



Strange Fascination

Riviera traditionally hasn't been keen on building hardcore fishing boats, but with a little arm-twisting and collaboration the company has produced a boat that's, well, fascinating. David Granville revisits the Riviera 51. STORY: DAVID GRANVILLE
PHOTOS: LOU MARTIN

Although David Lockwood reviewed Riviera's first 51 to come off the production line back in the Dec/Jan 2004 issue of BlueWater, we thought we'd show you a much fishier version

that's fishing the Cairns heavy-tackle season as you read these words.

Fascination is the result of a collaboration between Riviera, MTU-Detroit Diesel and Mercedes Benz. A truly spectacular-looking vessel with its sparkling Mercedes silver livery and sexy Black Marlin tower, Fascination is turning heads everywhere it goes.

It's not just all razzle and dazzle, however - Fascination is a working charterboat and was built under the watchful eye of long-time gameboat skipper Capt Bob Jones.

"Jonesy", as he is known to most, has forgotten more about gamefishing than most of us could ever hope to know, and when it comes to putting a serious gameboat together, Riviera made a wise choice by employing his services.

Riviera isn't renowned for its enthusiasm to build hardcore fishing boats; but whether the company likes it or not, people want to use its boats for gamefishing. Fascination is a good example of what can be achieved with a little customisation.

Although Riviera did take a red pen to Jonesy's original wish list, he did manage to convince the company to include many of the essential fittings required to turn a luxury cruiser into a practical liveaboard sportsfisher.

HEART OF THE MATTER

Without doubt, the highlight of Fascination is its engineroom. Sporting a glistening pair of MTU's latest Series 60 825hp Detroit Diesels - complete with full chrome kit and dyno tune - this is more of a showroom than an engineroom.

And let's not forget the easy-clean Awl-Grip gloss-white two-pack engineroom paintjob that took as long to complete as it normally does for Riv to finish an entire boat. The stainless-steel ball valves look the goods, and there are even a couple of stereo speakers in the engineroom to keep you entertained during services.

The cockpit on Fascination is pretty fishy thanks to Jonesy's input. A 130lb Relax gamechair takes centre stage, with enough room for a couple of crew to work the deck. Custom removable cutting boards have been installed on top of the cockpit freezer and sink so baits can be rigged without damaging any gelcoat.

There's a hatch to store all your odds and ends, plus Dacron and waxed thread dispensers. There's a very flash stainless-steel knife block too, which also houses pliers and bait needles.

A hatch with removable tackle drawers is just the place to store your terminal tackle, and a concealed tube in the port wing provides a clever way to store tagpoles and flying gaff poles.



Gunwale-mounted rodholders are appropriately positioned, and clearing rodholders are located on the tower legs. There are also horizontal storage racks for light-tackle outfits under the flybridge overhang. There is a livewell incorporated into the transom and a mile of storage below deck.

The only downsides I could see to the cockpit were the coaming rails (which are a survey requirement) and the swim platform. While the swim platform on Fascination is probably the best we've seen with its heavy-duty stainless tubing and stylish slatted teak

inserts, I'm sure Jonesy would have preferred not to have one at all. This was one necessity, however, due to the boat's commitment to corporate entertaining.

MAGNA CHARTER

Because Fascination is being used for liveaboard charter fishing, the main changes that were required internally over the standard boat were to the accommodation and the refrigeration.

Fascination still features a queen-sized island berth in the forward cabin, but instead of a midship master stateroom there is a two-berth cabin to port and a three-berth cabin to starboard.

If you include the saloon and the flybridge, Fascination has the potential to sleep at least eight or nine people.

Two separate bathrooms and a large-capacity watermaker ensure that all those bodies can stay hygienic.

When you're at sea for a week and have a heap of bodies to feed, let alone a bunch of bait to store, there is probably no more important facet to a working boat than refrigeration. After 30-odd years of running charterboats, I reckon Jonesy has a pretty good idea on what refrigeration is required - and although you can never have too much, he seems to have been able to squeeze an adequate amount into Fascination.

In the galley there are two Waeco under-bench fridges and a matching freezer. In the saloon there is another Waeco drinks fridge with icemaker. In the cockpit there is a big, deep freezer, and on the flybridge there is another drinks fridge and two under-seat freezers.

The flybridge on the 51 Riv is huge, with a dinette forward of the helm and another bench seat to port. The dash on Fascination is big enough to fit all the goodies, including two Raymarine 10in screens that drive the sounder, plotter and radar. There is also a Raymarine autopilot, chain counter, bowthruster control, HF radio and of course MTU digital engine displays.

Another smart inclusion is an LCD display that is hooked to a camera in the engineroom for constant monitoring. A 12V spotlight ensures that the camera has adequate light without having to run the genset.

As on most boats, the VHF radio is mounted overhead. I have never been able to work this out because the VHF is generally the radio used most; so every time someone calls you, you have to stand up to get the mic. Why not put it on the dash where it's within arms reach from your seat?

MONEY'S WORTH

Our sea trial aboard Fascination was more substantial than a lot of our reviews. Because the boat was on its way north for the season, we jumped aboard on the Gold Coast and stayed onboard for the 90-odd-mile run to my homeport of Mooloolaba.



Because I have made this run many times, Jonesy was happy for me to take the helm for most of the journey while he grabbed a few hours of shuteye.

The first thing I noticed once behind the wheel was the offset helm. The wheel is located slightly to starboard from the centreline and, to be honest, it felt quite weird. I found myself standing on the centreline to the left of the wheel so I could look directly over the bow.

When I did finally sit down, I was treated with a Navigator helmchair, which in my opinion are one of the most comfortable and robust chairs available.

The only problem was that with the seat low enough to have my feet on the deck, I could only just see over the dash and couldn't see the bow at all. Fortunately the Navigator could be adjusted to an appropriate height,

but this meant my feet were well and truly off the deck and I had to use the drop-down footrest.

With about 15kt of breeze off our stern quarter, it was a pretty smooth and uneventful ride to Mooloolaba. I was surprised, however, that even in a following sea we still managed to get a bit of spray on the clears.

PLAYING THE FIELD

Once off Mooloolaba it was time to have a bit of a play, so we turned Fascination back into the sea to see how she liked it on the nose.

We were still clipping along and it displayed a fairly impressive sense of solidity. When compared to the 48 Riv of old, this hull wins hands down.

On the test day we were cruising at 21.6kt on 1900rpm and consuming 210lt/h. According to Jonesy, with a light load Fascination will cruise at 23kt burning 180lt/h and it will hit 30kt at 2350rpm. Interestingly, Fascination increased 3kt at cruise when the props were changed from five-blade to four-blade.

Where Fascination really impressed was in the manoeuvrability stakes. As I chased my imaginary marlin around the ocean with a heavy hand on the throttles, it got around pretty quick for a 51-footer with a 30-odd tonne displacement. It was good to see that water ingress through the scuppers and the transom door wasn't too excessive either.

I know I say it every time, but you've just gotta love those Twin Disc Quickshift gearboxes. Being able to throw the levers from forward to reverse without stopping and without damage is one of the most substantial engineering breakthroughs in recent times. Indeed, they are made for marlin fishing.

Jonesy managed to convince Riviera to fit split single-lever controls, which in my opinion is a must - but because Riviera normally fits duals, the dash arrangement isn't really conducive to singles. The end result on Fascination was that, unfortunately, you really have to reach for the controls on either side of the wheel.

This boat test with a difference was thoroughly enjoyable, and it was nice to spend a few hours on Riviera's fishiest boat yet.

Just before this issue of BlueWater hits the newsstands I'll be spending a week aboard Fascination on the Great Barrier Reef fishing for giant black marlin. So if you think this is the boat you can see parked at your mooring, give me a call - I'll not only be able to tell you how it rides, but also how it

fishes!

Riviera 51
PRICE AS TESTED \$1,269,713
OPTIONS FITTED
Engine upgrade, Black Marlin tower, long-range fuel, silver hull, flybridge A/C, Reelax riggers, teak cockpit, 2C survey, two-pack engine room, custom saloon upholstery, watermaker, inverter, Raymarine electronics package, custom swim platform, flybridge freezers and more
PRICED FROM \$1,136,446
GENERAL
Material: FRP hull with composite superstructure
Type: Moderate-vee monohull
Length: 15.54m (51ft)
Beam: 4.9m (16ft 1in)
Draft: 1.40m (4ft7in)
Deadrise: 15°
Weight: 20,500kg (45,194lb)
CAPACITIES
Berths: Seven
Fuel: 3600lt (950 USgal)
Water: 860lt (227 USgal)/TR>
ENGINE
Make/Model: MTU Series 60
Type: Twin inline six-cylinder electronic turbo-diesels
Rated hp: 825

Displacement: 14lt
Weight: 1950kg (4298lb)
Gearbox (make/ratio): Twin Disc Quickshift/1.48:1
Props: Four-blade
SUPPLIED BY The Riviera Group, Coomera, QLD, tel (07) 5502 5555 or visit www.riviera.com.au All figures supplied as per manufacturer's specifications. Prices in Australian dollars for Australian-delivered boats unless otherwise stated.

Source: Bluewater

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