

Captains' Comments on Helm Chairs

We also asked the people, captains, who use helm chairs in their day-to-day job and accordingly have the most knowledge and experience of them: "What helm chair do you have on board and how does it work for you?"



Recaro – Brilliant.
Johnny Drummond

I have two leather STIDD seats. They are the finest chairs I have ever used.
Mitch Mitchell

I'm in a Besenzonei Ostrich pilot chair and I absolutely love it. It's comfortable and the best feature is that it is automatic. I also like the Pompanette chair as the leather is very soft and cushiony. For performance, I like the Besenzonei – besides they look sexy too.
Robert R. Risher (pictured above)

In my wheelhouse I have a helm chair made by STIDD and I have honestly almost never used it because being on a 56m Perini Navi we do watches from the flybridge, as from the wheelhouse we can't see anything in front of us... not even our own bow.
Captain Gianfrancesco (JB) Fantechi

On a Ferretti 128ft yacht I have a Besenzonei; the back isn't long enough, but the electrical adjustments are good. I miss the easier option of being able to rotate the seat and the step to get onto the chair isn't adjustable forward. Apart from this the seat is comfortable; however, I'm not sure this seat will still be working after ten years of use. After three years, it already has a lot of play.
Captain Jean-Maxime Berthet
M/Y Sanoo

We have three MetalStyle helm chairs from Italy. They are very well made, comfortable and easy to adjust.
Scott Barsin
M/Y Invader

We have STIDD helm chairs at three helm stations. The first two are electric ones in the pilothouse, and one on the centre line for the other watch-keeper in front of the radar and helm. We have a third at my desk as it's comfortable and matches quite nicely.

The centre line chair has a trackball for the alarm monitoring system, windshield wiper wash and steering in pods on the arms. It allows the helmsman to drive the boat in rough seas instead of having 'Casper' (the friendly ghost) or auto-pilot steer; much more comfortable and better for the boat.

In the flybridge there are three more STIDD chairs, with manual operation to keep maintenance down, again one on centre line for the helmsman and one either side. They have a dining table directly behind them and can be turned around 180 degrees to allow guests to dine there. The table is on a platform so the foot rests align with the floor and the people on the bench seating across the table are at the same height (elevation).

Lastly, we have two in the crow's nest steering station. When we are fishing I constantly switch chairs to improve my birds eye view of the lures.

I also send kudos to the Customer Service Department at STIDD; we had a minor warranty issue with two chrome bases on 9" pedestals that was dealt with flawlessly and professionally and cured eventually. We have done maintenance over the years and ordered replacement parts that always fitted and were correct. I cannot say enough good things about STIDD's service and their fine product.

Mike Hein

M/Y Mea Culpa



I have installed two Recaro Navigators into the bridge of M/Y Maraya (above). They covered them with the leather of our choice, which in this case ended up as Fendi. I also installed the Kelvin Hughes Ergo Pods in the armrest to control the integrated bridge equipment, which seems to have worked out well.

The chairs are very comfortable indeed, but the antiquated foot pump for raising and lowering the height reminds me of an old barber's shop that I was dragged to as a child for many bad haircuts.

I have never been a great fan of helm chairs in the bridge, as I firmly believe that the watch-keepers should be constantly active to keep them alert whilst moving to view every direction. However, I have found that the Principal will often frequent them for a day-to-day chat or just to watch the world go by from a different perspective which has its own benefits.

Captain Richard Hodgson

M/Y Maraya

As build captain on both Susurro and Ecstasea, I specified Recaro helm seats. In Susurro's case they were manually adjustable and on Ecstasea they were electrically operated and track mounted for fore and aft adjustment. I found them very comfortable even on long watches.

Joss de Rohan Willner

Yacht Consulting Limited

We have two J Robert Scott leather helm chairs in our wheelhouse.

Thomas Jones

M/Y Lionheart

I have two Besenzonei helm chairs on my Navetta 33m; comfortable chairs with forward-aft and backrest tilt etc and controls, but no real sea-test yet as we're still in the delivery process.

Hasan Eristi

Over the years I have had many different types (of helm chairs) from fixed to manually adjustable, to electrically adjustable. The main two brands I can recall are STIDD and Recaro. Both of these chairs had lots of features, even electric seat heaters. I have found the biggest problem with all chairs is the tendency to loosen up over time. This can become an annoyance in moderate to rough sea conditions, as the seats tend to wobble from one side to the next. The other common annoyance is the tendency to develop squeaks over time. I believe the best solution are chairs that can be manually adjusted and tightened completely with a system that will compensate over time as the seat begins to get broken in – I haven't seen one of these yet. On my project, we have decided to do away with all helm seats and go with a leaning post incorporating a small horizontal cushion as well for better flow through the wheelhouse.

Don Edwards, Project Manager

When we ordered a new 76ft Nordhavn, the builder recommended a certain manufacturer's helm chairs (two in the pilothouse and two in the flybridge) and bar stools. They had a demonstration chair in their conference room, which appeared to be comfortable and well built. Since they cost more than STIDD's, the owner of the vessel thought that this particular manufacturer's would be better and we had them installed.

Once the chairs were installed, we found them to be very uncomfortable. I asked them about this and they said they had changed the contour. I told them we didn't like them, and they said too bad, they're yours now.

Closer inspection revealed cracks in the seat base, which had been powder coated over. The footrests had sharp edges that cut some shins. The power front/back and up/down wiring needed re-wiring because they pulled loose at the end of their travel. Eventually the company bought these back at one third of the price we paid. This doesn't include the custom-supplied leather.

All the bar stools broke where the seat back fastened to the support arm. This happened even before we got under way for the first time. They fixed this at no cost and we still use them. The footrests on the bar stools have sharp edges unsuitable for bare feet, so it's on my list of yard repairs.

We replaced the four helm chairs with STIDD's. They've proven to be excellent in many miles travelled. The only change I would make next time would be to delete the power rotation option. It adds a slight wobble between the seat and post. Otherwise, they're perfect.

Summary: for our vessel, one manufacturer supplied poor design, poor quality and poor service. If they had stood up and provided what the customer wanted, I wouldn't be sharing my thoughts. STIDD has excellent products and service.

Anonymous

We have on board some helm chairs from Treben, Italy and I have been satisfied with the comfort and the finish.

Captain Philippe Simona
M/Y *Vinydrea*

I have spent many an hour in a high-back STIDD. Never understood why people spent so much on a chair that is until you have to sit in one for eight hours.

Transitioning the West Coast is a 24-hour, five-day week run, so the STIDD was a important piece of equipment that stood up to the task.

Former Captain
115ft Tri-deck *Scorpio*

A hard bench (is) good for not falling asleep...

Captain Alexander M. Hawkins

For years now I have used STIDD helm chairs and been very happy with them. My preferred chair is the

standard back with power controls and spinneyback leather.

Jason Machovsky

Our yacht has a leaning bar located at the helm position and an observation lounge located on the aft bulkhead of the wheelhouse looking forward. This configuration with the leaning bar works well for us, as a full size helm chair in the centre of the wheelhouse could be an obstruction due to the amount of space. Also, the leaning bar is a good way of making sure the watch-keeper is awake as it is difficult to sleep standing up...for most.

38m Trideck motoryacht

It says on the sides that it is a Keiper Recaro and it is installed on a beautiful Jongert 40T, functioning perfectly well. Satisfied customer you might say with some heavy going miles behind the stern.

Danny Keeven
S/Y *Southwind* (ex-Saint Jean, ex-Number One)



I am very much in favour of helm chairs but, as I never had the opportunity to use one, I cannot give any advice on the model. As bridges are getting smaller and smaller, once the settee area has been built, mostly for the owner's use as it is not suitable for watches, there is little, or no room for a proper helm chair. This option is very unfortunate as the OOW has to stand, sometimes for hours, sometimes in bad weather with nowhere to sit and carry out his duties; even the state of the art semi-custom built F45 Feadship does not offer this facility. Some builders/architects/owners may think differently with the reason that the OOW could fall asleep easily: ruled out. This is an excuse for cutting corners. Manning regulations are not equal to any tonnage and I know from experience that, on a delivery crossing with a small tonnage you just rely on yourself and the help of your deckhand. This trend also affects the traditional position of the captain whose accommodation is no longer behind the wheelhouse: he has to make more room for the owner, the guests or the charter party. The captain has to be on the bridge, not for the sake of tradition but because he rules the ship and, for this reason has to be above and separate from the crew but also his accommodation must be on starboard; this is because the captain is ultimately responsible whether he is on watch or not and therefore must stay close to the centre of command.

Richard Dunais
Captain 3,000gt

We have STIDD chairs in the pilothouse and the flybridge. The pilothouse chairs have electric up and down control as well as forward and back, which is very nice, but the chairs are no more comfortable than any other. They have strong footrests that can fold up.

My favourite and most hated helm chairs were on a 45m yacht; they were like the seat a bus driver has, they were mounted on a piston and would move up and down when hitting heavy seas, making for less wear on the occupant each time you hit a wave. Unfortunately, as they got old, they wore out and started leaning side to side too!

Captain Jay

We actually don't have a helm chair. Instead we have a leaning post. I believe it keeps crew more alert on watch rather than sitting.

Ben Turner

M/Y Time For Us



Asteria has three top of the line STIDD black leather chairs in the bridge (above). They were installed seven years ago and are like new with no worn threads, cracked leather, or signs of ageing or discolouration. The multiple adjustments provide every combination needed. I'm standing by for the model with the miniature Espresso machine in the arm

Captain Don Feil



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STIDD, and nothing but STIDD. As far as I can tell, they are the best by a mile. I think a nice testament to how good they are is that we sit in them all the time – officers meet to just relax with a book while dockside; they're just really luxurious and comfortable.

Anonymous

MetalStyle – in Genoa, leather – simple but comfortable, though after 20 years of helming sailboats outside, any chair would be great!

Anonymous

Besenzoni, P219 President Plus; chosen due to size (space limitations) and comfort.

Todd Rapley

M/Y Quest

We have two Besenzoni chairs on our Sunseeker 90ft. They are good but we would have liked a higher/adjustable head rest, similar to what you have in a car.

Arthur Jurg

M/Y In All Fairness

Well here on the *Northern Light* we are old school, no helm chair for us! We have a leaning bolster, it encourages the watch crew to be alert and on the move. So far, no complaints.

Scott Johnson

Northern Light

I have two identical helm chairs in the bridge of my current yacht, which were custom made by Goodline Trim in Brisbane Australia. They are black leather with a back that supports you up to the shoulder blades. They are both sitting on fixed stainless columns with a quadrant foot rest off the column (similar to a bar stool). Both chairs are approx six years old and have covered tens of thousands of miles but still look brand new! They are super comfy but firm so as not to lull you to the land of Zzzzz's on that 3am to 6am watch. I purposely didn't want a headrest as it would have been too dominating and also block the guests' view from the rear lounge. I have tried all the named brands of chairs and even with an open budget would still go back to Goodline Trim and source the same chairs as they have lasted so well and are still as good looking as six years ago.

Cameron Gray

Spirit of Sovereign

Ours is Grey and it is great. Staying awake in the chair is the tough part.

Steve Janzan

We have four STIDD chairs, and find them very comfortable. We did have some problems with their chrome-plated pedestals but STIDD were very quick to replace them free of charge, even though they were two years old.

Captain Nick Coombes

M/Y *Sinbad*

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