

BOAT REVIEW

Riviera 395 SUV

VROOM WITH A VIEW

Thanks to their popularity and feature-filled versatility, sports utility cruisers are the hot hatchbacks of the boat world. KEVIN GREEN finds out if the Riviera 395 SUV has what it takes to pull away from the congestion.

STORY **Kevin Green** PHOTOS **Kevin Green; Supplied**





FIRST IMPRESSIONS

On spec, the open-plan, two-cabin Riviera 395 has what it takes to get close to these ideals (including a base price on par with several competitors), but to be certain I would need to find out what lay under the bonnet too. Aesthetics are make-or-break for many prospective owners in this category, but for others (such as downsizing Riviera owners) it must still look like a Riviera. The 395 SUV accomplishes this by continuing the curved profile of its larger siblings and with those undulating hull windows — features that are distinctly Riviera, albeit in a fairly compact package. The newly-designed hull contains the requisite high volume for living below decks and enough flare in the bows to be seaworthy, while giving the owner sufficient elbow room in his suite as well. Other key design points that differentiate a Riviera from its European competitors is the wise use of bulkheads and overhangs to protect you from the harsh southern hemisphere sun.

Water access is another major requirement — as is dockside convenience — and the latter proved fine as I stepped aboard from the pontoon on Queensland’s Gold Coast, where hull number two gleamed white in the midday sun. The wide swim platform can house a bunch of kids fishing



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The hull is both sporty and sleek; Predictably-good handling and torque are on tap from the 370hp Volvos; Easy engine access should keep your mechanic happy; On a comfortable foredeck, relaxation is a requirement of entry



“The newly-designed hull contains the requisite high volume for living below decks”

The sports cruiser category is becoming an increasingly busy one, and is certainly not the realm for the unimaginative builder. British, Italian, French and other distinctive styles ensure it’s a hot category, and the temperature is almost unbearable around the 40-foot zone. These are transition boats for the mass production builders, and for the premium market ones like Australia’s credentialed Riviera, it’s their entry-level model. Riviera has built around this 43ft size before, but the market has moved on since then because of mass-produced competitors snapping from below and premium market competitors pushing hard to add value. This means that differentiators are perhaps becoming more difficult as common components, as demonstrated by the Volvo IPS pod drives on this Riviera 395 SUV and its competitors.

In keeping with our car analogy, here are some of the key must-haves: a big boot (aft cockpit), speed at the traffic lights (to pull a skier out) and sharp handling for easy parking. Other niceties include plenty of usable deck space for the watertoys in sheltered bays, while it should also have enough horsepower to blast offshore for the weekend. In between, there must be liveability at anchorage, enough comforts to keep the adults happy (yet not be overly complicated) or high maintenance as busy owners simply want to jump on and blast off. So how much of this wish list does the Riviera 395 SUV satisfy?



“The 43-foot hull is built around these 370hp supercharged engines with their forward-facing propellers”

while dad operates the transom barbecue, and there is still enough room for the inflatable to be stacked outside against the 316 stainless handrail. Under that barbecue is a lazarette to take the deflated dinghy as well.

Stepping into the vast cockpit reveals the corner seating and dining table with bar fridge nearby. Adjacent to these is the starboard-side Volvo IPS joystick control for those tight marina-berthing situations. Most of this area is snug under the fibreglass saloon extension and side windows give plenty light and vision. All fresco diners can easily reach in through the large opening window to their counterparts at the inside dinette — perhaps where the parents are enjoying a glass or two while the kids mess about in the cockpit area. This is where fuss-free surfaces are needed, so simple bare fibreglass flooring (with synthetic teak options) and vinyl flooring in the saloon will withstand a spilt Coke, while the substantial saloon door lip prevents sea water entry into the single level inside-outside area.

Given that anchoring is a major part of this style of boat, Riviera has ensured that the rode is adequate for all conditions, thanks to a deep chain locker that avoids build-ups and an oversize electric Muir windlass/capstan with manual override. Equally good is the large cleating midships (and all around) should you go alongside the fuel dock. Then, it's time to kick-back on the double sunpad and slip a few coldies into the drink holders.

The saloon is airy and open thanks to vertical bulkheads, large opening side windows and a stylish visor over the front to shade the instrumentation. Access is good through the uncluttered corridor to the portside steering console, with a double lounge bench behind it and the starboard galley opposite. It's sensibly located towards the back, and so it adjoins the aft deck. This is similar to some other marques, but what differentiates Riviera is the detailing: there are sturdy longitudinal handrails, Sunbrella soft furnishings and solid light American oak, plus



strong stainless fixings on doors and cupboards. These are built to last, meaning they maintain the value of your asset should you ever sell. Other quality touches include the double leather helm bench and an ergonomic leather fascia with Garmin instrumentation. There's twin 12-inch screens for navigation and a central one for the Volvo engine controls. All other systems are managed by the Czone digital bus screen and controls. Error-finding is a major advantage of these digital bus systems because any problems show onscreen. Traditionalists will appreciate the chunky buttons for repetitive controls such as wipers, lights, horn and so on, while the kids can pump up the volume of the Fusion hi-fi that's piped throughout the 395. The galley is modest but sufficient, which reflects the day-use and weekender clientele for this boat. There's a deep sink, single electric hob and microwave convection oven (the latter two appliances require the 7 KVA generator set to run). However, cooking needs to be a stationary affair, as there are no fiddles to prevent spillage. On the plus-side, there's energy efficient double-drawer refrigeration, while for the non-perishables there are overhead lockers.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Combinations of solid light wood and leather create an appealing and stately saloon; The galley has enough gear to encourage longer stays aboard the 395; The ergonomic double helm seat is another example of Riviera's knowledge and attention to detail

Rivals

Beneteau GT 46

The Grand Turismo range combines style with some grunt, and this is especially the case with the GT46: with its twin 435hp Volvo IPS pod engines that can produce up to 33kt, it's firmly cemented as one of the better vessels in the sports cruiser category. The GT46 has two main layouts – a galley-down with the two-cabin version or a three-cabin version with galley topside. The base boat sells for around \$740,000. www.beneteau.com



Fairline 43 Open

A smaller version of the British marque's popular 48, it has twin Volvo Penta IPS600 D6-435, diesel (435mhp each) which should propel it to 34kt. It has the galley downstairs with an athwartships double aft and second cabin in the bow. Unusually, the deck layout includes a tender garage and the saloon has a full-length opening sunroof with double bench at the starboard console. For pricing, get in touch with a local Fairline distributor.



Azimut 43 HT

The Azimut 43 Hard Top is a proven cruiser that uses Cummins 355hp shaft drives to power it to 23kt, so while not really a sports cruiser it is well made with a broad hull, vertical topsides and plumb ends to maximise volume. Below is a deep central skeg for solid directional stability. Inside, there is galley upstairs, while below is a full-beam master suite, two cabins and a bathroom. Locally it sells for \$1,000,000. www.azimutyachts.com.au



THREE-BED CABIN

A wide central corridor beside the helm leads down below where the single bathroom is starboardside, sitting behind the owner's bow cabin and the midships guest cabin. The large bathroom has dual access, so the second door leads to the owner's berth. In here, volume is high thanks to the tall topsides that create an airy space, which is accentuated by the man-size opening skylight (though the elongated side windows are a wee bit small). However, the open skylight should draw in enough airflow to make those tropical anchorages bearable without the rumble of the aircon and genset combo. Bedtime should be peaceful as the queen-sized, semi-island bed has steps alongside and an innerspring mattress. Thanks to IPS pods there's no bow thruster to disturb my reverie, as well as plenty of under-bed space for storage with four large drawers. Typical of Riviera, lockers are at a premium all-round this suite with a tall wardrobe, overhead lockers and shelf space.

The 395 shows good versatility in the guest cabin with three beds across its midships layout, making it ideal for a gaggle of teenagers, or two of the beds can become a double with an infill. Being under the saloon sole, height is obviously restricted, but padded headboards should minimise the bumps. Hull windows on each side reduce that claustrophobic feeling, along with opening portholes (with alarms wired to the helm). There's room for a TV on a bulkhead, a vanity table and under-bed storage along with cupboards; more than enough for a long weekend.

In the bathroom, the most striking feature is the elongated window angled down towards the ocean, creating a kaleidoscopic feeling from the separate shower unit or when standing at the vanity sink. Moulded tiles offer sure-footedness along with a quality touch. Mirrors on the two overhead lockers are perfectly placed and fresh air is a short reach above to the opening skylight, while an electric head finishes these excellent ablutions.

ABOVE The aft stateroom cleverly fits three singles inside

BELOW The single bathroom has dual-door entry





Quick Specs

RIVIERA 395 SUV
PRICE \$848,900.00 base boat
LENGTH (OVERALL) 13.27m
HULL LENGTH 12.06m
BEAM 4.26m
DRAFT 1.13m
DISPLACEMENT 11.3t
FUEL (L) 1,500L
WATER (L) 390L
HOLDING TANK 80L
BERTHS: 5 persons
ENGINE 2 x 370hp Volvo
 Penta D6-IPS 500
PROPELLERS IPS twin nibral
 3 blade (counter rotating)
DESIGN Riviera
WEB www.riviera.com.au

“The ride was smooth with absolutely no rattles from inside or out, while the motor spun at 3655rpm”



ACCESSIBLE HULL

The business end of the Riviera 395 SUV is not apparent at first, as a smallish hatch in the aft cockpit only lets you peep at the twin Volvo IPS 500s — only until I press a button and the entire cockpit sole elevates to fully reveal the engines and pod transmissions. Hull integrity depends on the fit of this large hatch, so it has a deep-recessed lip with wide rubber seal and a hydraulic arm to close it tightly. The 43-foot hull is built around these 370hp supercharged engines with their forward-facing propellers. Traditionalists understandably see forward-facing design as being vulnerable to debris, but given the proven nature of this engineering — Riviera alone have installed over 1,000 — there's a lot to be said for them when it comes to manoeuvrability. Other hazards for any kind of sail drives is electrolysis corrosion, which is something Volvo has tackled with its QL Active Corrosion Protection System. This system helps prevent galvanic corrosion attacking the metal parts of your sterndrive, which complements the sacrificial anodes.

Servicing should be drama-free on this layout

because all key points — oilways, filters, belts and electrical connections are accessible from four sides. The AGM batteries are sensibly-placed above the water level with switches and other componentry, while the bilges have sufficient depth to cope with a leak should a skin fitting fail. Also, slightly elevated is the 7 KVA Onan generator that sits midships, while the air-conditioner is on port.

SAILING OFF THE GOLD COAST

Leaving the dock is child's play, with the joystick pod drives precisely controlling all four points of the hull, allowing skipper Mark and myself to motor off to the Gold Coast waterway. A twist on the joystick towards your direction of travel pushes the boat that way, and Volvo's useful high-power mode is good for windy days (as our day would be). Sitting on the double leather seat, I pushed the throttles down while tweaking the tab button, flattening the bows so that those pesky jet skis buzzing around me wouldn't cause an accident. Using the Interceptor tabs, with their wide and deep foils, gave precise control to the



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE

The cockpit is vast and has some essentials at hand; A window opens the space between the al fresco area and interior dinette; Plenty of headroom and storage in the spacious master stateroom



Highs

- Functional and versatile design for Australian waters
- Quality build and components
- Good performance

Lows

- Lack of fiddles in the galley
- Smallish windows in owner's suite



trim on the 395 as I also could tweak each foil to control our heel as we banked into long, slow turns. Standing at the bolster seat, only a light touch was required on the wheel as I pushed the hull's shoulder deeper, spinning through some doughnuts without any sideways slide before bolting upright again for a blast through the calm waterway; only a faint murmur came from the Volvos, and the Garmin GPS showed our speed topping out at a shade of over 30kt — the major speed barrier for sport cruisers (at least in my eyes). The ride was smooth with absolutely no rattles from inside or out, while the motor spun at 3655rpm and drank a total of 144 litres. Decelerating to a more economical cruising speed of 26kt didn't vastly improve consumption, which also showed as 144 litres per hour. Overall, these are slightly more pessimistic figures than the factor data, but nevertheless give an average range of 300 nautical miles — more than enough for those blasts along the coast and those lazy long weekends at your favourite anchorage. 🍹