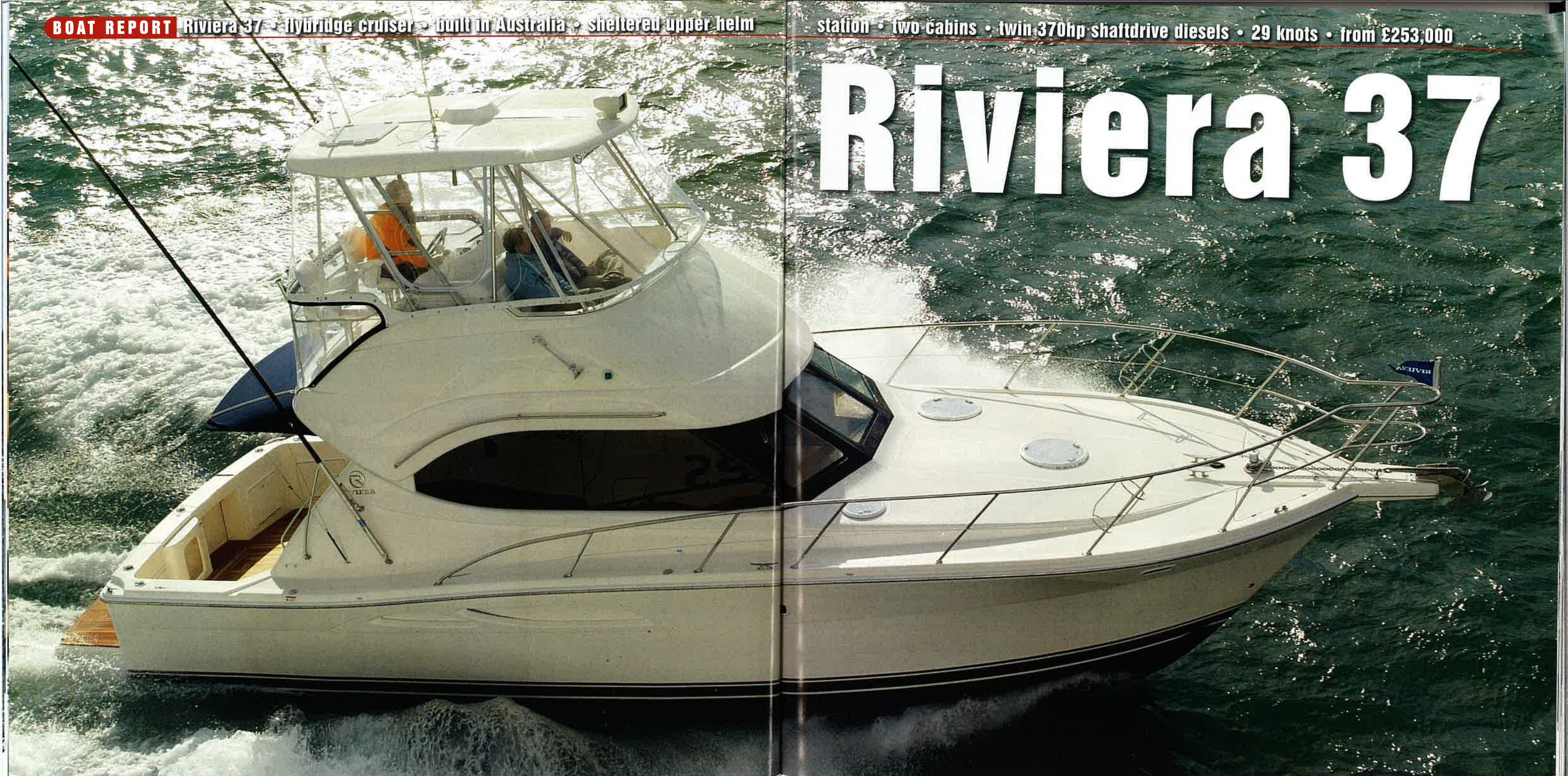


Riviera 37



Fresh from down under comes a flybridge cruiser that looks like a sportsfisher up top. Built for passagemaking in blue water, will it prove popular for use under grey skies? REPORT BY MARK TURLEY

They might be new to the UK, but Riviera are one of Australia's most successful boatbuilders, and have been making inroads into the Mediterranean market for some time.

Their range of blue-water cruisers extends from 33ft to 58ft, all solidly built for offshore running, basking and maybe fishing, with a suitable level of fit-out.

In the case of the first model to be imported, the two-cabin 37, this includes some serious protection for the flybridge by way of an optional enclosure which sticks out like a sore thumb.

An ugly conservatory or useful shelter come

rain or shine? We booked a test to find out for ourselves.

DESIGN & BUILD

In terms of exterior styling, the Riviera is quite different from what European buyers are used to in flybridge cruisers. The onus is on a command-centre helm, albeit with comfortable seating for the rest of the crew, rather than an extended space full of sunpads and wet-bars.

But the extremely solid optional hardtop fitted to our test boat, complete with sidescreens, will clearly allow this area to be used on even the wettest of days.

The boat's handsome reverse sheer is

reminiscent of a sportsfisher, while the seamless smoked screen under the eyebrow of the flybridge sharpens the look further.

Do not be deceived by the boat's '37' designation. Its hull alone measures 39ft 5in, and its overall length is almost 43ft.

Its shape is pretty keen too, deep-vee rather than medium. It is unblemished by the likes of tunnels, although propulsion is through a conventional straight drivetrain from twin inboard diesels.

The cockpit is spacious, not least because it's devoid of fixed seating, but then there is plenty of room in the lazaret to stow some loose furniture.

Equally unfussy is the accommodation. While the joinery and upholstery are solidly and smartly executed, the styling and layout are relatively conservative.

Nor have the designers tried to pack too much in, affording the saloon dinette, the galley and both cabins (which share a good-sized toilet/shower) just the right proportions to ensure comfort but without wasting space.

Everywhere, the accent is on no-nonsense seaworthiness. The fittings for securing open doors or hatch lids, for instance, are noticeably chunky and positive in the way they work.

And when you shut the through-transom door it becomes as solid as the rest of the deep coaming.

✓✓✓✓✓
Unfussy design, with handsome looks offset by an unsubtle hardtop.

ACCOMMODATION

You enter the interior through a wide, hinged door, climbing two steps up from cockpit level. This ensures that any water that finds its way aboard is kept out of the accommodation, and also that you can see out of the main window even when seated inside.

The interior 'decking' is actually a teak-and-holly-effect vinyl, but it looks the part, and useful handrails are set in the deckhead to help you steady yourself as you move around.

Our test boat had a wheelhouse/saloon layout, with an internal helm position to starboard, although some owners might prefer a second settee arrangement instead. Aft of this is a sideboard, with a drinks drawer incorporated in the base of the helm seat.

To port is a roomy, comfortable dinette, with

an accompanying free-standing stool, which will allow up to six people to sit around the table and eat. A pull-out occasional bed uses up the bulk of the space within the seat-base, but the rest offers fully lined storage.

Throughout the boat, most stowage is similarly practical, with flat areas, such as the top of the sideboard and the useful shelf between galley and dinette, finished off with a fiddle.

The helm itself is adorned by an imposing wooden wheel, and there is plenty of space on each side, as well as at head height, for gadgets and electronics. Unfortunately, the whole effect is rather cheapened by the pseudo-leather-and-walnut GRP console which houses the engine instruments and ready-use switches — an unfortunate example



above Although the galley's worktop moulding feels cheap, the single WC's tile-effect floor is impressive. The dinette offers a comfortable place for dining.

of spoiling the ship for a hap'orth of tar.

Moreover, it's a mistake replicated by the moulded galley surface, which also has a hollow ring to it. A nicely sculpted piece of Corian would be much more in keeping with the rest of the fit-out.

Still, the amount of worksurface is excellent, including a practical draining board moulded-in beside the decent-sized sink. For cooking, there's an inset two-burner halogen hob (made practical by the generator that comes as standard) along with a combi microwave/oven housed in the facing bulkhead. Stowage is good, with an array of drawers and cupboards plus a lift-out tray tucked under the sole.

In comparison with the generous proportions of the saloon, the forward cabin is slightly disappointing. The berth is rather squeezed into the vee of the topsides and is egg-shaped; although 4ft wide at the

shoulder, it pinches in at your head and foot.

Storage is adequate, however, with drawers and a cave locker under the berth plus a hanging locker that incorporates useful shelving.

The boat's single WC is en-suite, and it's a decent-sized compartment with an electric-flush toilet and a separate shower cubicle. Clever texturing gives the moulding a tile-effect floor, and the wooden cabinetry and mirrored surfaces reduce the potential blandness of having too much GRP.

Across the way, the midships cabin sports a staggered bunk arrangement which ensures that neither occupant will feel

cramped. There is plenty of room to stand and dress, as well as adequate clothes storage.

✓✓✓✓
Comfortable and well finished. Let down by some odd mouldings.

EXTERIOR

The slight dip in the sheer around the cockpit makes boarding from a pontoon when alongside particularly easy, especially since there is a grabrail and step down to the cockpit in the immediate vicinity.

The side decks are around 11in (28cm) wide at this point, and their width increases as they run forward past the flattish coachroof.

The forward, midships and aft cleats are all suitably chunky, and a thoughtful touch is the pop-up cleats provided on each quarter to take fender lanyards. The foredeck comes fitted with an electric windlass which feeds into a dedicated chain locker, and there is a separate one for warps.

Lockers abound around the cockpit too, with several worked into the coamings. Some of these house items such as the shoreside power connector, the manual bilge pump and the fuel

shut-offs, while another hides saltwater and freshwater wash-down systems.

For bulkier items, including a dinghy and cockpit furniture, the lazaret can be accessed via no fewer than three separate hatches. The only disappointment is the lack of gratings to keep gear clear of the hull sides, although plastic matting would easily sort this out.

Access to the flybridge is via a set of steps rather than a solid staircase. This has left space for a moulding with a sink and coolbox at its foot.

The flybridge layout is practical rather than luxurious, with space limited by what is a relatively short cockpit overhang. Unusually, the helm station is set behind the rest of the seating, but it remains the boat's command position, whether or not you have an interior helm too.

Two swivelling armchairs face a console moulded so that the banked instruments and controls face in towards the skipper and his mate. There is space for adding all manner of electronics, not least on the extra head-height fascia you get if you specify the hardtop.

The forward seating will accommodate a further four easily, although a table would make this area more versatile. The huge storage voids beneath the seat/console moulding and the forward coaming would also be more useful if they were subdivided, so that things couldn't slide around inside.

If you opt for the hardtop you get a very solid fabrication, with well braced stainless

steel supports topped by a robust GRP moulding complete with a hatch and handrail.

✓✓✓✓
Robust and practical, with a novel flybridge arrangement.

Tough, easily-deployed sidescreens finish the job, offering excellent all-round all-weather protection.

ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

The preferred engine installation is twin 370hp diesels from Volvo Penta or Cummins. Also listed are 330hp alternatives, but having

tried the boat with the 370hp Volvo Penta TAMD63Ps we believe that anything less potent would be doing the hull a disservice.

Access to the engineroom is excellent, through a clever combination of a hinge-up sink unit and door fashioned into the sideboard in the cockpit. This immediately gets you to the main battery switches and breakers, whereupon it is a short scoot down a ladder to the decking which is laid between the engines.

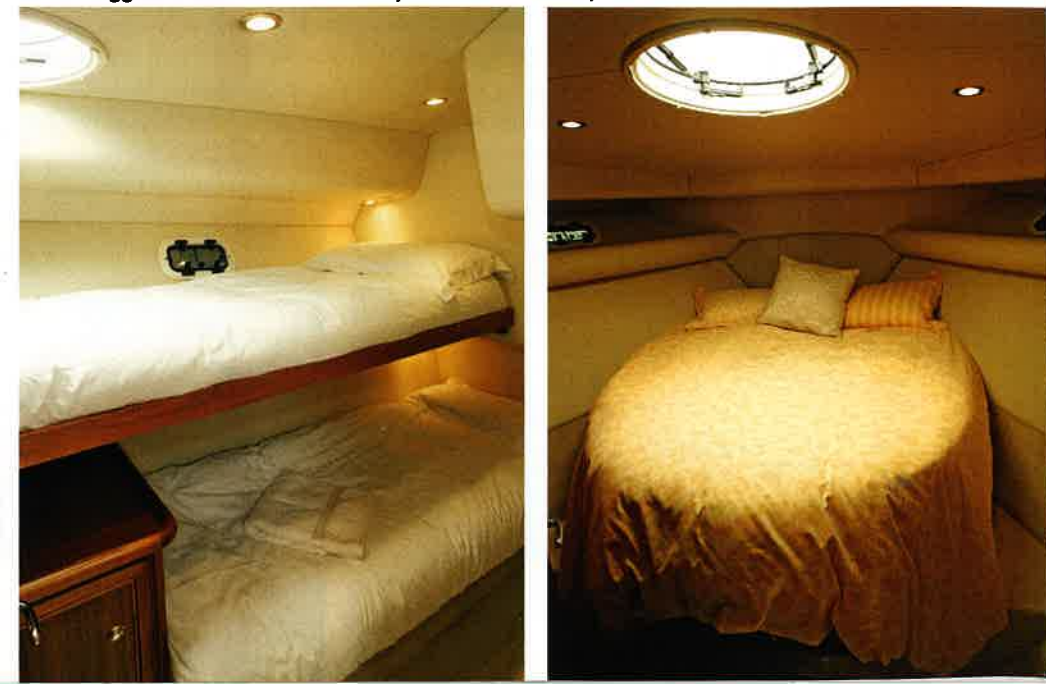
This treadplate is actually on top of the fuel tank, which is integrated into the hull with a double bottom rather than tucked into the



below The optional lower helm station has a disappointing console, but good practical features of the saloon include fiddled edges and deckhead grabrails.



below Staggered bunks make the midships cabin comfortable, but the forward berth is shoehorned in.





above Unusually, the saloon is two steps up from cockpit level. A ladder gives access to the flybridge.



above The upper helm has a command centre feel.



above Flybridge seating is in front of the helm.



above The cockpit sink hinges out for engine access. Various coaming lockers include those for a shorepower lead and hoses. Some cleats are pop-up units.

wings. A benefit of this is that there is plenty of space to get right round the outboard side of the engines, even though smaller items such as the water tanks are housed here instead.

Furthermore, there is sufficient height over the units for top-ups without the need to pull up portions of the saloon sole, the transparent bulbed water strainers are viewable from the access hatch, and primary fuel filters are immediately to hand on the aft bulkhead.

There is also room at the forward end of the compartment to get to the ancillaries that are ranged across the front of the engines, including the standard-fitment Onan 7kVA generator and the batteries.

The full belt guards on the engines make it safe to work up here even when they are running.

✓✓✓✓✓
Accessibility is first-class. Opt for the more potent engines.

below A doorway and ladder give great access to the engines and strainers. A generator is standard.



PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

Our unsettled test day was one of squally wind and rain interspersed with bright sunny patches and so the flybridge hardtop proved to be just the ticket. Its side screens could readily be rolled up or down depending on what the weather was throwing at us.

We had been concerned how vulnerable the screens might be in these circumstances, but they proved well up to the job, supported by the wholly robust stainless steel frame and GRP lid.

A second misgiving, as to whether the additional top-hamper might have a detrimental effect on the boat's handling at speed, also proved unfounded. A small amount of tab levelled up the hull against any crosswind to give an assuredly solid ride.

We were impressed by how agile the Riviera remained even given the fickle, windy

conditions. Whether running in a straight-line or being positioned around the photoboot, it stuck right with the helmsman, responding smartly and taking surprisingly sharp, nimble turns, but without heeling so far that the chines and bottom started to find the more solid water.

Partly, the hull's well-mannered nature must be down to the fact that it is not being pushed too hard. Our test runs, in clearly less than ideal conditions, gave us 27 knots flat-out at 2850rpm, although given kinder conditions the claimed top speed is nearer 29 knots.

When cruising, there is much enjoyable passagemaking to be done at around 2400-2600rpm, for 21-24 knots, not least because sound levels in the saloon are especially low, at 75dB(A). Oddly, though, our noise readings at the flybridge helm were unusually high for this kind of boat, probably because the helm is well aft, allowing the exhaust bark to intrude more than usual.

If you decide not to opt for the covered flybridge, at some point you are sure to prefer to drive down below, so it is good that visibility from the lower helm remains first-class.

Both helm positions are comfortable and have well-placed controls, with one exception: the ready-use switches at the interior station, for items such as the wipers, would be easier to find if they were sited on the angled console nearer the wheel rather than on the flat area ahead of it.

✓✓✓✓✓
Nimble even in squally conditions, and a good passagemaker.

SPECIFICATION & VALUE

The UK agents, Berthon of Lymington, tend to head for the quality end of any market they get involved in — witness the fact that they also handle Windy and Linssen in the UK.

The Riviera range fits comfortably into this regime, offering build quality, solid handling and performance as well as a certain pedigree.

Of course this comes at a price, but a fair one. Opting for a more conventional British flybridge cruiser of this size, by way of a two-cabin Fairline 40, would set you back the same £250,000 plus.

And the 37 will not short-change you in terms of specification, with luxuries such as a generator, reverse-cycle saloon heating and leather upholstery all included as standard.

The flybridge hardtop costs a not unreasonable £8,000 or so, assuming that you want it.

✓✓✓✓✓
A strong specification ensures the price is reasonable.

Verdict

There is much to praise about the Riviera, not least the quality of its fit-out and its assured ride and handling. However, two things make it stand out.

The most obvious is its optional flybridge enclosure, which will have potential buyers weighing up the pros (excellent shelter) and cons (debatable aesthetics).

The second is a rather refreshing balance between the practicalities that make a good, usable boat and the mantra of luxury that can over-influence flybridge designs.

Although it doesn't fall short in offering home-from-home comforts, this is a boat that invites owners to enjoy using it, rather than simply preen themselves on it.

As such it deserves to do well even if the love-it-or-loathe-it styling means that Riviera 37s are likely to remain a rare sight in British marinas.

MBM RATING 8/10
✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓

Riviera 37 technical data



specifications

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	design category B
LENGTH OVERALL	42ft 11in (13.09m)
HULL LENGTH	39ft 5in (12.01m)
BEAM	13ft 10in (4.23m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 5in (1.05m)
AIR DRAUGHT	19ft 3in (5.85m) with hardtop 16ft 3in (4.95m) without hardtop
DISPLACEMENT	12.0 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	270gal (1225lt)
WATER CAPACITY	100gal (450lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	11in
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 4in
MIDSHIPS CABIN BERTHS	twin 6ft 1in x 2ft 5in
FORWARD CABIN BERTH	6ft 2in x 4ft 0in

performance

engines twin Volvo Penta TAMD63P diesels.

configuration 6cyl, 5.5lt, 370hp at 2800rpm.

conditions wind northerly Force 4-5, sea slight.

load fuel 30%, water 50%, crew 3.

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
1600	9.9	—	—	—	—	70
2000	14.5	14.6	66	0.99	213	72
2200	18.1	17.1	78	1.06	228	72
2400	21.6	20.2	98	1.07	230	75
2600	23.4	27.7	126	0.84	181	77
2850	27.0	35.5	161	0.76	163	78

Range figures above are in miles, with 20% margin. Noise figures are in dB(A), recorded in the saloon.

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with twin Volvo Penta TAMD 63P diesels	£253,800
LAUNCH & COMMISSIONING	standard
ANTIFOULING	standard
FLYBRIDGE HARDTOP & SCREENS	£8,400
GENERATOR	standard
TEAK DECKING	£5,000
BOW-THRUSTER	POA
BOAT AS TESTED	£275,000

ENQUIRIES

Berthon International, The Shipyard, Lymington, Hampshire SO413YL. Tel: 01590 679222. www.riviera.com.au

the rivals



RODMAN 1250

from £175,400

How the Spanish do it: a very capable and solid two-cabin craft with a more basic specification than the three-cabin 41 which is based on the same hull. Tel: 01243 512454. www.seasportmarine.com



LOCHIN 366

from £242,000

A belt-and-braces British sportsfisher/cruiser with a customised fit-out and a choice of wheelhouses, but less accommodation than the Riviera. Tel: 01273 515085. www.lochin.com



TARGA 37

from £193,500

A different kettle of fish, but still offering serious, practical but comfortable boating with loads of space inside and out, plus an upper helm station. Tel: 01202 700702. www.wessexmarine.co.uk