



Riviera's beautiful new ute

It's called an SUV, and Riviera says it's designed to offer an all-round experience in a sports yacht environment.



By all reports Riviera is having a momentous year in 2012, and this new 445 SUV is a key contributor, with orders for four already on the books following its launch at the Sydney International Boat Show in August. Earlier in the year the company returned to private ownership after nearly three years in receivership through its acquisition, on March 9, by property developer Rodney Longhurst (see related article, *Mister Moxie*, P92 this issue). During

its receivership, with what might have been an uncertain future, the market still showed its confidence and loyalty to the brand, with some 289 boats purchased around the world.

The new ownership shows loyalty, too, as the Longhurst family has owned a number of Riviervas over the years – and they will be taking possession of this first 445 SUV. The family has a long tradition of pioneering success in Queensland as Rodney's father John built

By Graham Lloyd



Dreamworld from 60 hectares of scrub into a world-class tourist theme park. Having seen Riviera press on after the GFC and still sell strongly whilst in receivership, Longhurst blended his passion for boating and the brand into an opportunity to take Riviera to a new level.

Further proof of Riviera's ongoing worldwide success will come later this year, with plans already underway to celebrate the company's 5000th boat. Another point of celebration is the

inclusion of the stunning new Belize marque in the acquisition.

Although plans for a design such as the 445 SUV had begun around a year ago, it was the impetus of the new ownership that really got the ball rolling. There was a confidence and belief that now is a great time to invest and create the future – to be ahead of the market.

Riviera's feedback from owners of thousands of flybridge cruisers and hundreds of sport



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yachts indicated a trend to a preference for one-level onboard living; owners also wanted a large cockpit where they could have occasional furniture rather than fixed seating and tables. They also wanted to indulge in an occasional spot of sportfishing.

The requirement for a strong, seaworthy hull was a priority, as was ensuring the helm station and galley were all part of the main saloon so that everyone could share the good times together.

As you'd guess, the 445 in the name refers to the length, although it's actually 44ft 8in, or 13.61m for the hull and 14.46m, including the boarding platform and bow sprit.

The 'SUV' in automotive use denotes a Sport Utility Vehicle – a crossover between a tough 4WD off-roader and a more comfortable passenger car. Riviera has adapted the term to marine use in creating this crossover between a flybridge cruiser and a sport yacht. However, as 'utility' is hardly applicable at this level of luxury and performance, perhaps a more appropriate designation might be Sport Ultimate Vessel.

PROVEN HULL

The hull is a development of the 43 Flybridge that Riviera launched in 2010, of which some 38 have been sold. Proof of its performance has come with a record of smooth and quiet running and of competence in offshore conditions. The SUV, though, features a very large saloon incorporating the galley and helm, all on the same convivial level as the also generous cockpit. Belowdeck

accommodations comprise an owner's stateroom with en suite forward and a guest cabin plus a 'day head' or main bathroom amidships. Pricing starts at \$795,000 and this first 445 came in at \$850,000 with some options.

The day of our test run produced gale-force winds and threatening skies. That was challenging in some ways, but useful in others. Skipper Mike Joyce used a joystick positioned in the cockpit to nonchalantly manoeuvre us out of a tight marina berth despite the wind howling through the rigging of adjacent yachts. There is excellent visibility from the helm position, but having the joystick at the back makes it even easier to watch clearances in close quarters. I tried the 'stick later (in more open waters, I must admit) and today's technology just makes it so simple to intuitively direct and place the boat exactly where you want. That takes a deal of worry and pressure off skippers at times, and it's good fun, too.

Whilst punching through a considerable chop even in the confines of Sydney Harbour, we closed the saloon door and could have been enjoying a calm summer's day for all the effect the elements had on the interior and on the way the hull handled. With aft-mounted Volvo Penta IPS 600 D6 diesels connected to pod drives, the SUV was hushed and silky, displaying amongst the lowest of NVH (noise, vibration, harshness) factors I've encountered aboard a vessel of this size and type. Our crew could converse at normal levels with no worries, and it was easy to picture a ménage of family and friends sitting around the saloon and chatting away

A generous boarding platform extends the open-air relaxation area of the SUV; the open-plan cockpit is versatile and still caters for fun or serious angling.



with those at the helm and galley – and with others in the cockpit on calmer days than our gale-blown conditions provided.

STRESS-FREE PERFORMANCE

The IPS pod drives, with their forward-facing counter-rotating props, give excellent traction in all conditions, and their proven economy from a more efficient operating angle is well recognised. The 320kW (435hp) straight-six diesel engines are not stressed in delivering 30-plus knot (55km/h-plus) performance. Being able to mount the power systems right aft under the cockpit frees up interior spaces and allows much quieter running.

The hull had no trouble dealing with the wind and sloppy waters; the wheel was light and gave immediate reaction – as did the throttles and shifts. The lower-than-flybridge profile helped, too, with less side area to catch the wind. For

A clean layout on the dash is deceptive as the multiple displays for navigation, engines and onboard systems neatly display all the information the skipper could wish to see.

everybody in the saloon, including the lucky one at the helm, the 360-degree visibility through the large windows was superb, both for driving and simply admiring the view.

With a brand new boat and engines, we didn't want to push the envelope against the wind and chop, but we still easily reached 30.9 knots (57km/h) at 3500rpm, with power in reserve. A good cruise was around 3000rpm and 23.6 knots (44km/h). Factory trials have seen 32.2 knots (60km/h) at 3620rpm, with full fuel and water tanks. The cruising range, at around 23 knots (42km/h), is about 315 nautical miles (584km).

Access to the engines is excellent, either through a hatch at the front of the cockpit for quick checks or – even better – via the whole of the teak-lined cockpit sole, which lifts on a power ram to open up the entire width of the compartment. Moving around the engines is easy and encourages routine maintenance checks; as well, most owners would be proud to show off the quality engineering that comes from Riviera's decades of experience in meeting world-wide standards.

With the cockpit sole back down, we could stroll around the area unhindered by any fixed seats or tables. There is an aft-facing lounge at the front of the cockpit where it's handy but out of the way, whilst at the back was an optional barbecue centre with hot and cold water to a sink and with stowage below, all housed under a very neat fibreglass cover. Further aft still was a sizeable boarding platform with a stainless rail for a dinghy and a drop-down swim ladder. With the transom door open, the platform became an

extension of the open-plan, open-air relaxation zone of the SUV.

FISHING HERITAGE

The Riviera big game flybridge fishing heritage was easy to spot though, with toe-kicks moulded low into the cockpit sides. Whilst the emphasis of the 445 design might be on relaxation and entertainment, those who wish to go for a fish can do so with no compromise on facilities.

That joystick control is mounted on the port side just aft of the saloon entry. Here, too, is a convenient locker with bench space for setting out snacks and drinks, or for angling preparations, with an icemaker and storage below. A stainless-framed tinted-glass door slides away to port from the central saloon entry, whilst to starboard a large window with awning hinges up on gas-assist struts above the aft-facing lounge to really open up and connect the saloon and cockpit.

The port side of the saloon has a full-facility galley extending forward to the helm position, whilst across to starboard is a U-shaped set of lounges around a fold-over table on a height-adjustable pedestal. Steps at the front of the saloon lead down to the cabins, with the guest stateroom to starboard and back a bit extending amidships under the saloon. On this 445, the guests could enjoy a trio of single berths that would be great for a couple and youngster, or for just the couple, or for three good friends of any age. One berth runs fore-aft on the starboard side, whilst the other pair runs transversely. There's standing headroom in the cabin entry and sitting headroom over the berths. A double bed is an option, and there's plenty of storage area plus a flat-screen TV.

The day head is forward on the starboard side, with a generously-sized shower compartment as well as a toilet, basin and more storage lockers. There's a huge stowage area under the stairs leading down from the saloon, where optionally a washer and dryer could be installed.

ROOM WITH A VIEW

Centrally further forward is the owner's stateroom, with a queen-size island bed and en suite plus loads more storage space and another TV. Both sleeping cabins have large rhomboidal port lights as well as portholes that combine to let in a radiance of natural light. The port lights give a fascinating



The entire interior is beautifully finished in a blend of timbers and fabrics

view of the water rushing past when the boat is underway, and would provide magic sights when awakening on a sunny morning to see wavelets rippling and glistening right beside your bed.

The entire interior is beautifully finished in a blend of timbers and fabrics, and with many surfaces padded to give a true luxury look and feel

Above: The owner's stateroom is forward with a queen island bed, TV and large en suite. This first SUV had triple single berths in the guest cabin, but a double is optional.

Below: The heart of the SUV is the large saloon, which includes U-shaped lounges around a table with fold-over ends and height-adjustable supports.



The Riviera big game flybridge fishing heritage was easy to spot




as well as helping to minimise noise levels. Riviera wanted a different style for the SUV and says the interior is reminiscent of a classic Aussie beach house – which it is.

The floors are covered with a hard-wearing, but still comfortable, Amtico material, which looks good and is easy to clean so there are no worries about coming inside with wet or sandy feet. American buyers have expressed an appreciation of Riviera's approach to décor, seeing it as tough and serviceable, but still elegant. However, anyone preferring a more traditional gloss cherry or teak and leather treatment can also be catered for.

Back at the helm, the skipper is well served, with an excellent dash layout including dual Raymarine HybridTouch navigation displays, a Volvo Penta engine management display, the twin throttles/shifts and a leather-rimmed stainless-spoked wheel. Other controls are for the anchor winch (with chain counter) and searchlight plus there are aircon outlets and drinkholders for comfort. Against the port side are panels for switches and circuit breakers plus a marine transceiver. It all works very well, and the seat is a visual treat, too, in a silvery fabric, while the neat stitching in the upholstery around the helm console is another stand-out feature.

Despite being relatively low in the boat, visibility from the helm is near perfect through all those large saloon windows. And that single-level layout surely does include the skipper in everything that's going on; for a cruising couple, with perhaps one at the helm and one preparing

snacks in the galley, it is very appealing. On the other hand, the layout is also spot-on for keeping alive that favourite adage of 'the more, the merrier'.

Underlying all the visible aspects of the SUV is the 30-plus years of experience that Riviera brings to its fleet. An in-house design team and advanced construction methodologies have helped build the reputation of the brand. With 50 per cent of production sold internationally through dealers in 66 countries, Riviera has the support resources to back its products anywhere, let alone around Australia. That's just as important for an owner as the boat itself. 

SPECIFICATIONS: RIVIERA 445 SUV

Overall length:	14.46m (incl. swim platform/bow sprit)
Length (hull):	13.61m
Beam:	4.57m
Deadrise at transom:	14.5 degrees
Draft:	1.2m
Weight (dry, approx):	13,750kg
Sleeping capacity:	5 to 7 persons
Fuel capacity:	1800lt
Water capacity:	460lt
Holding tank capacity:	151lt
Power:	Twin Volvo Penta IPS (320kW/435hp each)
Generator:	9.5kW
Price (from):	\$795,000
Price (as reviewed):	\$850,000
More information: www.riviera.com.au , tel: (07) 5502 5555	

The seaworthy flybridge origins of the hull can be detected with the 445 SUV running cleanly in calm conditions, while the elegance of the superstructure creates a unique profile.