governors: the boat has been wheeled to hold rpm below the engine redline. And if the engines won't shut down, the skipper can drop a pair of emergency butterfly valves in front of the air intakes to "starve" the engines shut. (It takes two men to reset the valves but that's peanuts for their value if needed.)

The second thing is the alarm bypass on the starters. A bell sounds when oil pressure is less than the minimum-recommended, which it always is when engines are started. Hence the bell would go off every time you got underway, jarring the sleepers aboard and your neighbors in the

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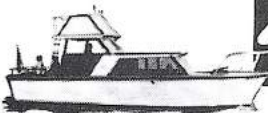


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marina. To avoid this, you simply depress a cut-off button which stops the bell while you start the engines. Good thinking.

PERFORMANCE. The huge, heavy hull maneuvers beautifully, as I have said, thanks in part to her heavy displacement and deep draft. Even with her wide beam, she works easily at pierside. At any number of turns up to about 1500 rpm, she handles well, depositing no great wake despite her bulk, and remains easy to steer. At 1600 rpm, her speed is 11 knots. Above this speed, some difficulties become evident. For one thing, you tend to over-steer. It took me about a minute to steady her on a compass course and after that I had to work to hold her within five degrees. Moreover, while visibility forward and to a point just abaft the beam is excellent at all speeds, you lose it astern as the bow rises. I had to stoop down, way down, to see the horizon aft. Granted, many yachts of these dimensions with an enclosed helm forward have little or no visibility aft, and granted, you have right-of-way over anyone coming up astern, it is in these days of high-performance speedsters desirable nevertheless to see all quadrants.

At cruising speed, or about 2100 rpm, at which turns she's making 16 knots, this visibility thing bothered me. It continued at full speed, which I timed at 18 knots on the measured mile—one tach reading 2375, the other 2410.

One other problem to note: if you put the helm hard over at high speed, you can induce a roll.

The Commander's a pretty fast boat for her size and weight. Those 18 knots translate into almost 21 statute mph. And the owner who cruises in protected waterways can't run at those speeds often enough to justify the extra work it takes at the throttles, since he'd be slowing down every few hundred yards to pass other craft. But at cruising speed, she's an angel in all respects.

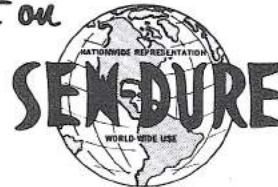
When I had finished the on-board examination and stuffed a fat, filled notebook back into my pocket, Jim Poe broke into an expansive grin.

"Well," he said, "\$30,000 down will hold her for you."

I assured him I was interested. "But could I put a down payment on the down payment?"

While the big Chris may, then, be out of my class, I've boarded quite a few large yachts in the years I've been doing this sort of writing and she's one of the best. □

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