CLASSICAL NOT ROCK 'N' ROLL

Riviera's extremely popular range of 51-footers is now even better. Warren Steptoe tests the new 51 Enclosed Flybridge Series II and finds that although the new version is a spectacular vessel in its own right, with the addition of a triple set of Volvo IPS drives, plus Sportfish Mode, and a gyroscopic stabiliser, this is one very comfortable touring/fishing rig indeed.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: **COURTESY OF RIVIERA**

After building more than 150 of the highly acclaimed Riviera 51 range, Australia's – in fact the southern hemisphere's – largest boat builder has gone back to the drawing board to create considerably refined, and much updated versions, now designated the *Series II*. While the new models may not look much different on first inspection, the revisions are quite comprehensive.

In many instances, the differences are to be found in the fine detail – which doesn't surprise when the first edition was so well received. Other changes are substantial, including a bigger LCD TV, a new drawer-style fridge and freezer for the galley, new flooring in the bathrooms, a new hideaway laundry and an optional, electrically operated, trundle bed in the saloon.

A big improvement for entertaining and social cruising is the new swing-out 'awning' window between the saloon and cockpit. It's a simple thing, but it allows people in the saloon to connect to others in the cockpit much more easily than through a normal bulkhead and doorway.

Another revision that many people will really like is a new all-weather helm position set at the forward end of the Enclosed Flybridge version. It has been compared to a luxury European car – which is certainly a reasonable observation – but one could also say this model's helm would do justice to a ship three times the size.

The helm is as comfortable as it is practical, especially so in the climate-controlled environment of the Enclosed Flybridge version that we tested. Even we anglers are given due consideration with a supplementary helm station positioned to starboard at the flybridge's aft end. This gives a brilliant overview of the cockpit, and an unhindered view along the starboard side – certainly of great assistance in awkward docking situations and tight marina berths.

The interior layout offers all of the practicalities and comforts of home. A spiral staircase connects the saloon with the second entertaining area on the flybridge, all in airconditioned comfort.

Opposite: The helm positioned at the forward end of the flybridge deck is ideal for cruising. When fighting fish or docking, the second helm station, positioned at the aft end of the flybridge, provides good visibility over the cockpit

LIVING IN COMFORT

One thing that hasn't been changed in the Series II models is the original three-cabin configuration. There are still two generously-sized staterooms, both of which feature queen-size beds, plus a double-decker crew/kids cabin. Of the two bathrooms, one is dedicated to the starboard master stateroom. The other two cabins share the second bathroom, which is accessible from the companionway.

Each stateroom, as well as the flybridge and saloon, are all separately climate-controlled thanks to their own dedicated airconditioners. Accommodation aboard any Riviera is always especially comfortable, and Riviera's attention to the small things is a hallmark of its design. An example is the way the master stateroom's bed lifts on gas struts to access the underneath stowage space. This is indicative of boats built by people who have spent enough time on their own boats to appreciate why it is important.

The sheer spaciousness of all the staterooms in our test boat was most impressive, and while I guess you would expect a 51-footer to be a comfortable cruiser, few among her peers that I've been aboard provided sleeping accommodation and bathrooms as roomy or as comfortable as those in our test boat.

Much the same can be said about the open-plan saloon lounge and galley area, which yet again maintains Riviera's tradition of elegance and practicality. Not to mention the amazing timber finishes achieved by their robotic facility, with a choice of American cherry or teak. Riviera's timberwork is simply outstanding!

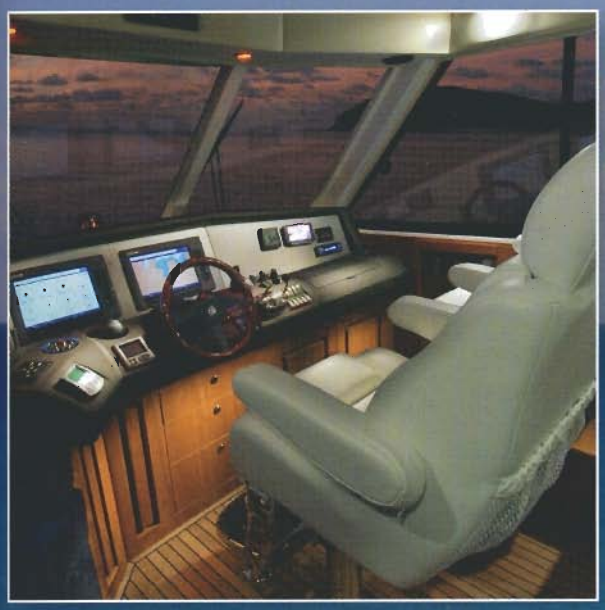
The enclosed flybridge effectively adds an extension to the downstairs living space. The forward helm position also contributes significantly to this additional entertaining area, by freeing part of the 'bridge (ordinarily occupied by the steering and dash structure) for a second 'upstairs' lounge area.

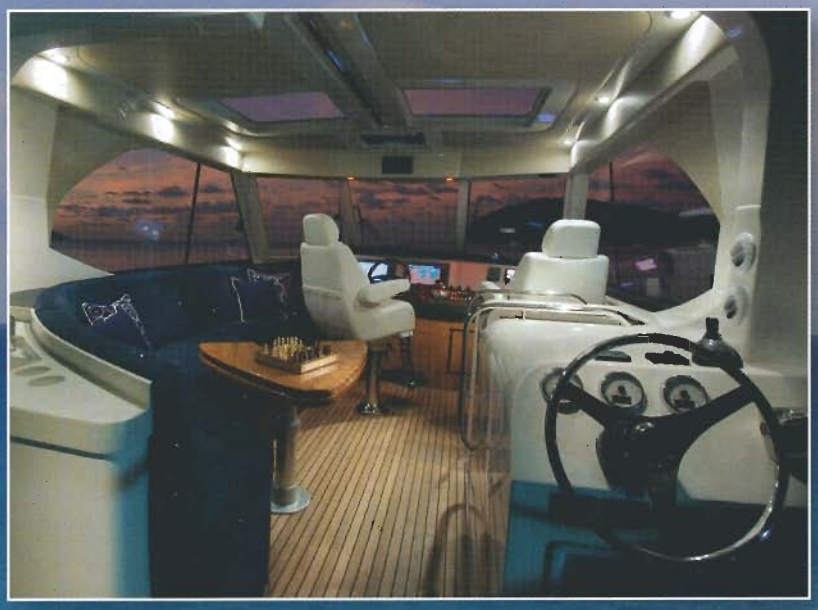
The only part of the boat's interior that I didn't find particularly roomy was the internal spiral staircase between the saloon and the 'bridge. I'm pretty slim, but still found myself negotiating the stairs cautiously. It is something that heavier-framed folk should consider carefully.

ENGINE ROOM

Although conventional shaft-driven propulsion remains standard for the Riviera 51 Series II, optioning Volvo's revolutionary IPS drives (whether two or – like our test boat – three) has a dramatic effect on the space available 'downstairs' on cabin level. As you may well be aware, with IPS drives the engines sit beneath the cockpit, rather than beneath the saloon. Engine access is easy because the cockpit floor tilts up on hydraulic rams, providing you with space, light and fresh air while doing maintenance.

Having the engines so far aft frees up a massive amount of space in the central area of the hull. The Series II designers have offered three different uses for this space. In our test boat, it became a significant machinery room, with access beneath the floor of the saloon. It was more than spacious enough for easy servicing of the battery bank, genset, refrigeration and airconditioning – plus a Seakeeper gyroscopic stabiliser! Alternately, the space can be optioned as crew





"The Enclosed Flybridge model's helm would do justice to a ship three times the size."

Above: This rig's three Volvo IPS drives are easily accessed after raising the deck panel in the cockpit.

Right: The additional space created by opting for Volvo's IPS drives has allowed the owners to create a sizeable machinery room beneath the floor of the saloon. This provides easy access and comfortable maintenance of the batteries, the genset, refrigeration and airconditioning systems, and the Seakeeper gyro stabiliser.

quarters (with its own bathroom if preferred) or simply used for stowage.

Out in the cockpit, our test boat's owners chose not to add the option of a wider cover board (atop the moulded cockpit sides), or a padded bolster on the inside that I find so important for upper-leg support while bluewater fishing. They had fitted a pair of Reelax 'riggers, but it seemed that 'hard core' gamefishing wasn't on their agenda. However, I can tell you they're experienced boaties with time on their hands, and they made no bones about their determination to spend as much time as possible at sea enjoying their new boat. Half their luck!

GYRO STABILISER

While talking to their skipper, Garry, about the Great Barrier Reef, it was quite evident that he knows his way around that part of the world well. Social cruising with friends is high on their agenda too, so in order to ensure more nights of comfortable sleep, in less than ideal anchorages, they decided to fit the stabiliser.

Boat tests tend to entail a few hours at sea at best, but on this occasion I was lucky enough to ride along with our proud new owners and their friend during a commissioning trip from the Riviera facility at Coomera on the Gold Coast to the boat's future home at Mooloolaba. A Riviera staffer was also along for the day to 'hand over' the boat and take them through the various operational systems on board in real world situations.

Learning the ropes is an aspect of new boat ownership that is overlooked all too often by some boat companies. To put it mildly, today's 51-footers are complex pieces of machinery, and this type of support is invaluable.

A less-than-ideal weather forecast meant we were travelling up the coast with incoming swells from the east off our beam. It was an ideal situation to try out the Seakeeper stabiliser system. To confirm its effect, we intermittently switched it off to compare the ride without it. The difference was dramatic to say the least. One minute we were cruising along at 20 knots in comfort, with only mild movement underfoot, and the next ... well, let's just say it was something of a revelation to feel what the sea conditions were really like once the Seakeeper's computer-actuated hydraulic rams ceased operating.

Seakeeper's system involves a gyroscope spinning at 9700rpm in a near vacuum. However, what makes it so effective is the way electronically controlled hydraulic rams actively control the gyro and dampen the hull's movement. The system runs off either 240V AC from the genset or 24V DC from an engine alternator, so it works as well under way as at rest.

We ran the boat against the swell from all directions for quite some time and our owners' grins just kept getting wider. They'd been convinced enough in the first place to invest in the system, but had been around boats long enough to reserve final judgement, at least until they experienced the gadget's effectiveness for themselves. It must be nice to be able to look forward to comfortable nights at

anchor. Again, what can you say but good luck to them.

Our test boat ran three Volvo IPS 600s – turbocharged, aftercooled, 6-cylinder inline, 5.5-litre engines, producing 435hp each.

Under way again (stabiliser on, of course), we were able to return to the 20-knot cruising speeds quite comfortably. At this speed, fuel consumption for the three Volvos stabilised at around 150 litres per hour in total. Garry was understandably reluctant to push them any harder while so new. Besides, the sea certainly was not conducive to higher speeds.

I would usually comment on how the hull handled the sea conditions on a test, but this time the stabiliser smoothed everything out to such a degree that it's left me with nothing relevant to say. Yes, it was *that* good!

When fitting three IPS drives to a Riviera 51, two of the pods were situated in the normal positions for a twin installation, while the third IPS drive was mounted between them. A special scallop, recessed into the keel line, gave the centre pod a draft similar to the outboard pair.

VOLVO'S JOYSTICK CONTROL

Volvo's sophisticated electronic joystick control made driving the boat no different to one with twin engines. Judging by the alacrity with which the IPS moved the boat in the direction you wanted it to go by simply moving an innocuous-looking joystick, there must be some smart computers running the steering. It would be interesting to know precisely what happens with all three IPS units while manoeuvring with the joystick, but apart from curiosity, I suppose all you really need to know is that the boat simply goes where directed.

Before turning towards the Mooloolah River entrance, we took an opportunity to slow down once again to see what happened when we selected what Volvo calls 'Sportfish Mode'. Intended for the more radical manoeuvres gameboat skippers associate with fighting fish, in this 'Sportfish Mode' control reverts to the familiar twin gear/throttle levers.

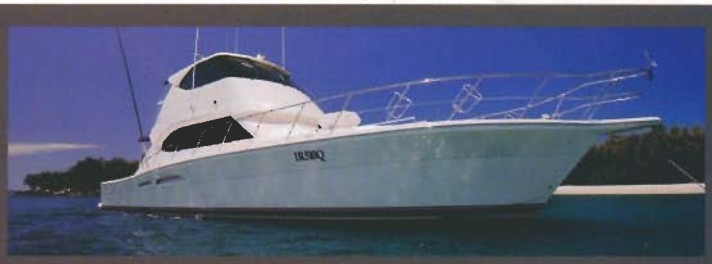
The boat certainly proved responsive, and without actually having a hard-charging fish to chase down, seemed quite nimble. With the main helm set so far forward at the front of the flybridge, you'd naturally use the aft helm position while fishing, although if you prefer the traditional sticks each side of the wheel that would be something to discuss with Riviera during negotiations for your own customisations.

That thought leads us to questioning whether Riviera's new 51 Enclosed Flybridge has what it takes for serious fishing. I am happy to report that this test left me in no doubt that it has, albeit with a bit of the specialised finetuning here and there that Riviera seems to take in its stride. When you add to this just how supremely comfortable a cruiser this boat is, you have one highly desirable package.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Roomy staterooms.
- Excellent family/social/corporate and extended cruiser.
- Effective gameboat.
- Manoeuvrability and ease of Volvo's IPS system.
- Seakeeper stabiliser system.
- Resale value from a respected manufacturer.
- Riviera's support program and network.

SPEC CHECK



RIVIERA 51 ENCLOSED FLYBRIDGE SERIES II

PRICE AS TESTED
$1,922,530

PRICED FROM
$1,476,779

STANDARD EQUIPMENT INVENTORY
Bose Lifestyle sound and entertainment system, deck reinforcement for gamechair or table, stainless steel and tinted glass salon door and awning-style bulkhead window, refrigerated fishbox with pumpout, cockpit fresh and saltwater washdown, anchor locker saltwater washdown, Amtico flooring in cabin and bathrooms, microwave convection oven, 12V and 24V DC battery chargers, 2 x 24,000 BTU, 1 x 16,000 BTU and 1 x 10,000 BTU aircond units, Pompanette helm and passenger chairs, clear Strataglass across flybridge rear, remote-controlled spotlight, drinking-water purifier, antifouling, cedar-lined hanging lockers, Vacuflush toilet system with pumpout, icemaker, teak table in lounge, and more.

OPTIONS FITTED
Three Volvo IPS600s with 'Sportfish Mode', Seakeeper M7000A stabiliser, Karcher washdown system in cockpit and anchor locker, electrically-operated trundle bed in saloon, 2 rodracks in saloon, aft helm station, trim tab upgrade to Bennett, remotely actuated forward-hinged cockpit deck, livewell and bait prep station, Onan genset upgrade to 22.5kw, Reelax outriggers, flybridge rail rodrack, 450kg Davco davit, custom tender cradle, teak-laid deck in cockpit and flybridge, Asko washer/dryer upgrade, leather upholstery in salon and flybridge, upgraded galley, HRO 110 litre/hour desalinator, OceanView nightvision camera, Aqualuma underwater lighting, three Lumitec Maxillume floodlights, Ericsson W35 phone/data system, Icom HF radio, cockpit coolbox to deep freezer conversion. Raymarine package including: 2 x E Series 14" display units, DSM-300 fishfinder module, 4kw 48nm 18" radar scanner, STV satellite TV antenna, LP-125 GPS antenna, B260 transducer, ST8002 autopilot.

GENERAL
Material: Handlaid GRP composite hull, with cored deck and flybridge, Isophthalic gelcoat, vinylester resins
Hull type: Flybridge monohull cruiser/gamefisher
LOA: 17.73m
Beam: 4.93m
Draft: 1.38m inc. IPS drives
Deadrise: 15 degrees (at transom)
Dryweight: 21,800kg

CAPACITIES
Sleeping capacity: 6-8
Fuel: 3300 litres
Water: 710 litres
Holding tank: 151 litres

ENGINES
Make/model: Volvo IPS600 x 3
Type: Turbocharged and intercooled 6-cylinder inline diesel
Rated hp: 320kw/435hp
Displacement: 5.5 litres
Weight: 901kg (IPS package weight)
Gearbox ratio: n/s
Propeller/s used for test: Volvo T4

TEST BOAT ARRANGED BY
The Riviera Group
www.riviera.com.au