

STORY JEFF STRANG PHOTOS BARRY ASHENHURST

# HAPPY TO BE HERE

Built to fill a widening gap between specialist vessels, the new Riviera 445 SUV is billed as a jack-of-all-trades



To my mind Riviera's original 40 and 48 Flybridge boats were probably the best Australian-built production vessels of their era. So successful were these two models that many credit them with forming the foundations on which the huge success story that is Riviera was built.

The 40 quickly became the ubiquitous family favourite, while the larger and more offshore-capable 48 established itself as the number one pick for charter operators and those wanting sturdier legs in a medium-range cruiser. That the boats were reliable and well-finished to an achievable price was part of the success formula, but it was the vessels' unequalled versatility that defined them.

Versatile is also a good word to describe the typical Australian boater. Take a look in an average Aussie shed and you will likely see what I mean. Behind the lawn mower there will be an assortment of bikes, some for the littlies and at least one for the "big" kid, a collection of outdoor furniture and a portable barbecue, golf clubs, a dive tank or two, and a fishing rod collection to put Starlo to shame. The best boat for this bloke is a jack-of-all-trades and a master of some.

### NICHED TRENDS

The quandary is that since about 2005 the trend of many boatbuilders has been to refine their products into ranges that are more specialised, such as those tailored for cocktail cruising or at the other end of the spectrum, offshore fishing. Whether this is by design or as the cumulative result of a gradual tweaking process in response to customer requests is debating semantics. The result, as Riviera has astutely recognised, is a lack of true family-orientated all-rounders in the market, like the 40 Flybridge that was so successful for the marque in the late '90s.

Although I had heard rumours something significant was in the pipeline for some time my first viewing of the Riviera 445 SUV (Special Utility Vessel) was at its world release during the Sydney International Boat Show back in August. The warm tones and relaxed styling immediately got my attention. Kind of like a friendly neighbour inviting you over for a barbecue, this demo boat felt welcoming to step onboard. Not all boats are like this, particularly at shows where getting past the front-of-shop Gestapo is a



The stylish helm module has a black matt finish that won't distract the skipper's visibility underway.

challenge in itself. You can physically feel yourself being judged as worthy or otherwise just approaching a stand.

A time was set the following week for an extended private cruise on Sydney Harbour with Riviera's Director of Brand and Sales, Stephen Milne.

### GLORIOUS SYDNEY

Knowing I am still somewhat a tourist Down Under, Stephen had arranged an impressive itinerary for our day-cruise on his native Sydney Harbour. First there was a trip to the fish market to pick-up lunch followed by an extensive sea-trial out around the heads. To finish off the day, we had a cold glass of Chardonnay to look forward to as the sun set over one of the harbour's many beautiful

beaches. Pretty rough gig!

### QUICK ONCE-OVER

The Riviera 445 SUV is presented as a contemporary single-level, two-cabin liveaboard cruiser. In the current market the exterior lines are distinctive — crisp and refreshingly clean. A wide, fully enclosed cockpit leads through to a spacious saloon with round-table seating to starboard, a galley to port and the helm station forward. The accommodation spaces can be somewhat customised but were presented today specifically to suit a family of five, with a double cabin forward and three single berths in the full-beam cabin amidships. Both cabins are serviced by their own en suites. Staying with the current trend, the 445 SUV is Volvo



This photo: Connectivity between inside and out is achieved with a sliding saloon door and adjacent tilt-up window. The starboard lounge/dinette (below) almost traces the full length of the saloon.



Penta IPS driven to make the most of efficiencies, functionality and space optimisation offered by this technology.

### WHY NO FLYBRIDGE?

It's a fair question — after all I did bang on about how successful the 40 and 48 Flybridge boats were. Well the simple answer revolves around the customer's desire for family and social interaction. Some owners have suggested flybridge boats often leave party members feeling left out of the action. Many have grumbled about spending all their time on the downstairs station leaving the

flybridge redundant and frankly a waste of money. The single-level 445 could not be better configured to ensure all are involved as much as possible. After all the family that plays together stays together, and as you will see both the cockpit and the saloon are good examples of this philosophy.

### NEPTUNE'S PLAYGROUND

Those who like to think outside the square should picture the cockpit of this boat as a well-fenced floating backyard with unparalleled sea views. In an attempt to suit a wide range of activities the company's

### [HIGHS]

- › Specially tailored with versatility in mind
- › New approach to internal styling includes warmer colours
- › Children's cabin amidships is a master stroke
- › Low-fuss factor before and after excursions
- › Excellent balance of space between the key living areas
- › Very dry and fume-free in the cockpit
- › Dealing with Riviera

### [LOWS]

- › Overhead cupboards (galley) slightly intrusive

loyal followers have provided feedback on most of the essential elements required by their various favourite pastimes.

Entertainers will find plenty of space to set-up for al fresco dining and can enjoy tasty morsels straight off the barbecue and hotplate centrally located in the transom. There's a drinks fridge and an icemaker within easy reach under a tidy, teak-trimmed counter top and the galley and serving benches are only another step or two away through the saloon doors.

Divers and fisherman will be pleased to see features like the two

THOSE WHO LIKE TO THINK OUTSIDE THE SQUARE SHOULD PICTURE THE COCKPIT OF THIS BOAT AS A WELL-FENCED FLOATING BACKYARD WITH UNPARALLELED SEA VIEWS



oversized self-draining wet-lockers in the cockpit sole and toe-kicks around most of its circumference. Avid bathers and watersports enthusiasts will find the water access via the oversized swim-step more than adequate and Riviera has included a stainless steel tender bracket on the back as well. There is adequate storage underfoot too.

### COMFORT AND SAFETY

Regular passagemakers will understand how valuable it is to have comfortable seating aft and the 445 sports a quality two-seater lounge to starboard under the fully opening rear window. Not only is this an excellent spot to take in the action ringside but those prone to a little *mal de mer* will find this position one of the most agreeable on the boat. The addition of clears to either side really ticked a box for me, providing extra protection from the elements and windblown spray. Photographer Barry Ashenhurst, who does get green around the gills from time to time commented about how clean, dry and fume-free he found the ride.

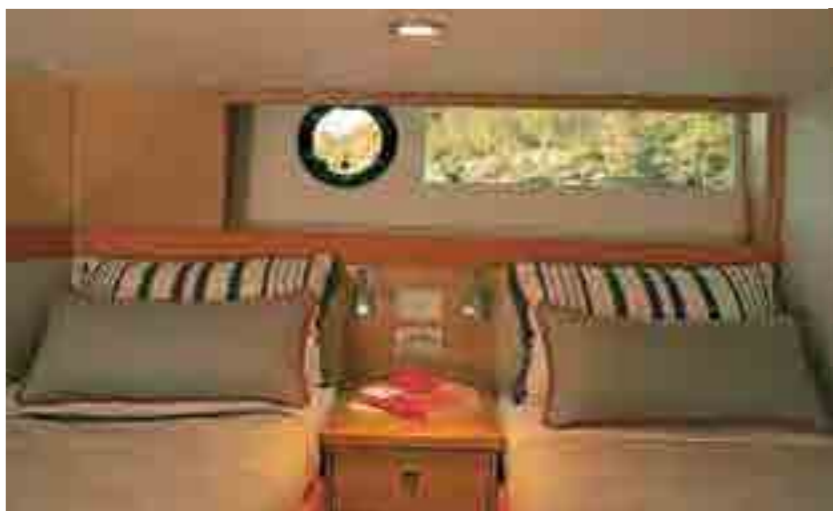
For safety reasons, particularly with small children onboard, I personally favour the double-locking transom door featured on the 445 over the stainless steel gated walkthrough option often seen on Portofino-sterned cruising vessels.

### FENG SHUI

Balancing the use of space on any mid-sized vessel is a challenge and given the Riviera 445 SUV has made the most of its opportunities in the cockpit, I was pleased to see the saloon and galley area hadn't paid a heavy price for the room allocated outside.

A five-seat (perfectly matches the number of berths) U-shape couch surrounds a classic timber three-piece fold-out dining table. Directly opposite, and in almost a mirror image to the U-shaped lounge's configuration is the galley. While it is true this area could be described as compact, it works well. Two can easily prepare gourmet delights, while the lucky remaining three languish in comfort ready to leap in and assist if required. "Yeah right," I hear the mother's groan.

All jokes aside this is a well-appointed galley, with many fittings as good, if not better than you might have at home. While some less boat-friendly chef's may have to innovate a little and include the outdoor hotplate in their plans to augment the two-burner cooktop and



The forward master cabin (top) and the three-berth cabin amidships (left) have their own en suites (above). Note: Yes it is three cabins, we just struggled to get the third in the shot.

combination microwave/convection (standard on mid-sized cruisers these days), bench space and storage will not be an issue and few kitchens can rival such a splendid view!

In front of the galley on the portside lies the helm station. One of the first things I noticed was the detailed finish of the bucket-style bench seat for two — very classy and probably too comfortable. Apparently this is just one of several features Riviera commissions locally to add that extra touch of panache to its vessels.

Like the seats the helm station itself is tastefully enclosed in a stitched leather-like product. The

low-profile layout ensures the panoramic view is not impaired by the flashy instrumentation. As you would expect a combination of top-notch electronics (in this case twin Raymarine e-Series HybridTouch units, although R-Electronics offer a broad choice) and good ergonomics ensure all the essentials (data as well as control systems) are easily at hand when required. Most importantly the configuration allows the skipper to be actively engaged in the social banter aboard while maintaining a diligent watch underway.

To be honest the broad description above does not do justice to the

living spaces of the Riviera 445 SUV. It's a classic case of the whole package, with its fresh styling and warm tones, being worth more than the sum of the parts.

### SOUND OF LAUGHTER

In a move contrary to recent vogue, Riviera has not located the master cabin in the full-beam space amidships, instead opting for a more traditional double vee-berth for'ard, complete with private en suite. Fear not — it remains comfortable and spacious, and tailored to a level worthy of the captain and his queen. Alternatively the full-beam space



Aiding berthing is a joystick in the portside cockpit wing station (above). Engineroom entry is via a hatch in the cockpit sole (above right). For sundowners (right) just add a fold-up picnic table and chairs.

has been cleverly configured as a children's cabin, complete with three independent single berths, individual sets of drawers and of course the all-important TV. Although this cabin can be optioned differently if single berths are not your thing, as a family man I view this presentation as a real *coup de grace* in a boat of this size. What could be more satisfying and reassuring than listening to the happy laughter of your whole brood couped-up safely together after a perfect day enjoying Australia's aquatic playground? And if the happy laughter turns to petty squabbling over which DVD to watch, just close the door and lock it.

### GOING PLACES

As the name suggests the Riviera 445 SUV is not a boat destined to spend its life bound to a marina berth, so it was appropriate our day provided an abundance of behind-the-wheel opportunities. Like the marque's other recent Volvo Penta IPS-powered models, the 43 and 53 flybridge boats, the 445 SUV has a very positive feel to the helm. This is because the whole drive system is configured so that the rudder fins and the propellers work in unison to turn the vessel. Engineers will tell you the system has the added benefit of eliminating the drag induced by a conventional rudder, when it is turned sideways across the propeller thrust. The result is an ultra-lightweight helm with a well-balanced snappy feel.





**[tradeboat SAYS...]**

The Riviera 445 SUV is one of two Australian-built production boats to really get my attention so far in 2012. It seems likely the company has found the perfect formula to enter a new era with. Highlights for me include its versatility and its unashamed appeal to any family whose primary vehicle is an SUV - regardless of whether it's a Porsche or a Prado

**Facts & figures**

**RIVIERA 445 SUV**

**PRICE AS TESTED**  
\$937,000

**SEA TRIALS**

Twin 435hp Volvo Penta IPS600, full fuel and water

RPM	SPEED	FUEL BURN	RANGE
1500	7.9kts	23lt/h	553nm
2000	9.1kts	49lt/h	301nm
2200	9.9kts	56lt/h	285nm
2400	14.9kts	78lt/h	309nm
2600	17.5kts	92lt/h	308nm
2800	20.1kts	104lt/h	313nm
3000	23.2kts	120lt/h	313nm
3200	26.7kts	127lt/h	339nm
3400	29kts	148lt/h	317nm
3620	32.2kts	167lt/h	313nm

*\*Sea-trial data supplied by Riviera. Fuel burn is for both engines, and range calculated with 10 per cent fuel reserve*

**PRICED FROM**  
\$795,000

**GENERAL**

**MATERIAL:** Handlaid fibreglass  
**TYPE:** Planing monohull  
**LENGTH:** 14.46m (overall); 13.61m (hull)  
**BEAM:** 4.57m  
**DRAFT:** 1.2m  
**WEIGHT:** Approx 13,750kg (dry)

**CAPACITIES**

**PEOPLE (NIGHT):** 5+2  
**FUEL:** 1800lt  
**WATER:** 460lt

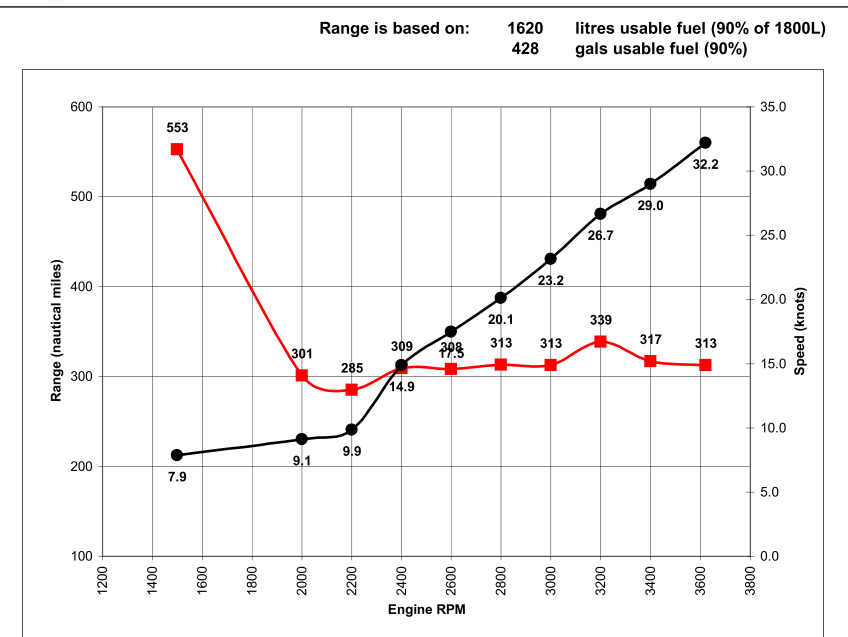
**ENGINE**

**MAKE/MODEL:** 2 x Volvo Penta IPS600  
**TYPE:** Six-cylinder turbo-diesel  
**RATED HP:** 435 (each) at 3500rpm  
**DISPLACEMENT:** 5.5lt (each)

**SUPPLIED BY**

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**LAYOUT**



This data is recorded from actual Sea Trials. Individual boats may vary from these figures. This information is provided for reference only, is not intended for navigation, and may change without notice. Fuel rates are taken in one direction only, typically into tide.

On a slight negative I find IPS boats lean more in turns than many conventionally propelled hulls, which can affect the helmsman's visibility, however the benefits of IPS, which include superlative fuel economy and joystick controlled low-speed manoeuvring outweigh this one slight issue.

**OUR VERDICT**

The Riviera 445 SUV is one of two Australian-built production boats to really get my attention so far in 2012. It seems likely the company has found the perfect formula to enter its new era with. Highlights include

the boat's obvious versatility and its fresh approach to internal styling.

I also enjoyed the boat's easy feel and left genuinely enthused about the product. While it has class it doesn't hang you out to dry on your airs and graces, or lack thereof. It's a boat that unashamedly appeals to any family whose family wagon is an SUV — regardless of whether it's a Porsche or a Prado.

So would I own one? Absolutely! And that is saying something for a diehard flybridge man like myself, although I have to admit I would probably be the first to bolt a tuna tower on the top. 🍷

Test day weather information supplied by

