

# BIRCHWOOD

## COMMANDO 510







## REVIEW

Topping off the Birchwood range, the Commando 510 powercruiser not only has performance and practicality, but also a rarer commodity these days – personality.

Phil Draper reports

For a 13.7 metre powercruiser, the Commando 510, the flagship of the current Birchwood fleet, packs in a great deal. For a start she has bold and distinctive lines – such shaping is especially impressive in a sector of the power market where many designs look all too familiar. Then, beyond a 35 knot maximum speed potential, she also offers a big volume cockpit, comfortable saloon and accommodation for up to six in three cabins.

Much of the 510's outward aesthetic charm stems from her chunky windshield treatment and large side windows which, perched high, are vaguely reminiscent of the eyes of a crocodile. The high sides afford considerable protection to the open cockpit within, whether the boat is underway or at rest in harbour. They also ensure plenty of headroom when the standard-fit bimini is in place between the windscreen top and the sturdy archmast.

The 510's cockpit area has been particularly well configured. By keeping side decks to a minimum, the usable cockpit area has been maximised and everything that should be there is and in sensible proportion. As with any decent powercruiser, the cockpit begins at the stern, with the teak-clad bathing platform providing the usual amenities of swim ladder and freshwater shower. Our test boat *Ocean Drive* – the property of a British owner but kept in Spain – comes with its teak decking corked white, which makes for a cleaner look and is a welcome change from black.

Access up to the cockpit is via a couple of low steps to port, the fall of one concealing a smart and efficient Opacmare telescopic passarelle. A low stainless steel and glass gate





makes the divide between the aft area and the rest of the cockpit. The middle of the transom is given over to a huge oval sun pad, under which is a practical tender garage capable of accommodating a good-sized RIB, such as the Rhino Rider and its 25hp Mariner outboard motor which was aboard *Ocean Drive*, or perhaps a personal watercraft. There is also another even larger sun pad in the traditional location up on the foredeck.

Moving into the cockpit and under the archmast, a large C-shaped dinette with two



**Above: the saloon, with its muted colours and beautifully crafted joinery is the perfect place to relax**

**Right: the light forepeak master cabin and en suite shower room**

**Left: the curvaceous, well-equipped galley**



pedestal tables occupies much of the amidships area to starboard. The wet bar facilities of sink, Smeg griddle, sink, food preparation area, refrigerator and ice-maker are under the moulded lids and behind the locker doors of a neat sideboard-style unit along the port side.

Under the windscreen there are comfortable twin helm seats to starboard which are independently adjustable fore and aft, and to port there is a sociable *chaise longue* settee – a delightful spot whether the boat is running or at anchor. The forward cockpit area is also made all the more comfortable by the fact that quadrant-shaped panes slide open within the side glazing on both sides, which encourages a welcome through draught. All the instrumentation at the helm, mostly Raymarine



equipment aboard our test boat, is set into mock-burr laminate panels.

When it comes to performance, the 510 certainly delivers the goods. She offers a useful maximum speed of around 35 knots with the biggest twin 710hp Caterpillars 3196 C12 diesels. But there are also a number of lesser options, such as the Italian 600hp Isotta Fraschini L1306T2 HSC diesels that our test boat had, which have particularly good power-to-weight ratios and provided a top speed of around 32 knots during our afternoon test. The other more mainstream diesel options include twin 480hp Volvo Penta TAMD 74Ps, 530hp Yanmar CX GTE2s or 675hp Scania DI12 44Ms. The access hatch to the engines is amidships via a hatch in the cockpit by the dinette.





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As for handling, *Ocean Drive* certainly appeared more than capable off her home port of Benalmadena, the vibrant marina village that lies between Marbella and Malaga on the Costa del Sol. The moderate chop whipped up by the day's on-shore breeze posed no problems for her deep-V hull and her manners remained impeccable throughout. Indeed this is a real driver's boat. From the helm position, visibility is quite superb, whether looking out through the glazing when seated or over the top of the solid frame when standing. She also ran and steered extremely accurately under her Raymarine autopilot, which is always the most relaxing way to drive whether offshore or inshore.

Through the tinted laminate sliding door are six innovative and beautiful sculptured lily pad shape teak companionway steps down, supported by well sited hand rails. These provide access below to an attractive saloon, resplendent with curvaceous cherrywood veneer joinery that is fitting of a yacht much larger in size. All door mouldings are one single piece. Internal headlinings, wall panels, leather upholstery and carpets are a mixture of rich creams, oatmeals and off-whites. There is a comfortable long and low settee to port framing an ingenious veneer-topped freestanding coffee table. With the Birchwood motif inlaid on its top, the table holds a twin stool set that slots in



discreetly into its sides when not in use. These stools can be pulled out and a tabletop leaf stored behind the settee placed on top to provide comfortable dining for six guests.

A television/audio entertainment system runs throughout the interior, as does ample storage.

The 510's well-specified galley sits over to starboard, as does a day head/head-shower.

Standard galley equipment includes a four-burner gas hob, microwave and large refrigerator. Both the double sink and sink top in the galley, as well as the washbasins and head lids in both shower rooms, are strikingly moulded with a black granite-effect gelcoat.

Aft of the saloon are two twin-bedded guest cabins, each sharing the day head with shower facilities off the saloon. A good-sized owner's double cabin with en suite shower room occupies the forepeak. A particularly good feature here is the dressing table, with its mirror on the back of a revolving cupboard door. There are also a couple of portlights and a circular hatch to the foredeck to provide plenty of fresh air and natural light.

UK-based Birchwood Marine International's well-engineered portfolio now runs from 10.4-15.6 metres. It begins with the semi-displacement aft-cabin Crusader 340 and 400, which are both available with either of two interior layout options. Then there is the soon-to-be-revamped flybridge Challenger 360, and the flybridge Challenger 460 which is now also available in two or three-cabin guise. Lastly there are the two powercruisers, the Commando 370 and our flagship 510.

Although around 60 percent of Birchwood boats are sold to British clients, over half of them, such as *Ocean Drive's* owner, choose to keep their boats overseas. The prime destinations for Birchwoods at the moment are Italy, France, Spain and Slovenia. These locations seem perfect for such manoeuvrable, speedy and comfortable vessels. □

### BIRCHWOOD COMMANDO 510

<b>LOA</b> 15.63m	<b>Engine options</b> 2 x Caterpillar 3196 C12	<b>Fresh water capacity</b> 505 litres
<b>LWL</b> 13.7m	1,420hp; Scania DI12 44M	<b>Accommodation</b> Six in three cabins
<b>Beam</b> 4.1m	1,350hp; Yanmar CX GTE2	<b>Builder</b> Birchwood Marine (International) Ltd. Common Road, Huthwaite, Nottinghamshire. NG17 2JU, England Tel:+44 (0) 1623 515133 Fax:+44 (0) 1623 440328
<b>Draught</b> 1.11m	1,060hp; Volvo Penta TAMD 74P EDC 960hp	
<b>Dry weight</b> 14 tonnes	<b>Bowthruster</b> Sleipner 9hp	
<b>Max speed</b> 35 knots	<b>Generator</b> 10kW HFL	
	<b>Fuel capacity</b> 1,600 litres	

