

Reader
Tested:
REGAL 53

New and Improved

TECHNOLOGICALLY SPEAKING, THE REGAL 53 SPORT COUPE IS NOT JUST AHEAD OF THE CURVE. SHE'S BEYOND IT.

BY CAPT. BILL PIKE, AND *POWER & MOTORYACHT*
READERS CAROL AND ROBERT BRATHUNE



ROBERT HOLLAND

You may recall that late last year Carol and Robert Brathune of Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, helped us out with our very first *Power & Motoryacht* Reader Panel Boat Test ("Born to Run, And Run, And Run," November 2013), a venture that featured my own input as well as theirs, once we'd all sea trialed a Garcia Trawler 54, just prior to her return passage to France, across the mighty Atlantic Ocean. The idea behind the combined effort, of course, was to complement a professional boat tester's observations and opinions with those that might more closely align with a boat-owning reader's point of view.

Not long after the test report on the Garcia hit the streets Robert contacted me. He and his wife had really enjoyed being boat testers for a day, he said, and they were wondering whether *Power & Motoryacht* might perhaps be interested in having them check out the new Regal 53 Sport Coupe. The 53, he continued, was at least somewhat derivative of the Regal 5260 he and his wife had owned since 2008 and would debut at an upcoming boat show. "This is really going to be a gorgeous Regal," he added, "I mean really."

Logistics proved a bit problematic at first but eventually I managed to get the two Brathunes onboard the new Regal 53 Sport Coupe at Ocean Club Port Canaveral Marina in Port Canaveral, Florida. Conditions were relatively mild on test day, with 2- to 4-foot seas in the coastal Atlantic and a sparkling winter sun beaming down. Regal's Frank Stoeber joined us as skipper of record and photographer/videographer Robert Holland came along to document the event.

Robert Brathune: Man Cave Redux

My wife and I have owned two Regal Express Cruisers and currently own a Regal 5260 which is the predecessor to the 53 Sport Coupe. We were especially pleased to join *Power & Motoryacht* in reviewing this latest model from Regal, since my wife and I have participated in several Regal owners forums where feedback based upon our boating experience was solicited. The Regal 53 Sport Coupe is a product of Regal's evolutionary approach to boat design: create a boating platform based upon feedback from owners of previous models to enhance the boating experience.

I'm sure you'll agree that it's nice to have a totally enclosed cockpit that has the benefit of air conditioning, allowing the persons inside to be free of the elements while cruising. But of course, this sort of thing is



Pike and Brathune in the engine room. Note the tightly fit sound-attenuating foam panels—they explain the low sound levels in our test data (right).



LOA: 53'0"
BEAM: 15'4"
DRAFT: 3'10"
DISPL.: 36,000 lb. (dry)
FUEL: 450 gal.
WATER: 125 gal.
TEST POWER: 2/550-hp Cummins QSB6.7 diesel inboards w/ Zeus pods
TRANSMISSION: Cummins Zeus 3800/ 1.39:1 gear ratio
PROPELLERS: T-11
OPTIONAL POWER: none
GENERATOR: 11.5-kW Westerbeke
BASE PRICE: \$1,335,000 (or \$949,000 if purchased via Regal's pre-production program)

NOTEWORTHY OPTIONS: Seakeeper gyro stabilizer (\$115,000); SureShade awning (\$9,050); twin-bunk third stateroom (\$10,150); RIB dinghy with electric outboard (\$9,995).

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	RANGE	dB(A)
600	4.3	0.8	2,348	62
1000	7.0	3.4	839	62
1500	9.1	9.1	406	66
2000	11.0	22.4	200	69
2500	17.0	33.3	207	69
3000	26.3	47.2	226	71
3360	30.8	56.4	221	71

TEST CONDITIONS: Air temperature: 77°F; humidity 97%; wind: 10-12 knots; seas: 2-4'; load: 150 gal. fuel, 30 gal. water, 5 persons, 1,400 lb. gear. Speeds are two-way averages measured w/ Garmin GPS sensor. GPH estimates via Volvo Penta monitor. Range based on 90% of advertised fuel capacity. Sound levels measured at upper helm: 65dB(A) is the level of normal conversation.



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Making sound-level measurements at our Regal's helm was facilitated by Brathune (with clipboard). The two cushy helm chairs shown here are adjustable "six ways from Sunday," according to Stoeber (far right). The man was not exaggerating.

abhorrent to those folks who desire to be one with nature and the watery environment, a penchant that serves as the basis for many an individual's love of boating. Luckily, the 53 SC offers a compromise on this front, since it incorporates an outside seating area which can be either separated from the cockpit with a very efficient glass and stainless-steel enclosure or incorporated into the cockpit area with the opening of a sturdy sliding glass door and the touch of a button that hydraulically lowers an aft glass wall. The effect is to create a very large seating and entertaining area that offers a great deal of flexibility. The electrically deployed SureShade awning over the aft outside seating area is a nice touch and again offers flexibility to suit the tastes of sun and non-sun worshippers alike.

My wife calls the engine room on our boat my "man cave." The 53 SC has perhaps the largest and best laid out "man cave" I have ever experienced on a boat of this size. The rear hatch lifts up high to allow entry without effort and a very tall man can stand up between the main engines. The placement of batteries, filters, fluid-fill ports, and dipsticks was certainly engineered by people who understand an owner's desire to maintain his boat with ease and comfort.

I was very impressed by the presence in the engine room of a Charles Industries IsoBoost50 which is an isolation transformer that senses dock voltage and automatically boosts it by up to 15 percent to keep voltages at a minimum of 110 and 220 volts respectively. The prevalence of so-called "brown power" at many marinas these days is astounding and the long-term benefit of reliable power in maintaining all the electric motors on a boat is significant. I was also very impressed by the presence of a seachest that provides sea water to the four air-conditioning systems and generator, thereby eliminating numerous through-hull fittings. The sea chest is also self-macerating, meaning it macerates shells, sea grass, and sea organisms ingested by the system either on demand or on a timed basis. Also in the engine room were



Glendinning level-winders for both the power cord and water hose—they make preparations for getting underway much easier.

When I took the helm of the 53 SC, it was my first experience with the Cummins Zeus Pod Drive system. I found Zeus to be very easy and smooth to operate, much like my experience with the Volvo IPS on my own boat. The Skyhook feature which holds the boat's orientation and GPS position automatically is a much-desired feature for any captain that has had a significant wait for a bridge to open. The boat is extremely quiet throughout the cruising range and the normal cruise speed at approximately 80 percent of engine load resulted in a respectable 26-knot speed, as well as some fuel-consumption numbers that were downright stingy.

Regal has done an excellent job of integrating form and function into this latest offering. The 53 Sport Coupe is nimble and efficient, comfortable and seaworthy. Whether you are hosting a Super Bowl party onboard or doing some serious offshore cruising, she'll allow you to do it safely and in style.

Carol Brathune: The Lady's Take on Layout

What's most impressive to me, at least for a boat of the 53's size, is the immensity of the full-beam master stateroom with its "Olympic-

sized" walkaround queen bed. My husband tells me that this happy situation is made possible by an increase in usable floor space produced by installing the Zeus steerable pod propulsion system. The head and shower in the master suite are split, meaning they are separated on opposite ends of the aft bulkhead. Both Robert and I find this sort of thing to be a real advantage, as I can shower and be doing my hair and makeup while he is showering. Moreover, on both the 5260 and the 53, there is good storage with both hanging and drawer-type space and there is a washer/dryer (which is optional on the 53 I believe) in a master closet which I use on our boat constantly.

The 53's galley, just forward of the master, has a residential-style Sub-Zero refrigerator with two freezer drawers that operate on 120-volt or 12-volt power. The extra cold storage here is going to really be appreciated when an owner wants to entertain or stay aboard for any length of time. There is a big convection microwave oven too, and an in-counter stovetop hidden under a granite insert. Storage in the galley is plentiful with a variety of cabinets, above the settee, in the dinette, and in two separate underfloor storage areas.

I found the starboard-side settee in the saloon to be very comfortable. It is perfectly positioned for watching the flatscreen TV and there is a foldout bed under the cushions, nice for overnight guests. Natural light



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The brightness of Carol Brathunes "upper-deck living room" (left) is matched by the brightness of the lower saloon (top and above) with its huge windows, skylights, and array of top-shelf galley appliances.

pours into the lower saloon through windows that are absolutely huge and there are overhead skylights that add to the belowdecks brightness.

I'd say that living for extended periods onboard the new 53 would be very comfortable. The dayhead (with shower), just off the lower salon, has its own door as well as a door that communicates with the forward VIP suite. It has good stowage and a push-button marine head that even your non-boater guests can operate. The VIP suite itself is as large as many master suites on similar-sized boats. There is a queen bed and a single bunk above that is ideal for kids or guests that don't want to share the queen bed.

As with most Regals, many of the interior appointments on the 53 SC are customized to the specifications of the owner. Furniture options, flooring in a variety of woods, countertop materials from Corian to granite, cabinet colors and materials, and all the soft goods from the vinyls that are used for seating areas to the fabrics that go into the bedspreads and pillows in the staterooms are chosen by the owner during the construction process. This customizes an interior nicely.

A very outdoorsy, upper-deck living room includes the helm area topside, the cockpit, and exterior seating aft. A 50-inch flatscreen TV emerges and disappears into a counter area with an under-counter refrigerator/ice maker and wine steward below. Opposite is a wraparound



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Joystick maneuvering's fun! Carol Brathune pulls into a fuel dock while the author (standing) and Regal's Frank Stoeber look confidently on.

seating area with a table. Passengers can relax here in real comfort and still be socially connected with the captain at the helm, whether the boat is underway or everybody's watching a much-anticipated football game. The entire area can be enjoyed in complete air-conditioned comfort or opened up to the tropical breezes depending upon conditions.

As a first mate on our boat, I really appreciated the obvious thought that Regal put into the sidedecks leading forward. They've got strategically placed handrails all along the way, thereby making crewmembers feel much safer when deploying fenders or going forward to drop anchor.

At the urging of Capt. Bill Pike, I took the helm of the boat to try my hand at using the Cummins Zeus joystick-docking system. Truthfully, this is not something I have wanted to do on our own boat. Nevertheless, I was very impressed at how easy and intuitive it is to make the boat respond to the movements of the joystick. Next time it's raining I think I will send my husband out to tend the lines!

Capt. Bill Pike: You Go Girl!

I did a little maneuvering with the Cummins Zeus joystick myself and came away just as impressed as Carol was. Over the years I've been able to check out a multitude of joystick-type propulsion systems (from Cummins, Volvo Penta, ZF, and Twin Disc among others) and have come away with one hard-and-fast conclusion—the efficacy of a given system depends to a great extent upon how carefully and precisely it is integrated into the design parameters of a given boat. Are the engines too far forward to guarantee practical running attitudes? Or too far astern? What kind of deadrise are we talkin'? Will excessively splayed pods produce dicey angles of heel in a hard-over turn? And what about the physical/digital linkage between the joystick itself and the transmissions that govern the pods? Is maneuvering smooth, or is it herky-jerky, with oodles of turbulence around the boat even during comparatively mild-mannered maneuvers?

These questions and others were on my mind as I spun the 53 around within her own length in Port Canaveral Channel and then walked her rather robustly sideways, first into and then away from a bespoke spot along a local fuel dock. "This system is tweaked to the nines," I chortled at one point, "I don't think I've handled a smoother

setup. And as long as you go with subtlety and steadiness when tilting and rotating the stick, there's seemingly no turbulence at all."

Answers to some of my other questions came as soon as we ventured offshore. For starters, the running attitudes I measured throughout the rpm range were civilized, with a maximum of six degrees coming out of the hole. Otherwise, via both the auto-tab feature built into the Zeus pods and an automatic trim tab control system from Lenco, the 53 kept her nose down quite nicely, engendering sightlines that were adequate throughout the rpm range. Hardover turns, which seemed to produce a tactical diameter of approximately three boat lengths by my estimation, were exciting but exhibited not a hint of excessive heel or stern slide. And the speed? A wide-open velocity of almost 31 knots is pretty darn rousing and undoubtedly owes at least some of its verve to the vessel's comparatively lightweight 36,000-pound dry displacement.

I feel duty-bound to report on two other standout features of the Regal 53 Sport Coupe. First up is the optional Seakeeper gyro stabilizer, strategically located on or very near the boat's center of buoyancy. To test its effectiveness we pulled our engines into neutral at the mouth of Port Canaveral Channel while laying abeam in some 4-foot swells coming in off the ocean. Wow—with the Seakeeper engaged, the 53 virtually refused to roll, remaining almost as steady as the sidewalks at the cruise ship terminal ashore. With the Seakeeper off the case, however, the roll soon became quite pronounced. Indeed, it eventually became so pronounced that a wide stance was called for onboard, as well as a solid handhold overhead.

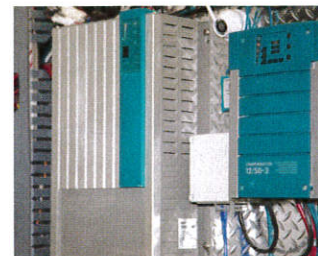
The second feature I need to mention encompasses a range of highly useful products Regal has installed onboard the 53, many of them standard. While I address a few of the more significant items separately (see "Better Boat: Tops in Technology," opposite), there's one thing that's true about the whole. Not only does it represent some of the best marine engineering on the recreational market today, it also clearly illustrates Regal's long-standing, hands-on engagement with powerboating. The Regal 53 Sport Coupe is not just a highly technological boat, she's also a highly practical one as well. □

Regal Marine Industries, 407-851-4360; www.regalboats.com

► See more photos of the Regal 53 Sport Coupe and video of our test @ www.pmymag.com.

Better Boat: Tops In Technology

In addition to the stylistically modern textures and finishes onboard the Regal 53 Sport Coupe, there are several specific items that take the boat to the cutting edge, technologically speaking. Below are photos of a few of these items, each with a brief reprise of the item's capabilities:



Our test boat was equipped with a top-shelf Mastervolt MASS Combi 12-2500-100 inverter/charger. In league with an array of compact NorthStar AGM batteries as well as a Mastervolt ChargeMaster 12/50-3 3-step charger, it keeps all the refrigerators and freezers onboard operational for very long periods of time, according to the folks at Regal. Want to shut down the generator for a virtually silent night on the hook but still dine on rock-solid ice cream for breakfast? No problem!

Under the central walkway in the engine room there's an unusual but very useful



device—a self-macerating seachest. **Called the Hydro-matic Self-Cleaning Sea Strainer by manufacturer Groco,** it performs an automatic 30-second cleaning cycle at user-selected intervals and flushes debris overboard. Should the need arise, a purge cycle can override the intervals for a one-time maceration. As noted above, the unit on our 53 also does duty as a seachest, meaning it takes in raw water and distributes it to

a variety of auxiliaries, thereby seriously reducing the number of through-hull fittings necessary for systems operation onboard. Got a problem with seagrass clogging your sea strainers? Here's the fix.

Engine room access onboard our 53 was superb, **with well over 7 feet of headroom between the Cummins QSB6.7**



diesels. Not only was main-engine access virtually unlimited, with dipsticks, filters, and fills at the ready, so was access to the Westerbeke genset, the Marine Air air-conditioning component, the Charles Industries IsoBoost50 (which massages and optimizes dockside power), and the two level-wind reels from Glendinning, one for the waterhose and the other for the shorepower cord. You can walk around this engine room like a kid in a candy store.

The smooth, nearly seamless "glass bridge" helm of the 53 offers an exceptionally up-to-date, fully integrated Garmin 8212 multi-touch MFD. The unit (there were two onboard our test boat, one of them optional) presents engine data, an



electronic chartplotter, vessel-monitoring information, a crisp radar picture, and all sorts of other onboard info. Additionally, screen layouts, data, and gauge displays are fully customizable and you can switch them

from screen to screen. You can even add Garmin Helm via a free app, a tricky little feature that lets you view and control chartplotter function from an iPhone or iPad.

While our Cummins Zeus propulsion package had its own



automatic (albeit overridable) trim tab package, **our 53 also had Auto Glide from Lenco, a second automatic trim-tab control system.** After a brief setup process, Auto Glide will automatically adjust a boat's trim to maximize comfort, fuel economy, and an owner's driving experience throughout the rpm range. Of course, you can override the system if necessary.

Regal installs the Seakeeper gyro stabilizer at or on the 53's center of buoyancy to maximize its effect.



Our Seakeeper seriously reduced roll not only when our test boat was at rest but also when she was traveling along at slo-mo speeds. In point of fact, we found that our unit cut the tendency to roll in a beam

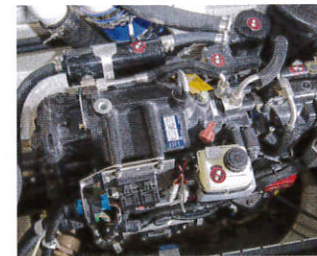
sea to virtually nothing, a finding that very much impressed the Brathunes. Does it make much noise? Nope!

Our test boat came equipped with a Maretron Vessel Monitoring and Control System



that uses a variety of sensors and cameras to keep tabs on tank levels, engine data, bilge-pump activity, navigation instrument status, and general shipboard functions like whether a hatch is closed or open. The system sends text message alerts to a cellphone should something go wrong onboard.

Certainly, **Regal's produced a Cummins Zeus install on the 53 that's very smooth and efficient.** However, the com-



pany's also made the pod units in the engine room exceptionally accessible. Because headroom above the units is virtually unlimited, topping off vital fluids in the drives could not be easier. Note the fill caps and the dipstick—no crawling around in the dark under a low overhead while dealing with drive-unit maintenance here.