LET’S CUT TO THE CHASE HERE. The new Riviera 445 SUV is a brilliant new addition to the Riviera line, and I love absolutely everything about her... except the SUV tag. I know the 445 does many things well, but I’m weary of the “Sport Utility Vehicle” label, even though I own two of them. Still, I guess they couldn’t call it the “Swiss Army Knife,” and labeling it “The Multi-Tool” isn’t too classy, either. So I’ll live with the SUV tag... and I’d love to live with this yacht, too.
This is an excerpt from Riviera's successful 43-foot flybridge, but it’s built for those skippers (like me) who sometimes feel like a bus driver. You know... we’re stuck up on the bridge driving the boat, eminently listening to the laughter of everyone having fun below. Sigh.

It’s also a boost for all seasons. Our test run was on a hot day off Miami, but inside the 441 it was cool and serene. On a rainy, gray day out on the Great Lakes, it would have been warm and serene. But when the weather is pleasant, with the sliding doors and window to the cockpit open and, as they say in Australia, the “shrimp on the barbie,” it’s just that “doesn’t get any better.” The teak-planked cockpit is not only large (123 square feet), but comfortably outfitted for every desire.

Gold standard

Built on Australia’s Gold Coast, you can outfit your 445 with fishing options from a bait tank to tackle lockers. But the 445 that I was aboard fit my idea of fun, with a sink and grill on a console at the transom (no smoke in the cabin) and a comfy lounge seat to watch the starks so they cook just right. There’s a big console to port with a table that can be removed, and a corner seat with TV or watching the flat screen. The other two berths run athwartships, and here’s the grabber. They slide together to form a full-sized queen berth. This cabin also has a built-in, bureau, nightstand and another one of Riviera’s most civilized hanging lockers.

I, OK, admit. I'm full headroom only in one area by the mirror and bureau, but there’s plenty of space for everything from a pair of air conditioning/heating ducts. There’s a good-sized double berth for walk-around access, built-in night stands, and mirrored lockers because there’s never enough storage. The galley is to port, with an L-shaped counter providing exemplary room for prepping meals. The sink is a, two-burner cooking is in the middle, and a 36” two-decker fridge and a microwave are tucked under the counter. And, to give full credit to Riviera, they understand that cooks need storage. Lockers and drawers are below, and eye-level cabinets are filled with glassware and dishes in dedicated little-fable holders. Someone’s actually going to enjoy cooking on the 445.

Before we leave the salon, there are other nice touches, like the galley is to port, with an L-shaped counter providing exemplary room for prepping meals. The sink is a, two-burner cooking is in the middle, and a 36” two-decker fridge and a microwave are tucked under the counter. And, to give full credit to Riviera, they understand that cooks need storage. Lockers and drawers are below, and eye-level cabinets are filled with glassware and dishes in dedicated little-fable holders. Someone’s actually going to enjoy cooking on the 445.

Appealing accommodations

The Volvo IPS pod drives do several things, such as increasing maneuverability and allowing joystick docking, but one of the often unheralded benefits is increasing the usable cabin space. Because the engines are mounted well aft, the 445 enjoys two full staterooms with the engines mounted well aft, the 445 enjoys two full staterooms that may just cause some disagreements if you have guests aboard. But, for once, it’s not because anyone is a “second-class citizen” stuffed into a nifty little cabin. It’s because both cabins have so much to offer that guests may find themselves in the position of saying, “No, no, you take the master stateroom, I’m just fine aft.”

The forward stateroom would be the traditional owner’s cabin on most boats, but on the Riviera, not necessarily. It’s big, with an island double berth for walk-around access, built-in night stands and mirrored lockers because there’s never enough storage. The cabin has a real hanging locker (thank you, Riviera!) that can actually fit coat hangers, and slacks will hang full length without crumbling. This cabin also has private access to a generously sized ensuite head with a stylish vessel sink and a shower stall large enough to enjoy.

So what’s the problem? Well, it’s that the aft stateroom is just so appealing. First, it’s not the usual dark cave. The cabin has large windows on both sides, augmented by opening ports for fresh air, and the combination of light-colored upholstery on the bulwarks and the pale oak trim makes this stateroom cheery. Interestingly enough, it has no fewer than three berths. One runs along the starboard side under the window, and is where I could lay my head, prepped up with a good book or watch for the bridge or remote controller. The other two berths run athwartships, and here’s the grabber. They slide together to form a full-sized queen berth. This cabin also has a built-in, bureau, nightstand and another one of Riviera’s most civilized hanging lockers.

Economical and fun

Standard (and only) power for the 445 is a pair of Volvo IPS 60s, which are 435-hp diesels linked to Duoprop pod drives, and these are just the right combination of spunk and economy for this boat. You — and your mechanic — are going to love the engine room access. The entire teak cockpit sole lifts hydraulically so you can get to every nook and cranny without a struggle. There’s a small hatch by the cabin door supposedly for daily checks, but why would I ever use that when I can touch a switch and stand upright while I do my shoe-diligence?

The Onan 11.5 kW genset is tucked behind the ladder and fully accessible, batteries are convenient, and all the electrical and plumbing is done in a most seamanlike manner. And, besides having a fiber-optic display system, there is a second one in several areas, the entire engine room — including stringers, bilge and bulwarks — is finished to a high standard.

Underway, the 455 is everything you want and more. Nimble, quick and comfortable. Getting away from the dock (and returning) is finger-tip easy, thanks to the Volvo Penta joystick that takes all the white knuckles out of close-quarters maneuvering. You can use it to spin in a tight circle, move sideways against wind and tide, and even pin the boat against the dock while securing lines.

We topped out at just over 32 knots with full fuel and water, plus three people aboard. That’s plenty fast for most families and, after all, how often do the sea conditions allow it? When the sea builds, the well-proven 455 hull is both dry and easy-riding, with a 14.5-degree deadrise. And, even punching into head sea, the Riviera is quiet, with none of the usual squawks or groans.

Back off the throttles to 20 knots and 2800 rpm, a speed that’s easy on engines and guests alike, and you’ll be sipping an economical 26 gph. Even better, the Riviera soundproofing kept the sound level below 70 decibels for easy conversation. She’s real to drive, too, with hydraulic steering that invites you to crank her into a hard turn that still has her heeling solidly with no cavitation.

You’ve probably broken the code: I like the Riviera 445, and I like her a lot. And, yes, I can learn to live with the name. As they say Down Under, “Good on ‘ya, mates!”

Riviera 445 SUV

Specifications

LOA: 478
Beam: 15
Draft: 311
Displacement: 35,000 lbs.
Fuel Capacity: 476 gals.
Water Capacity: 122 gals.
Power: Volvo Penta IPS 600 diesels
Base Price: $796,000
riviera.com.au