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Midsize Masterpiece

The new 38, Cabo's latest flybridge model, excels at every level.

BY JOHN CLEMANS





The inherent seaworthiness of today's sport-fishing boats combined with the high level of luxury that has been bred into them over the years qualifies many new models to compete with true cruising yacht designs. For that reason, a boat review that fails to mention a convertible's suitability as a family cruiser is often deemed incomplete by many builders. But not by Cabo. I've never had the feeling this company cared if its boats were judged by such standards. Cabo's goal is to build the best production sport-fishing boats afloat, and this has been the only criterion they consider relevant.

Ironically, succeeding at this has swelled the ranks of Cabo owners who fish only occasionally. After all, quality is quality. And quality is what Cabos are all about; that includes the newest model in its line, the 38 Flybridge.

Cabo owners have an eye for excellence. Whether primarily anglers or cruisers, they appreciate the classic styling, the steroidal construction, the flawless fit and finish and the microscopic attention to detail that define these California-built flybridge and express fishing boats.



SOFTTONES. Satin-finished teak, Corian and Ultra leather on the convertible settee produce an elegant ambiance in the salon (top); a shower medicine cabinet adds storage space in the head (above).

In a recent electrical system article in our “Boatkeeper” section, a Cabo’s terminal grid was chosen as the benchmark for wiring excellence. Easily accessible behind the eye-level electrical panel of the 38 is a similar display that could qualify for service on the space station or for exhibit in the Museum of Modern Art. Take a close look at the workmanship if you’re experiencing sticker shock.

Cabos are constructed of as few pieces as possible and these pieces are fastened together so the end result is a single piece. The hull/deck flanges are bonded together, through-bolted every 9 inches and tabbed on the inside so that the joint becomes stronger than the laminate on either side of it. Wiring is run after everything is put together rather than during the process, so all wires can be accessed and replaced. Owners are provided with exact schematic references that detail every wire in their particular boat. The 38’s DC system is 24 volts for greater efficiency per pound of wire.

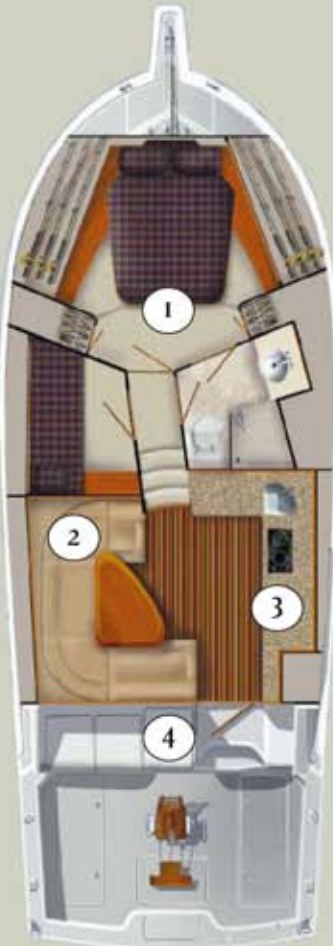
Cabo was founded almost 20 years ago by two ex-sailboat builders who believed they could offer the world better midrange fishing boats than those that were then in existence. In 1991 the first Cabo, the 35 Flybridge, was launched. Now there are five Flybridge models from 35 to 48 feet and six Express models from 32 to 52 feet. The company is owned by Brunswick — a testament to its success. Ownership has changed, but overkill continues to characterize Cabo’s construction philosophy.

“If a component calls for 14-gauge wire, we use 12-gauge,” said Jim Renfrow, Cabo’s vice president of sales and marketing. He took me on a tour of the boat at Lighthouse Point Marina in Lighthouse Point, Florida, prior to our sea trial in the Atlantic on a particularly breezy day.

Thirty-eight feet is a somewhat unusual length for a flybridge configuration, but certainly not unheard of. Thirty-ones and 32s are legendary because Bertram, which also built a 35 and 37, and Blackfin built

them. Cabo’s 35 is already a classic. Forty- and 41-footers abound. Hatteras built a 34 and a 38. In the under-40 class, however, express boats are greatly favored, including Cabo’s. They outsell flybridge boats by about four to one. But 38 feet sounds like a great length for a new convertible to me — and driving the Cabo into, between

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SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 40'8"

Beam: 15'1"

Draft: 3'9"

Transom Deadrise: 17 degrees

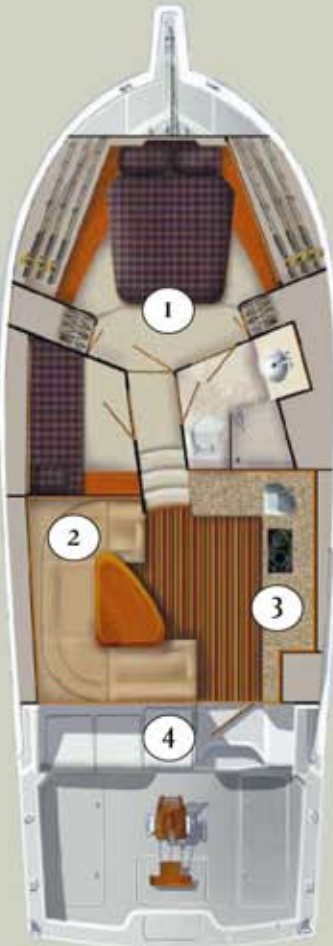
Weight: 28,000 lbs.

Fuel: 475 gals.

Water: 95 gals.

Contact: Cabo, caboyachts.com

Base Price (with test power): \$806,775



PERFORMANCE

TEST POWER: (2) 800 hp MAN R6 diesels. Speeds measured by GPS in the Atlantic off Lighthouse Point, Florida, with four adults aboard, full fuel and full water. Fuel consumption measured by the MAN electronic engine-management system. Sound levels measured at the helm in dB-A.

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	DB-A
600	8.7	4	77
900	10.6	10	79
1,200	12.5	24	84
1,500	20.3	38	87
1,800	28.6	49	88
2,100	33.8	72	89
2,320	37.5	80	90

INSIDE: ❶ There’s plenty of storage space in the forward stateroom, including a compartment beneath the mattress. ❷ The ultra-comfortable Ultraleather settee with storage space beneath it converts into a double berth. A built-in flat-screen TV is nearby. ❸ A two-burner cooktop is recessed, providing a natural fiddle; the top stores by sliding it down behind the cooktop. There’s also a side-by-side refrigerator/freezer and sea rails on the Corian countertop. ❹ The cockpit tackle center has a freezer, plus a huge sink and a cutting board with tackle storage beneath the latter. Fresh- and saltwater wash-downs are to port.

PROS:

- Heavy-duty, custom-built hardware.
- Convenient storage drawer at the helm.
- Immaculate electrical wiring.
- Huge head with bench in shower and two medicine cabinets.
- Vertical rod storage cabinet in guest stateroom.

CONS:

- Outboard side of engines and aft engine room bulkhead are tough to reach.
- Forward seat on bridge should have a gas ram on its storage compartment lid.
- Forward grab rail on bridge should be on top instead of on the sidewall.



FISHING RULES. A rod locker (above left) in the guest stateroom defines the 38 as a tournament contender; the Cabo does 37 knots at WOT (above).

and in the same direction as the 3- to 5-foot waves off the Hillsboro Inlet confirmed it.

The 38 has the liveliness and maneuverability of a smaller boat and the ride and comfort of a larger one, so you get the best of both worlds. Unlike builders that offer two or three engine options in this size class, Cabo offers five: twin 800 and 600 hp Cummins MerCruisers; twin 715 hp Caterpillars; twin 720 hp Yanmars; and twin 800 hp MANs. All are in-line, six-cylinder diesels. Our test boat had the MANs and topped 37 knots offshore in 3-foot seas. That's great speed, but what's even greater is the ability to achieve it in such rough conditions.

Top speed is more important to some anglers than others. Trolling speed is important to all of them. The troll mode on the MAN-powered 38 is programmed into the transmissions by ZF and top speed is set at whatever an owner wishes it to be. Our boat's was 7.9 knots. The slowest the boat would troll without the trolling mode enabled was 8.8 knots, which is still slow enough for effective billfishing (and we didn't have the Volvo QL trim tabs down, which would have slowed us slightly more). What is noteworthy is that in the trolling mode the burn was only 2 gph (at 38 pounds of transmission pressure), but when not in the trolling mode it was 4 gph (at 325 pounds of pressure). So, in the trolling mode you get almost twice the miles per gallon while trolling only 1 knot slower than if you weren't using it.

Then there's the Easidock mode, which is virtually the same thing. Transmission pressure drops to 35 psi and minimum speed goes all the way down to 4.1 knots. This



is invaluable when you're docking in a tight space because you don't have to keep bumping in and out of gear and switching sides. It's also useful when in a no-wake zone behind a very slow boat.

Heading straight into the sea we were able to maintain 20 knots. There was a snap to the ride but no jolts. Eighteen knots was more comfortable in 4-footers. Having the trim tabs deployed halfway not only smoothed the ride but also added half a knot to the speed. The bridge curtains — a triangular EZ2CY rigid panel in the front and also at the rounded corners, and Stratoglass on the sides — were closed the entire time, including when we were making the speed runs (so you can add a knot), to keep the spray at bay. An insulated cold drink box and both a glove box and a big drawer — particularly useful — were welcome features on the bridge. Too many boats lack a place to keep items such

as binoculars, sunscreen, cell phones, etc., and the 38's drawer is the handiest solution I've seen.

Every hinge I saw, both outside and in the interior, was a piano hinge. Interior cabinet door hinges, of course, were the adjustable type. To really appreciate the strength and sophistication of the 38's construction, check out the transom door and walk-through gate hinges. Not only are large, flat-head machine screws on each side of the hinges secured to drilled-and-tapped, laminated-in, aluminum backing plates, but their head slots are all lined up.

The padded gunwales on the 38 are at a perfect height to brace yourself against, and, just as important, especially for the health of released fish, you can easily reach the water. The well-angled ladder has molded treads whose nonskid pattern matches that of the decks. At the top of the ladder a door will (and should) be added for safety, as the cutout is only inches away from the base of the console. Even though the seat is on a slider, I'd move the companion pedestal chair nearer to the helm console so a short man or woman could more easily brace their feet against the console. This is essential for safety when the boat is in rough water.

Cabo may not emphasize the cruising comforts of its boats as much as it does their fishing features, but the 38's interior is as thoughtfully and practically appointed as any cruiser's. And it has a head befitting a 50-footer. The soon-to-be-rectangular dining table will lower to convert the salon's big, U-shaped settee into a double

berth. The cabinets throughout the boat all have handsome cross-hatch ventilation grilles in their doors. Put that in the microscopic-attention-to-detail department, along with the sea rails on the polished Corian countertops, the notched StarBoard cutting board that fits perfectly in the galley sink recess and the gelcoated shallow bin in the forward stateroom's under-mattress storage area. Practical touches like these demonstrate that the Cabo's builders are experienced not only at fishing but also at living aboard.

I'd use the unique vertical rod and reel locker (you can get a clear acrylic door that shows off your gear) in the guest stateroom as a closet with shelves or a hanging locker and store my tackle on the sidewalls of the master stateroom and over the dining area in the salon. And, as always, I'd have an overhead grab rail beginning at the salon door.

There's not much anyone could do to create more space in the engine room, where, with the MAN R6s in place, acreage is at a premium. The portside Racor, for instance, embodies the phrase "so near and yet so far." Checks can all be made without undue effort, however. Pulling an engine is a demolition project.

The cramped engine room aside, from the oversized cleats to the fiberglass fuel tank, the 38 makes no concessions and cuts no corners — except when making sure-footed sharp turns at high speeds. In short, this is one classy, combat-ready machine from which you can "catch 'em up" and also cruise in comfort. There, I said it. ♦



OVERNIGHT COMFORT. *The forward (above left) and portside (right) private staterooms offer a double, island-style berth and upper and lower berths.*