CRITICS HAVE OFTEN labelled the current generation of Riviera convertibles as having compromised hull design for interior space. In short, some Riviera models, which are good seagoing boats, have hulls which don’t deflect spray as well as those with a true Carolina flare.

We saw a gradual trend towards addressing that inherent bow design where interior comfort had prevailed over a more traditional flared hull with the release of the Riviera 41 earlier this year.

The all new Riviera 41 was a most impressive package and when Riviera, Australia’s largest recreational boat builder, announced plans for the release of a 45 Open complete with moulded flybridge staircase, I was naturally inquisitive.

The 45 Open was launched at this year’s Sanctuary Cove International Boat Show back in May and we were quick to accept an invitation from Riviera’s Public Relations Manager Denby Browning, to give the new cruiser a run in blue water. We couldn’t have wished for a better day - we had suffered
weeks of inclement weather which wreaks havoc with our boat testing program. We were greeted with a fabulous sunny Friday with mid-range westerlies and an uncomfortable rolling swell off the Gold Coast seaway - a result of weeks of meteorological disturbances over southern Queensland and the north and central coast of New South Wales.

The new 45 Open is a clear cut winner in terms of styling. The new low profile hardtop with considerable weight saving features looks a much more integrated design than earlier Riviera hardtops.

The one noticeable difference - the bow features more flare and wider shoulders and the benefit is immediately identifiable - the boat is much drier with very good spray deflection angles as a result of the full length chines and increased deadrise. Riviera have backed their build quality with a five year transferable hull warranty.

All Rivs now feature tunnel hulls and this innovation has clearly benefitted the handling of their flybridge range. The 45 Open is no exception to this beneficial enhancement. The turning circle on our test boat was most impressive and handling was responsive from the flybridge portside helm.

It is unusual these days, to climb aboard a cruiser with a portside helm - Sunseeker do it occasionally but largely convention applies and manufacturers deliver either centrally located helms or starboard helms.

The Riviera 45 Open has a portside helm but the true driving position is almost midships because of the clever design features. To allow for a moulded flybridge staircase, a much overdue feature on all flybridge cruisers, Riviera's design team has moved the helm from starboard to port with absolutely no disadvantage to the overall look of the boat or its handling.

The starboard stairwell has teak topped treads and the angle of incline is very good and safety is assured because of the well placed stainless steel guide rails. A lock down hatch provides that extra element of safety when underway in rough conditions.

So back to our onwater test. We ran due east away from the ever increasing silt bar developing on the Gold Coast seaway to get away from the inshore joggle. The big cruiser powered its way forward with complete ease. The standard engine configuration for the 45 Open has twin Caterpillar C9 575hp turbos and while engine upgrades are available, I found the new Riv to be well powered and even in uncomfortable conditions, at 2,512 rpm, clocked 29 knots
on the E120 Raymarine GPS. The ride was a little jerky at times but there was absolutely no cavitation or vibration even, in tight turns and I would be reluctant to mark down the cruiser’s otherwise impressive performance in somewhat uncomfortable conditions. In the irregular swell pattern we ran at 23.1 knots with the tacho sitting on 2,269 rpm and fuel consumption at an acceptable 92 litres per hour.

Turning the boat to run beam on, I expected some spray and spray we got but to my surprise, the angle of deflection was very good and not even a drop of water hit the all encompassing and top quality clears. Even into the breeze, on our way back in under full throttle, I continued to be impressed by the dry nature of the 45 Open. Although we had the clears fully battened down, the overhead hatch provided plenty of fresh air flow to the flybridge.

Riviera have clearly done their homework in regard to the development of the 45 Open and I am, even at this early stage, convinced that it will be one of their more successful models – something akin to the popularity of the 35 Bertram.

It is a nice looking boat, runs high and dry and has a welcoming open saloon and large cockpit. Even the extended bimini which provides shade to the cockpit did not limit my line of sight to the swim platform and transom – often a problem on flybridge models and something Riviera have clearly addressed since releasing their 41 earlier in the year.

To give the boat more lift and a better centre of gravity, there are two fuel tanks and fuel can be transferred between tanks to suit prevailing conditions. The main tank is positioned athwart ships and forward of the engine room bulkhead while options exist to have either a forward or aft secondary tank. Our test boat, hull Number One, was fitted with an aft secondary tank.

Not only does the new 45 Open have tunnels, it also features underwater exhausts and a quality finish in the spacious engine room. The all glass finish and heavy duty non-slip rubber matting on the accessway between engines is a clear sign of a well presented engine room. The Riviera 45 Open has an 11° shaft entry angle and runs five blade bronze props which obviously assists torque and lift.

Credit where credit is due and I have to say, Riviera have done a nice job on the engine room of the 45 Open. The engineering standard is very high and little things like a wash-out hose in the engine room, raised battery boxes, quality Racor filters and separators, a Seafire fire suppression system
and brass straps fitted to the stainless steel shafts clearly demonstrates the boat is built for serious boating. Coupled with a watertight collision bulkhead forward, a solid GRP keel and hand laid keel, the 45 Open is built to last.

Behind the wheel, the 45 Open is easy to drive and all controls and gauges are well placed. The multi-level dash is nicely appointed with twin E120 Raymarine screens, Caterpillar digital controls, rocker switches cleverly grouped and an LED systems warning panel mounted close to the compass on the top level of the dash. The 45 Open is fitted with QL tabs and the day of our test was probably the only time I have been impressed with these new tabs. The boat responded quickly and trimmed up well with just a touch of the electronic control pads with indicator lights to show the true down angle of the tabs.

The cruiser was also fitted with autopilot, DC outlet, Muir electric winch, SidePower bow thruster, VHF radio and a stainless steel wheel. There is room behind the skipper’s and navigator’s chairs so that access to the aft mounted rocket launchers is both comfortable and safe.

Safety has been well considered on the 45 Open. A U-shaped overhead grab rail has been installed on the flybridge hardtop to allow safe movement from the helm to the forward flybridge lounge. The flybridge is spacious enough for onboard entertaining with two lounges forward and either side of the helm with a utility bar positioned just forward of the stairwell. There is plenty of storage under the lounges and in a forward locker in the superstructure. The flybridge floor has carpet while the cockpit is full teak.

The cockpit is very beamy and macadamised with self draining scuppers in both aft corner pockets. There are three lazarette hatches in the deck for under floor storage and access to tanks, steering and pumps. The engine room hatch is located in the companionway aft of the saloon door.

The cockpit has a wide transom with starboard side transom door, centrally located live bait tank and a bolt on swim platform with pressure vents, a portside swim ladder and wrap-around grab rail. A Cookout stainless steel barbecue can be mounted on the portside transom for onboard entertaining and a boat hook is cleverly positioned above the saloon door. Fixed spotlights in the flybridge superstructure illuminate the spacious deck area after dark. There are five rod holders located strategically around the hand rails for the fishing buffs. There is an eutectic freezer box to port of the saloon entry.
together with a moulded sink. A fibreglass hood conceals the sink and freezer while there is a good storage locker in the base of the moulded stairwell.

Deckware is well positioned - there are four fixed cleats on either side with the corner cockpit pocket cleats stepped down slightly with stainless steel fairleads running aft. Two recessed fender cleats have been positioned on either side of the handrail about mid cockpit.

A single step leads forward to one of the safest and most comfortable side decks I have found. Grab rails follow the contour of the flybridge and, the foredeck is almost flat with very little forward angle which adds a further dimension to onboard space.

An ADC 200kg crane is mounted on the portside foredeck for tender retrieval. There are two anchor lockers, a fresh water wash down outlet and foot operated winch controls. The anchor is secured in a moulded bow sprit and is a 60kg Manson plough and coupled with the heavy link anchor chain, the boat will hold well in all conditions.

A spotlight is mounted on the forward rim of the hardtop with digital controls for searching on the dash panel.

The interior layout and design of the 45 Open is most impressive providing good space, well positioned furnishings, a forward galley and aft alfresco window, a la the Riviera 4700 Sport Yacht and the New Zealand built Salthouse cruisers.

The interior is cherrywood with teak and holly floor. There are two lounges - a portside L-shaped lounge with adjustable coffee table on entry to the saloon and a forward starboard lounge which provides eating around the extendable dining table mounted on a solid base with storage compartments. A centre line overhead grab rail has been recessed into the ceiling and decorated with a wooden surround panel.

A wet bar with large fridge has been concealed in the starboard aft corner of the saloon. The AC and DC electrical panels are located in a cabinet above the fridge. Those responsible for the interior design and fitout have done a nice job of concealing the air conditioning vents in the pelmets above the fixed leaf style side windows which have retractable blinds for privacy.

The galley is forward of the port lounge and is aft facing with twin burner ceramic electric cooktop and deep bowl stainless steel sink, both with bench covers while the cooktop has an extraction fan above. The galley has a twin drawer fridge and dishwasher, concealed rubbish bins and a
large cupboard extending into the side of the boat. There is a chilled and filtered water tap above the sink as well as a convection microwave and adequate drawer space. Cleverly, Riv’s interior designers have made use of the space forward of the galley, below the fixed windscreens, to provide additional storage space for the galley. On the opposite side, a large 26” Sony flat screen TV offers good viewing from the saloon lounges.

Although I was critical of the small step down to the galley - it is hard to distinguish from the change in level of the saloon floor and is a potential ankle twister, I was suitably impressed with the enormous space found in a below floor compartment in the galley companionway. The storage compartment accommodates the hot water system, battery charger, air conditioners and has enormous storage options. It is also accessible from the port cabin on the lower deck.

Three steps lead to the lower deck. A common bathroom is located to starboard of the stairwell. The wet area is spacious and well appointed with separate shower stall, vacuflesh toilet, porcelain above bench vanity basin and teak and holly floor. The bathroom is a practical area and features such niceties as well positioned mirror, towel racks and rings and container holders in the shower. The shower has an air vent and porthole.

There are three cabins aboard the 45 Open. Two cabins feature single beds while the forward stateroom has an island queen. The port cabin has twin horizontal single bunks which extend aft under the galley floor while the starboard cabin has upper and lower single bunks.

Both cabins feature full height on entry and there are cabinets for clothes and other personal items in a combination of hanging space and drawers, as well as porthole or overhead hatches for natural ventilation. Both cabins have separate climate control and wall mounted mirrors.

The 45 Open is equipped with a washer/dryer fitted in a double door cabinet off the companionway. Shelves above the washer/dryer also serve as useful additional storage.

The master cabin located in the bow has an island queen bed, deep shoulder height lockers on either side of the cabin and twin wardrobes - one with hanging space and the other with shelves. Narrow mirror panels below the overhead lockers add a spacious dimension to an otherwise roomy cabin. The bed has storage drawers fitted in the base and is mounted on gas struts which allow the bed to be raised to reveal further storage ahead of the drawers. There is an overhead hatch with privacy blind but no side portholes.

The ensuite is to port and aft of the cabin entry. Again Riviera’s interior designers have done a great job in delivering a spacious, well appointed and practical wet area with teak and holly floor, vacuflesh toilet, a large wall mounted mirror above the vanity with makeup downlights, extractor fan and a spacious, man-size shower stall with storage cutouts and even a foot step.

There are plenty of towel rails and rings as well as twin GPOs near the vanity unit.

Overall, there were some really clever innovations on the 45 Open. Small yet practical things like the stainless steel cutout on the flybridge utility bar which prevents glasses or bottles from going for a slide. This was repeated on the flybridge table. The storage compartment below the galley floor was a real winner and small touches like courtesy lights on steps, the moulded flybridge staircase, comfortable and safe walk-around side decks, separate climate controls in all cabins and the saloon and fridge drawers in the galley are much more practical on a boat.

To their credit, Riviera have approached the design of the 45 Open with, dare I say, an open mind and the result is a clear winner. For those discerning buyers searching for a well appointed, comfortable convertible flybridge cruiser with an excellent pedigree and backed by one of the industry’s best after sales service programs, the Riviera 45 Open will be of considerable appeal.

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<th>SPECIFICATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>LOA</td>
<td>15.62 metres (51ft 3&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LWL</td>
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<td>Twin Cat C9 575hp with five blade bronze props</td>
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Test boat supplied by R-Marine, Coomera. Phone 07 5502 5592  www.riviera.com.au