

14 Apr 2010 | In this, the second and final part of our long-distance test, JOHN ZAMMIT takes Riviera's 47 Enclosed Flybridge II from Sydney to Melbourne

It was warm with light rain falling as we sat out in the cockpit in the early morning having breakfast. Quiet and serene with not a breath of wind, the only sound being the rain gently landing on the taut canvas of the cockpit canopy sheltering us.

Looking out across the water, dense bushland covers the steep banks rising up from the water's edge and one can almost imagine we are in some exotic rainforest, miles from care. Except this is America Bay, off Cowan Creek, close to the entrance of the Hawkesbury River near Sydney. We have just spent the night here on a mooring.

We were in transit, heading home to Melbourne from the Gold Coast aboard *Limelight*, a Riviera 47 Enclosed Series II, just two-weeks old. Last month, I recounted how the four of us onboard — two couples — had made our way from the Gold Coast to Pittwater, Sydney, stopping off at Yamba, Port Maquarie, and Port Stephens for Christmas, before moving on to Sydney where we'd been cruising the beautiful waters of Pittwater, Cowan Creek and the entrance to the Hawkesbury River for three days.

Owners Len and Jane from Melbourne had opted to take delivery of their new boat direct from the Riviera factory on the Gold Coast and decided to cruise home to Williamstown, Victoria, taking time to smell the roses or seaweed along the way. My partner Fiona and I went along for the ride.

VISITING SYDNEY

ON New Year's Eve morning, the plan was to make our way to Sydney Harbour where we were invited to join friends aboard a Riviera 51 to watch the fireworks. With the sky grey and overcast, we slipped our mooring just after 0800 hours and were soon heading out of Broken Bay, past Lion Island and Barrenjoey Head, for the short run to Sydney Heads. By the time we arrived, just over an hour-and-a-half later, the showers had cleared and we decided on a tour of Sydney Harbour before making our way to Fergusons Marina at the Spit, Middle Harbour, where we'd prearranged a berth.

I'm from Melbourne and there is a perceived rivalry between the two cities, but I have no hesitation in saying that Sydney has one of the great harbours of the world. It's a cliché, I know, but cruising this magnificent waterway with the Harbour Bridge and Opera House as a backdrop is a real buzz.

By late afternoon, with *Limelight* safely tucked into her berth at the Spit, we made our way to Sydney Harbour aboard *La Contess*, a Riviera 51. I'm not sure what the collective noun is for a large group of boats anchored, stem to stern and gunwale to gunwale in close proximity, but a flotilla doesn't sound quite right.

Whatever it is, that's the sight that greeted us as we rounded Bradleys Head and idled into Athol Bay in full view of the Harbour Bridge. Hundreds of boats were anchored so close together it seemed possible to step from one to the other all the way to the shore which, incidentally, was also packed with spectators taking up positions to watch the fireworks.

HEADING SOUTH

We were soon securely anchored and before long we'd fired up the cockpit barbecue. Feasting on lobster tails, prawns, lamb cutlets and other delicacies, washed down with appropriate nectar, we were entertained by some spectacular displays of boat handling, textbook anchoring and some total disasters, as new arrivals jostled to find enough room to drop anchor with varying degrees of success.

The time just flew by and before we knew it, it was 2100 and the first round of fireworks lit up the night sky. The second round at midnight was even more spectacular, with fireworks off the bridge, moored barges and city buildings. A sensational way to welcome in 2010. You editor on a nearby 42-footer with family agrees.

We said goodbye to Sydney on January 2, cruising out the heads at 0700 for Ulladulla. With four of us having spent the past two weeks onboard, the accommodation on the Riviera was working well. With three cabins and two bathrooms, one an en suite to the master, we never felt crowded. The well-kitted galley with twin electric hotplates, convection microwave, separate fridge and freezer and stainless steel sink had been given a regular workout and was a definite hit with the ladies. The luxurious saloon, wide and spacious with a separate dinette, together with the large cockpit, had been thoroughly tested as we'd entertained a steady stream of visitors at our various stopovers. So far, it was a big tick all round for the boat.

We called in to Port Hacking briefly on the way past and by 0915 we were passing the Sea Cliff Bridge, a balanced cantilever bridge extending out over the sea, linking the towns of Coalcliff and Clifton in the Illawarra region of NSW. The bridge is one of only seven offshore and parallel-to-the-coast bridges in the world. Swinging off, we headed for the smokestacks of Wollongong and Port Kembla. By 1030 we were less than half-a-mile offshore passing the picturesque lighthouse at Kiama Harbour some 15nm south of Wollongong. With our twin Cummins CMQ11 660hp electronic engines ticking over comfortably at 1850rpm, we made good time.

GUIDED TOUR

In Sydney, we'd been joined by Frank Wilkes, a friend from Melbourne, who is also a bit of a legend around our boat club and has made this trip countless times before. Frank promised to show us some of the out-of-the-way places on our way home and, with five of us now travelling in the flybridge, it was surprisingly comfortable.

Fitted with twin, adjustable Pompanette helm and companion chairs facing a dashboard with room to accommodate our two 12in Raymarine screens incorporating GPS/plotter, radar and fishfinder, along with two engine-monitoring screens, autopilot, tridata, trim tab indicator and intercom, the dash certainly isn't overcrowded.

Forward of the helm is bench seating to port in front of a sink with flick-mixer tap and below that a refrigerator drawer and storage. To starboard is an L-shaped lounge with a high-low adjustable table. Lots of storage, too, under the bench seat and in the forepeak, accessed through twin doors flanked either side by a bank of drawers.

CROCODILE HEAD

By midday we were off Crocodile Head approaching the entrance to Jervis Bay. The spectacular sheer cliffs along here are an awesome sight and Australia's highest cliff is located just beyond the entrance.

Inside Jervis Bay, we picked up a mooring opposite a sandy beach in an area called Darling Road. With the sun shining and the water so clear, it was the ideal spot for lunch, nothing too exotic today, just some freshly made sandwiches, fruit and a cool drink. Part of Jervis Bay, nearly nine miles long and five miles wide, is controlled by the Royal Australian Navy. While there are many beautiful anchorages here, there are no marinas or port facilities for private vessels.

With the breeze picking up and storm clouds heading our way, we left Jervis Bay for the 22nm run to Ulladulla. By 1325, off Wreck Bay, it was raining heavily, but with the fully enclosed flybridge fitted with windscreen wipers, and washers no less, it's not an issue for us.

The rain had barely stopped when we were joined by a large pod of dolphins, not unusual as we'd encountered them almost every day, except this time, as well as surfing our bow wave, they frolicked at the stern, most unusual and something we hadn't experienced before. We surmised they were fascinated by the underwater exhaust, or whatever it was, and we were treated to quite a show.

By early afternoon we were entering the harbour at Ulladulla, a coastal holiday resort town and fishing port with a population of just over 8000. The local Coastal Patrol oversee berthing here and we were fortunate to find a spot alongside the wharf. Often, visitors need to raft-up beside another vessel and be prepared to move at short notice.

At most fishing harbours along this part of the southern NSW coast, the wharves are fixed rather than floating and relatively high to accommodate large trawlers. Visitors need to ensure mooring lines are long enough to allow for the predicted rise and fall of the tide, otherwise you might awake to the sight of your vessel hanging off the wharf, or worse still, do some serious damage to your vessel.

The next morning, the weather wasn't looking too good. Our next stop, Bermagui, is where we were hoping to top up with fuel — we carry 2700lt in the standard aft tank and Len's had an optional forward tank fitted that holds another 1000lt.

WAVE RUNNER

Getting away at 1015, the forecast was spot on: a southeast wind of 15 to 20kts, 3m of swell and 1.5m of sea. The boat handled the conditions well and we were managing a respectable 18kts as we steered her, working the waves and doing our best to avoid the big ones. Every now and then we'd crest a wave only to find nothing behind it and we'd come down hard. We'd expected this and we'd battened everything down so there were no surprises.

Passing inside of Montague Island, the sea was easing and we rounded Cape Dromedary at 1500 crossing the bar into Bermagui a half hour later. We'd made good time given that we'd stopped at Batemans Bay along the way and briefly dropped anchor on the leeward side of Snapper Island for a short break and some lunch.

At Bermagui we were met by friends who'd been holidaying in Merimbula and had driven up to meet us. After the obligatory tours of the boat we went ashore continuing the merriment at the newly opened Bermagui Fishermans wharf, a brand-new \$5 million waterfront development, incorporating café, bars, retail shops and offices. Bermagui has sure changed since I was here last. It was Sunday and after a few phone calls we managed to organise fuel,

taking on 1854lt. We were averaging nearly 7lt/nm. That night it was 13 for dinner at the Bermagui hotel.

We slipped out of Bermagui at 0500 the next morning en route to Lakes Entrance and its notorious bar. Looking at the forecast, we were hopeful conditions would be okay by the time we got there in around nine hours.

By now we'd established a regular pre-departure routine and everyone had a role as we prepared to get underway. Everything is put away and secured, the engineroom checks including fuel filters for signs of water or contamination, oil and coolant levels, and a visual inspection of anything unusual. Considering there is so much down there, including an 11kVa Onan Generator, the engineroom is well laid out with everything easy to get to.

Within two hours we were passing Merimbula travelling at 19.5kts, it was overcast but the sea was calm with less than 0.5m of swell. We made a short stop at Bittangabee Creek, a small inlet 11nm south of Eden. The inlet is considered a fair-weather safe-anchorage and originally served as a service stop for the nearby Green Cape Light. Part of the Ben Boyd National Park, it has an interesting history and it's a nice spot for a quick breakfast. The walls of a house that once served as a boat station in the whaling era are still standing close to the waters edge.

INTO BASS STRAIT

Underway again and we we're soon rounding Cape Howe and crossing the border into Victoria. We could see Gabo Island ahead in the distance with its red granite lighthouse. It lies just off the coast 5nm southwest of Cape Howe. Up until 1993 the lighthouse was manned, now it's automated with a resident caretaker. Rounding Gabo we went into Santa Barbara Bay and considered tying up at the jetty, but it was surging so we continued on.

By 1445 we were standing off Lakes Entrance, checking out the conditions at the bar. The entrance here is a manmade channel linking the Gippsland Lakes with Bass Strait. This bar has a formidable reputation, but there was not much to worry us this day as we went through and made our way to the wharf adjacent to the main street of Lakes Entrance.

With a population over 5000, Lakes Entrance is a popular holiday town situated 319km east from Melbourne. It's home to one of the largest fishing fleets in the country and lies at the entrance to Australia's biggest and arguably most beautiful expanse of inland waterways. More than 400km² of lakes, rivers, lagoons and islands are separated from the ocean by the Ninety Mile Beach, a beautiful narrow strip of coastal sand dunes.

We'd planned to be home by January 9, so as much as we would have liked to stay and explore the lakes, we left the next morning to spend some time around Wilsons Promontory. The Prom' is the Australian mainland's southernmost point, a National Park, with a 130km coastline making up the largest coastal wilderness area in Victoria.

We spent the next night at Port Welshpool, taking on 2082lt of fuel and the following day, cruising around and down the southeast side of the Prom', through Corner Inlet past Rabbit Island and Sealers Cove and finishing up at Refuge Cove, a small but magnificent safe-anchorage with no roads in, just walking tracks. It's a popular stop-off for vessels travelling this part of the coast and a destination in itself. After settling in, we launched *Limelighter*, our 3.6m centre console tender and explored the surrounding coves and secluded beaches.

After a relaxed barbecue breakfast the next morning, we left Refuge bound for Phillip Island in Western Port Bay. It was warm and sunny as we travelled close to shore enjoying the spectacular coastline with its large rock formations, secluded sandy beaches and beautiful, clear blue water. By mid-morning we were passing South East Point lighthouse before tracking up inside of Wattle Island and the Anser Group. The sea was getting a bit lumpy by now passing inside of Skull Rock, heading for the Glennie Islands, where we stopped on the leeward side and got up close and personal with Great Glennie Island. Frank showed us some of his favourite spots before continuing on to Waratah Bay at Walkerville where we anchored off the beach for lunch.

Soon we were off again, around Cape Liptrap and in through the Eastern Entrance to Western Port, past San Remo and under the bridge linking Phillip Island and the mainland. We arrived at Cowes, on the north side of Phillip Island, late in the afternoon and picked up a mooring for the night. Most nights we'd cooked on board and this night was no different, on the menu was a simple pasta, but with a magical homemade bolognese sauce, accompanied by a nice chianti, it doesn't get much better than this!

The next day we'd arranged to rendezvous with a couple of boats at Queenscliff just inside Port Phillip Bay and stay there for our last night onboard.

HEADING HOME

It was near midday when we approached the Heads. Melbourne is Australia's busiest commercial port and the narrow entrance to Port Phillip Bay has countless large ships and recreational vessels pass through it every year. When conditions aren't right, these Heads are considered one of the most dangerous stretches of water in the world. The tide was ebbing and a southwest swell caused the waves to stand up. Not the ideal time to go through but with more than 1300 horsepower down below it wasn't a problem, apart from a bit of spray.

We'd had a lot of people onboard at various times as we made our way to Melbourne, but the real test for the Riviera 47, as an entertainer, came at Queenscliff. Friends and family had come to meet us and within minutes of tying up at the new Queenscliff Harbour Marina, the cockpit was overflowing with people and an impromptu party got underway.

The harbour at Queenscliff has been recently redeveloped and this state-of-the-art facility now boasts a 280-berth marina, drystack for boats to 10m, fuel and pump-out facilities, a 150-tonne travel lift, boatyard and a magnificent waterfront promenade with cafe's, shops, offices and an observation tower. It's a great destination for recreational boaters, but it's still a working harbour and home to the pilot boats and the huge Queenscliff ferries that transport cars and people regularly from here across the bay to Sorrento.

It was Saturday, January 9, our final day onboard and we didn't really want this trip to end. We cruised leisurely up the Western Channel to Portarlington, for a raft-up and some lunch before reluctantly heading home across the bay to Williamstown and *Limelight's* permanent berth at the Royal Victorian Motor Yacht Club. Of course, the celebrations started all over again and continued well into the night.

Our journey had taken us from Coomera on the Gold Coast to Williamstown at the top of Port Phillip Bay, with numerous stops along the way. All told we were onboard for 25 consecutive days. Riviera claims that this boat is designed for extended cruising... they'll get no argument from me!

Specifications - Riviera 47 Enclosed Flybridge II

PRICE AS TESTED

Refer to dealer for pricing

OPTIONS FITTED

Sternthruster (bowthruster is standard), extra 1000lt forward fuel tank, teak cockpit and swim platform, 350kg davit, upgraded upholstery in saloon and flybridge, Raymarine electronics package including twin E-120 Raymarine screens (with GPS/plotter, fishfinder, 24nm radar, autopilot, and Tridata), CCTV (to cockpit, engineroom and saloon), waterblaster, and Aquapro centre console dinghy with 25hp Yamaha and cradle

PRICED FROM

\$1,173,089 w/ twin Cummins QSM11 electronic diesel engines

GENERAL

Material: Handlaid moulded fibreglass hull w/ balsa and core matt in the hull sides; balsa and high-density foam-cored deck and flybridge.

Type: Monohull

Length overall: 16.17m

Length to ISO 8666: 15.19m

Beam: 4.89m

Draft: 1.35m

Weight: 19,600kg (dry)

CAPACITIES

Berths: 6 to 8 people

Fuel: 2700lt (standard); 1000lt forward tank (optional)

Water: 620lt

Holding tank: 151lt

ENGINE

Make/model: 2 x Cummins QSM11

Type: Six-cylinder electronic turbo-diesel

Rated HP: 661

Displacement: 10.8lt

Weight: 1188kg (dry)

Transmission (make/ratio): Twin Disc MGX-5114A / 1.75