

BOAT TEST

Riviera 53 Flybridge



Bridging **THE DIVIDE**

Fifteen years ago Riviera flybridge boats changed the way we viewed lifestyle boating. In 2011 it is about to do it again...



Words by Jeff Strang
Images supplied



Few vessels have been launched with more fanfare in this part of the world than the much-heralded Riviera 53 Flybridge. As editor of this maritime oracle I almost felt as if I had been part of the team on this boat's development, thus was the level of material passing across my desk as each step of the process was completed. So given Riviera had talked such a big game prior to its release this new 53 Flybridge had an awful lot to live up to at the big reveal.

Sadly I missed the actual "big day" at the Sanctuary Cove Boat Show due to work commitments but by all accounts it was quite an event complete with Dame Edna Everidge and a Michael Jackson impersonator. I can't believe I let work get between me and seeing the moon-walk performed live, but there you go.

At the dock

The 53 Flybridge is unmistakably a Riviera in that all the lines are very familiar but look a bit deeper and you can see that something very significant is evolving. In the past this company has developed three very different and diverging types of vessel.

There has always been its staggeringly successful flybridge range which, in this country at least, set the benchmark for this style of boat and for a time was almost completely dominant in the sector. High profile flybridge cruisers like the Striker showed that not only was it a great family boat but also a very capable sportfishing vessel and could genuinely be considered both. The Flybridge was followed by the Sport Yacht and the Express which fit into either end of the lifestyle to sportfishing spectrum respectively.

The 53 Flybridge with IPS is a true acknowledgement of the class' crossover

credentials and has been designed to excel in that position. I guess it's fair to suggest that when the first flybridge boats were designed there was no real recognition that this crossover class existed. They were just good boats without masts that people would love to own. They could fish, they could cruise, and they could entertain.

As the specialist models (the Sport Yacht and the Express) developed the crossover class just evolved by default without very much thought being given to developing a boat that was genuinely a great all-rounder. That's not to say the older flybridge models were and are not great all-rounders; it's just a comment to explain that the three-year development of 2011's 53 resulted in a boat that's clearly benefitted from a whole lot of loving.

While it is true that the first time I stepped foot on this new vessel was the test day, this story reflects that I did have some idea of what to expect. As mentioned, the release of the 53

“This boat had a lot to live up to in terms of hype and it has delivered” **Tradeaboat says...**





is easily the most heralded boat launch of my professional career and I had already tested its little sister, the 2010 stupendously successful Riviera 43 Flybridge IPS.

The 43 was the first flybridge Riviera design with pod drives and its development gave the team a chance to understand what could be achieved in this style of boat with those drives. Arriving at Riviera's Coomera base on the Gold Coast I expected to see a big version of the 43; that was most certainly not the case.

Sitting on the end of the pier resplendent in gun metal with gleaming white topsides and teak trim was a vessel that was just plain big and powerful. It's sleek yet seemed to dwarf boats of a very similar LOA parked next door. A frank comment from one of Riviera's own people (suggesting he still wasn't convinced by her looks) surprised me as I was really quite excited by the prospect of taking this sexy, confident-looking girl for a stroll. Walking the dock for a closer inspection it soon became apparent that this is a very big volume boat indeed.



 WWW

There is a large selection of quality new and pre-loved Riviera boats to choose from. Visit Tradeaboat.co.nz and type Riviera into the search bar to start looking

Looking forward from the galley and you're presented with two luxuriously upholstered C-shaped settees surrounding a drop down table. The comfortable seating for 10 passengers is a good thing because owners are likely to find themselves inundated with guests once word of the cosy atmosphere and 50" pop-up TV gets out.

I found the feel of the galley and saloon quite different to others I've experienced from this manufacturer. Boating writers use the word "spacious" far too liberally when it comes to describing interiors. This one actually does feel spacious – partly because it is (the pod installations allow for better utilization of the vessels beam) – and partly due to a few clever tricks that are hard to detect at a glance.

The forward companionway is centrally located (rather than offset to one side as is the norm). It's also slightly wider than usual, removing the feeling pokiness that's often present. The front windscreen has been formed from two rather than three pieces of curved glass and the viewer's perspective (relative to the bottom of the surrounding

At this point I could take you for a virtual stroll through the boat and wax lyrical and the various refinements and the quality of the furnishings. They are both present and important but what is of much more significance is just how Riviera have achieved the end goal of producing this very classy and eminently usable vessel.

The winning formula starts where it should – in the saloon. In what I believe to be a first for Riviera the galley has been moved aft to the rear bulkhead. At this point long time boat owners in New Zealand will be nodding their

heads sagely and murmuring "I told you so" under their breath. Whether or not this is a Kiwi idea is irrelevant – what matters is that it works well, primarily for two reasons.

Firstly, being further aft and slightly more central makes for a considerably more stable location to prepare culinary wonders in a seaway. Secondly, located as it is between the main saloon and the cockpit (and in conjunction with the large, fully-opening hopper window) the galley becomes the hub of entertainment allowing the vessel's host to interact seamlessly with guests.

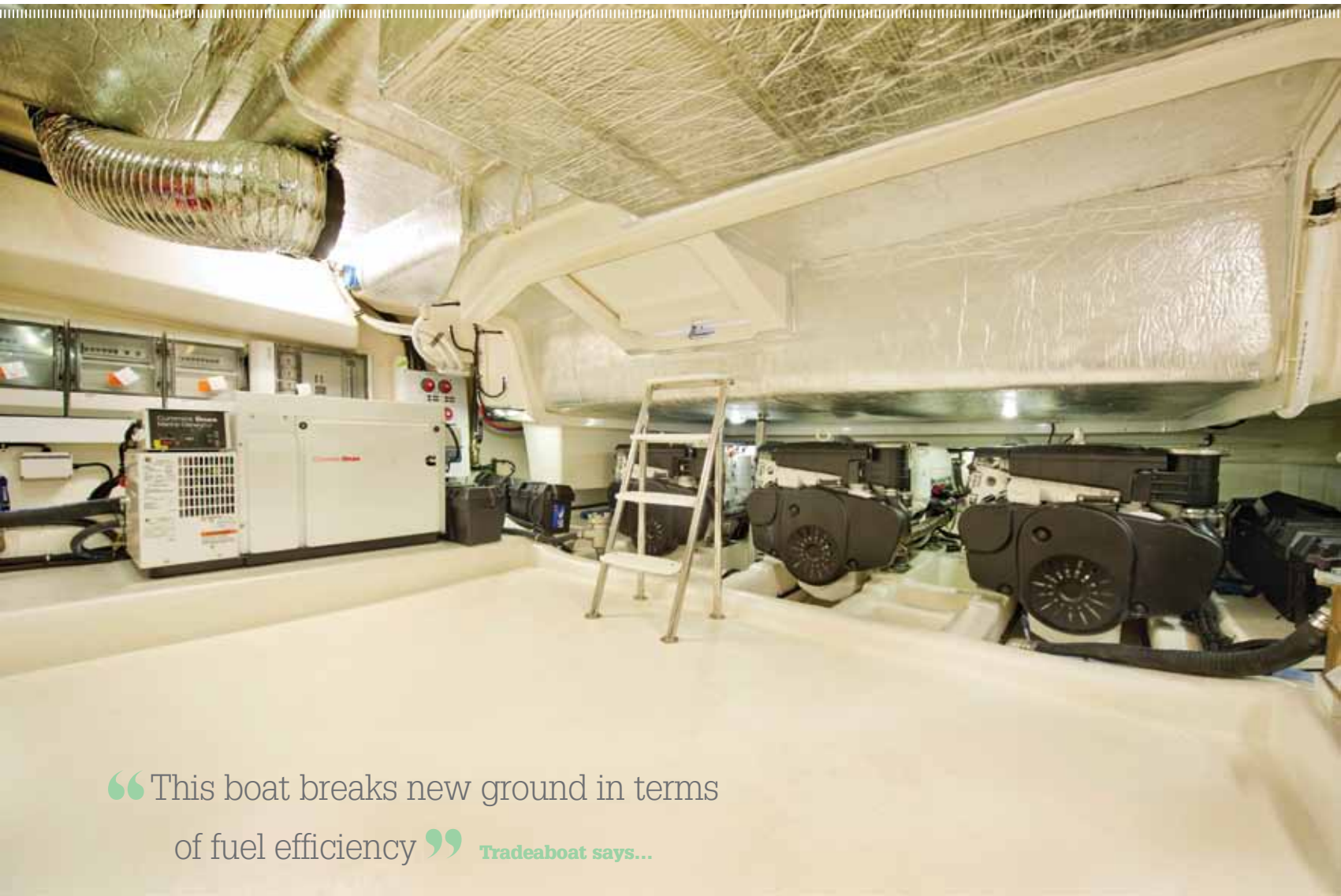


windows) is higher both sitting and standing. The combined effect is superbly airy and welcome news for those that may suffer from motion sickness.

Moving forward into the accommodation area, you'll find a couple of very new concepts, especially for those unfamiliar with pod-propelled hulls. There is the usual, beautifully-appointed forward stateroom and its ensuite which doubles as the day head. The crew-come-kid's cabin features twin single berths and plenty of storage. If the TV isn't standard I am sure it can be optioned in which should keep the youngsters out of trouble when entertaining.

Now here is where the uninitiated stand back and say "what the??" A second set of stairs leads back aft and down under the saloon floor where the engine room should be. Instead we find ourselves in, quite simply, a breath-taking master stateroom. I shan't go on too much about it because the pictures speak in much more elegant terms but I suspect this full beam parlour with king-sized bed, two seat couch, separate walk-in wardrobe and full service ensuite – all in a 53' cruising boat – will have competing designers scrabbling for a sharp pencil.

And what a hood it is. The engine room (located under the cockpit floor) can be accessed in two ways. Day-to-day



“This boat breaks new ground in terms of fuel efficiency” Tradeaboat says...

PERFORMANCE RECORDED ON THE DAY

7 knots	9L per hour (slow cruise)
8.5 knots	11L per hour (slow cruise)
21 knots	138L per hour (running)
24 knots	165L per hour (running)
30 knots	240L per hour (WOT)

access is via a standard hatch-and-ladder system in the saloon entry, but the real access for servicing is thanks to a set of hydraulic rams which lift the entire cockpit floor. You'd think that with three 435hp Volvo IPS drives there wouldn't be much room for anything else. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Even with a 17.5kVA Onan generator, multiple air-conditioning units and a watermaker – equipment considered standard on a vessel of this class – there is room for another optional crew cabin. This boat did not have one but I've seen it on the plans.

Instead this boat had a huge open storage and workshop area which is probably the option I would look at because the 53 already





has plenty of accommodation and you can never have too many places to store toys. And it pays to remember that some of the space previous Riv owners will have become accustomed to under the lazarette floor is no longer available. Servicing access around the engines is pretty good and I doubt your local diesel mechanic would find any reason to complain.

For those who might feel the need for a bit more bite at the prop Riviera has made a few other engine configurations available. You could opt for a twin IPS 900 installation

powered by a pair of 700hp Volvos or even twin IPS 1200s powered by a couple of 900hp Volvos. Alternatively, the vessel can also be fitted with the IPS' main competition in the form of the ZF4000 pod system, with either MTU or Caterpillar engines.

For me the cockpit is the best reflection of the vessel's "cross-over" design ethos. Riviera's design team has covered all the bases nicely. The huge two-burner barbeque is as easy to clean as it is to use, and the raised settee (an idea borrowed from bigger boats) is the perfect spot to while away a day's gamefishing

in comfort.

The huge underseat freezer means you have no need to break the holiday with a trip to the shops. I particularly liked the way so many features have been designed "family safe". A good example is the open access bollards in the stern corners. Not only are they super robust but they are about as safe to use as bollards can be because accidents at mooring time are invariably serious.

From a hard-core fisherman's point of view there is no bait-tank or tuna-tubes but they can be retrofitted, and from a purely leisure



boat perspective the stern garage in the Sport Yacht model is hard to beat. The designers never intended this boat to be an award winner in either of these two categories, although I'd be surprised if it doesn't pick up a few accolades in its own right.

The view from the flybridge... is pretty appealing. Even more impressive is the number of people who can enjoy it. By my count the bridge provides seating in comfort for at least 10 people. That is two more than can be catered for on the 51 (the boat the 53 is replacing). It very well-appointed with every

mod con you could feasibly request (icemaker, fully-adjustable seating, and my personal favourite – the full width electric sunroof).

The 53 comes in two helm options: forward and aft. As a keen fisherman I would favour the aft layout, but I can see why the more cruising-orientated clients would prefer a forward helm station. If the forward option is chosen an aft docking station is provided for via a single joystick control (that's all you need with a pod drive setup).

Taking charge of this vessel's helm truly is child's play. Those unfamiliar with IPS joystick

controls will be delighted at how intuitive this computer-controlled, close-manoeuving system is. The vessel's movement and aspect in relation to the dock is controlled with a push or a twist of the joystick. It is actually quite difficult to get the vessel into any trouble and the delivery of horsepower is carefully managed by the computer. Once clear of the dock and in open water the helmsman foregoes the joystick in favour of a more conventional steering wheel and twin lever system.

The test boat for the day was set up with a dazzling array of the very latest from

“It’s quiet, responsive and beautifully smooth on the open water, and around the dock it’s a perfect lady” **Tradeabout says...**



Raymarine and when you add in the very excellent C-Zone system (a kind of one-touch, multi-room platform that allows you to monitor and control all the boat’s “goings-on” at a glance) you really do feel like you’re at the helm of some sort of luxurious Starship Enterprise.

Performance

There is no arguing that the Riviera 53 IPS boasts very impressive performance in terms of speed but we have seen that many times before. What really got more attention was just how quiet and fuel efficient it is. At 24 knots we were only recording 43 decibels on the bridge and even at close to wide open throttle (more than 30 knots) we still had only 45 decibels. To put that into perspective, a normal conversation usually produces

around 60 decibels. Even at “full noise” you can almost drown out the engine noise just chatting. To be honest that is about twice as good as any other boat I’ve tested.

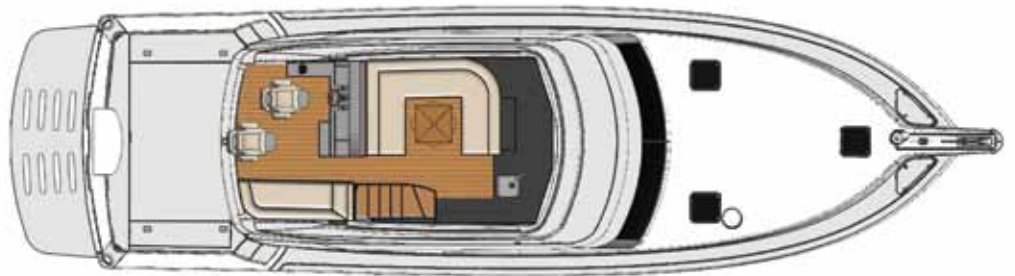
The fuel efficiency is nothing to sniff at either. The rough figures I worked out had us burning 11 litres per hour at 8.5 knots. Again the closest rival of a vessel in this class I’ve ever driven used 18 litres per hour at the same speed. Admittedly, these rough calculations may require some calibration but the message is clear. This boat breaks new ground in terms of fuel efficiency.

No matter how you look at it she’s lovely to drive. Quiet, responsive and beautifully smooth on the open water, and around the dock she’s a perfect lady – pretty hard to fault in my book.

The Verdict

I could not have been more impressed with the Riviera 53 Flybridge IPS. As I said to my colleagues when I got home, this boat had a lot to live up to in terms of hype and it has delivered. It is quite simply a very well put together and beautifully-appointed vessel. It is very hard to be all things to all people and given that is almost exactly what Riviera’s design brief asked for, they have done very well. I love its look on the water and I can see how nicely it would fit a typical kiwi family’s lifestyle. There are enough options in terms of power to give it more kick but I don’t think it is needed and you would probably be messing with something that is already very, very good.

Bravo Riviera!



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- Huge volume and great use of space
- Well suited to a broad boating lifestyle
- Beautifully appointed
- Latest C-Zone (it really is very cool)
- Ground breaking noise dampening and fuel efficiency



- With all the options taken into consideration I could not fault it

SPECIFICATIONS

NEW 53 ENCLOSED FLYBRIDGE	
LOA	18.2m
Beam	5.13m
Maximum Draft	1.25m
Dry Weight (approx)	22,300 kg
Fuel Capacity	3,500 litres
Water Capacity	740 litres
Holding Tank Capacity	273 litres
Sleeping Capacity	6-8 persons
Standard Engine Volvo IPS	3 x 435hp (320kW)