

RIVIERA 445 SUV

A multi-faceted yacht for all your boating needs.

BY CHRIS CASWELL



LET'S CUT TO THE CHASE HERE. The new Riviera 445 SUV is a brilliant new addition to the Riviera line, and I love absolutely everything about her... except the SUV tag. I know the 445 does many things well, but I'm weary of the "Sport Utility Vehicle" label, even though I own two of them. Still, I guess they couldn't call it the "Swiss Army Knife," and labeling it "The Multi-Tool" isn't too classy, either. So I'll live with the SUV tag... and I'd love to live with this yacht, too.



This is an express version of Riviera's successful 43-foot flybridge, but it's built for those skippers (like me) who sometimes feel like a bus driver. You know... we're stuck up on the bridge driving the boat, enviously listening to the laughter of everyone having fun below. Sigh.

It's also a boat for all seasons. Our test run was on a hot day off Miami, but inside the 445 it was cool and serene. On a rainy, cold day out on the Great Lakes, it would have been warm and serene.

But when the weather is pleasant, with the sliding doors and window to the cockpit open and, as they say in Australia, the "shrimp on the barbie," well, it just doesn't get any better. The teak-planked cockpit is not only large (123 square feet), but comfortably outfitted for every desire.

Gold standard

Built on Australia's Gold Coast, you can outfit your 445 with fishing options from a bait tank to tackle lockers. But the 445 that I was aboard fit my idea of fun, with a sink and grill in a console at the transom (no smoke in the cabin) and a comfy lounge seat to watch the steaks so they cook just right. There's a big console to port with room for fridge or icemaker, and a countertop large enough to set out a buffet. The transom door leads to an extra-wide swim platform, and the cockpit has enough room for a Little League team.

Inside, the Riviera 445 is bright (thanks to the oversized windows) and airy (courtesy of opening windows on both sides), with satin-finished oak trim (high-gloss cherry is optional).

The galley is to port, with an L-shaped counter providing exemplary room for prepping meals. The sink is aft, a two-burner cooktop is in the middle, and a Vitrefrigo two-drawer fridge and a microwave are tucked under the counter. And, to give full credit to Riviera, they understand that cooks need storage. Lockers and drawers are below, and eye-level cabinets are filled with glassware and dishes in dedicated rattle-free holders. Someone's actually going to enjoy cooking on the 445!

Opposite is a big dinette with a table that can be unfolded for meals or folded for cocktails, or even lowered as an extra berth. And, once again, kudos to Riviera for huge stowage underneath.

The skipper gets a delightful "office" just forward of the galley, with visibility that's truly 360 degrees. There's a comfy, double-wide helm seat with folding armrests and two levels of foot rests, and the dark gray, leather-trimmed dashboard causes no distracting reflections. Our boat comfortably handled a pair of Raymarine HybridTouch monitors perfectly placed just below line of sight forward, and there was ample space for everything from a pair of air conditioning/heating ducts to drink holders to a row of protected and backlit rocker switches. I particularly like the placement of the throttle/shifters on a raised platform so they were perfect for use whether seated or standing.

Before we leave the salon, there are other nice touches, like the two opening overhead hatches for light and air, the recessed soffits above the windows for indirect night lighting, and the hidden shades on all the windows.

Appealing accommodations

The Volvo IPS pod drives do several things, such as increasing maneuverability and allowing joystick docking, but one of the often unheralded benefits is increasing the usable cabin space. Because the engines are mounted well aft, the 445 enjoys two full staterooms

that may just cause some disagreements if you have guests aboard. But, for once, it's not because anyone is a "second-class citizen" stuffed into a nasty little cabin. It's because both cabins have so much to offer that guests may find themselves in the position of saying, "No, no, you take the master stateroom; I'm just fine aft."

The forward stateroom would be the traditional owner's cabin on most boats but, on the Riviera, not necessarily. It's big, with an island double berth for walk-around access, built-in night stands and mirrored lockers because there's never enough storage. The cabin has a real hanging locker (thank you, Riviera!) that can actually fit coat hangers, and slacks will hang full length without crumpling. This cabin also has private access to a generously sized ensuite head with a stylish vessel sink and a shower stall large enough to enjoy.

So what's the problem? Well, it's that the aft stateroom is just so appealing. First, it's not the usual dark cave. The cabin has large windows on each side, augmented by opening ports for fresh air, and the combination of light-colored upholstery on the bulkheads and the pale oak trim makes this stateroom cheery. Interestingly enough, it has no fewer than three berths. One runs along the starboard side under the window, and is where I could be found, propped up with a good book or watching the flat screen TV. The other two berths run athwartships, and here's the grabber: They slide together to form a full-sized queen berth. This cabin also has a built-in bureau, nightstand and another one of Riviera's most civilized hanging lockers.

OK, I admit: There is full headroom only in one area by the mirror and bureau, but there's plenty to sit everywhere else. If this were my 445, I'd stake this out as the owner's cabin because it spans the full beam, has huge windows and a big bed.

But, you say, the forward stateroom has a private head. Au contraire, I say; Riviera thought of that, too. There's a very clever door arrangement that turns the day head into a private head with a large shower (with teak seat) just for the aft stateroom. What more could you want?

Economical and fun

Standard (and only) power for the 445 is a pair of Volvo IPS 600s, which are 435-hp diesels linked to Duoprop pod drives, and these are just the right combination of spunk and economy for this boat. You — and your mechanic — are going to love the engine room access. The entire teak cockpit sole lifts hydraulically so you can get to every nook and cranny without a struggle. There's a small hatch by the cabin door supposedly for daily checks, but why would I ever use that when I can touch a switch and stand upright while I do my due diligence?

The Onan 11.5 kW genset is tucked behind the ladder and fully accessible, batteries are convenient, and all the electrical and plumbing is done in a most seamanlike manner. And, besides having a fiberglass non-slip floor in several areas, the entire engine room — including stringers, bilge and bulkheads — is finished to a high standard.

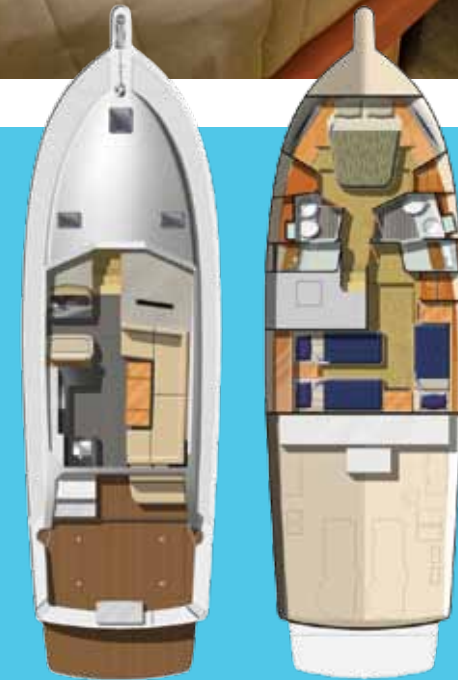
Underway, the 445 is everything you want and more: Nimble, quick and comfortable. Getting away from the dock (and returning) is fingertip easy, thanks to the Volvo Penta joystick that takes all the white knuckles out of close-quarters maneuvering. You can use it to spin in a tight circle, move sideways against wind and tide, and even pin the boat against the dock while securing lines.

We topped out at just over 32 knots with full fuel and water, plus three people aboard. That's plenty fast for most families and, after all, how often do the sea conditions allow it? But when the seas build, the well-proven 445 hull is both dry and easy-riding, with a 14.5-degree deadrise. And, even punching into head seas, the Riviera is quiet, with none of the usual squeaks or groans.

Back off the throttles to 20 knots and 2800 rpms, a speed that's easy on engines and guests alike, and you'll be sipping an economical 26 gph. Even better, the Riviera soundproofing kept the sound level to a whispery 70 decibels for easy conversation. She's fun to drive, too, with hydraulic steering that invites you to crank her into a hard turn that still has her biting solidly with no cavitation.

You've probably broken the code: I like the Riviera 445, and I like her a lot. And, yes, I can learn to live with the name.

As they say Down Under, "Good on 'ya, mates!" LB



Riviera 445 SUV

- Specifications**
 LOA: 47'5"
 Beam: 15'
 Draft: 3'11"
 Displacement: 30,300 lbs.
 Fuel Capacity: 476 gals.
 Water Capacity: 122 gals.
 Power: T-Volvo Penta IPS 600 diesels
 Base Price: \$795,000

riviera.com.au

