



# Riviera 33 *Gunnars* makes stunning debut!

Words **Greg Alice**

**The Riviera 33 named *Gunnars* recently made her maiden voyage and what an inauguration it was! Great weather, tuna and even marlin were on the cards for the beautiful sportfisher and her crew, but not without a crisis that threatened to ruin what was to be a great day out in the deep.**

**I**t was just before 05h00 on the dawn of Human Rights Day when the new owner, Ismail Borat; his captain, Chris Gerber; and a few crew members including myself, Nishaad Ibrahim and Mario (friends of the owner); all met at the Blue Flag Marina in Granger Bay to prepare the Riviera 33 named *Gunnars*.

The weather was pristine with warm temperatures, not a breath of wind in the air, and perfectly still water. This was the Riviera *Gunnars'* maiden voyage and we could feel the excitement in the air. The vessel was to leave Granger Bay for her new home in Gordon's Bay.

We left the berth just after 05h00 and headed south down the coast towards Cape Point. By that time the water had developed a slight chop and reports had forecast a two-metre swell. En route we discussed and planned what direction we would take as well as where to start trolling for our target

species – the revered Yellowfin tuna.

The journey to the agreed-upon spot took us around three





hours to reach while cruising at around 18 knots. We took it slow and really got a chance to experience why Riviera boats are such sought after vessels – the chief reason for me being comfort! While skipper Chris Gerber manned the helm and set the course on the auto pilot the rest of us were free to relax, and relax we did – mostly lying around on the soft leather couches in the saloon, listening to our choice of music and sharing past fishing experiences. The ride was extremely smooth considering the sea conditions and we never felt anything but safe and comfortable on this strong sports fisher.

As we reached our destination, we set the rods up for trolling. We had six rods in the spread with our choice of Halco/Rapala lures and some soft squids which are known to be extremely effective for Yellowfin.

It wasn't long before we had our first strike and the fish pulled the entire rod clean out of the holder and overboard it went. It was gone! Very disappointed but staying positive, we grabbed another rod, set it up, and made sure we tied each and every rod to the boat!

Soon the reel was screaming once more as another fish took the hook. Ismail was up first and while he grabbed the rod we started to clear the lines to prevent any burn offs or tangles. Then two of the other reels screamed as two more fish were hooked! It was a triple up! We excitedly cleared the remaining lines and began the three-fish battle. One fish managed to throw the hook – this happens sometimes for a number of reasons and you just have to roll with the punches and carry on.

We managed to bring the second fish alongside the boat; it

looked to be approximately 15 kg. Nishaad was quick to grab the gaff and successfully gaffed the fish but as he hauled the tuna over the gunnels, the front treble hook of the Halco went straight through his finger! We both jumped on the fish to make sure it didn't move around too much, grabbed a set of pliers and quickly removed the second hook from the fish's mouth. But with no bolt cutters on the vessel we were in trouble.

We tried with all our might to saw through the hook with side cutters but nothing could cut through it. We then decided to flatten the barb of the hook to try and remove it, but this proved unsuccessful as the barb was still slightly protruding and actually put us in a worse situation with it now being lodged inside his finger.

It was then decided that we would head home and take Nishaad to the hospital to safely remove the hook – he was, as you can imagine, in some serious discomfort by this stage. However, he proposed we radio some neighbouring boats to find out if anyone had bolt cutters. The fish were on the bite and it would be a huge loss to pack up and leave at this point.

Luckily charter boat *Lynx* from Gordon's Bay had a set of cutters. It was a two-mile run to their position so we strapped up the second hook and headed their way. They passed us the bolt cutters and, because of our bad call previously of trying to remove the hook, Nishaad had to muster all of his courage to push the hook back through his finger to expose the point and barb. I then proceeded to cut both ends of the hook and pulled the remainder out.

It was a huge relief for Nishaad. We cleaned, disinfected ►

and covered his wound with a plaster wrap and hurriedly put our lines back out!

In the distance we saw a large stern trawler on the horizon; these trawlers drop down large nets which they trawl for a couple of hours before pulling up again. Big tuna are often in the vicinity of trawlers, especially when they raise their nets, as the tuna pick off the baitfish that are either dead or injured by the net or those that manage to escape it. We therefore raced over to the larger vessel but as we

suddenly shot off and dived back under. We suddenly saw a flash of blue and knew something was chasing it. Our first thought was that it must be a shark, probably Mako – which are quite common in these waters. The tuna then raced back to the boat for shelter and as we got a clear view of its pursuer we struggled to believe what our eyes were seeing... It was a massive marlin!

You can imagine our excitement at the sighting – marlin aren't commonly caught in the Cape due to the cold water



approached we noticed that they had already raised their nets... We had missed the boat.

We then radioed some fishing buddies over the VHF and they gave us their position. They were one of about 15 other fishing boats that were sitting alongside another stern trawler and were onto some nice fish.

We certainly didn't need to be told twice and we hastily pulled in the lines and raced over to their position. We navigated our way through all the other fishing boats and picked our spot right behind the trawler. We then started baiting the water with cut blocks of sardines and two hooked pieces of bait. It wasn't more than two minutes before the maimed but determined Nishaad had a hook up!

Tuna often hunt in schools and, pound for pound, are one of the strongest fighting fish in the ocean. We could see the fish ascending to the surface as the beautiful yellow glimmer was only just visible through the water.

The Yellowfin was about to break the surface when it

and yet here we were, on the *Gunners'* maiden voyage no less, watching a big tuna being chased by an even bigger marlin! Everyone shrieked and whooped with excitement!

Our attention was now focused on the marlin and we left the tuna in the water to keep its massive, blue assailant interested and hanging around our boat. Nearby boats had caught wind of the enormous predator under our boat and were now trying to entice the marlin by throwing out all kinds of baits. The race for the big one was on!

We were not at all kitted to fish for marlin but this didn't deter us in the slightest. The marlin circled our boat and chased the tuna under again and suddenly our line was stuck. It had snagged around the propeller or rudder and there was no getting it loose.

Thinking on our feet, we pulled out one of the tuna we had caught earlier and cut a large fillet; we grabbed a free rod and threaded the fillet onto a hook and tossed it overboard. Nishaad then free-spooled the line, allowing the fillet to ►

sink to a depth at which it was no longer visible. I ran up and took the helm of the boat for I knew that if we hooked up we would have to put some distance between us and the fleet of boats as soon as possible to have a better chance of landing the fish safely.

The seconds ticked by with all the crew looking on in anticipation and then it happened! Nishaad could feel the sheer power of the marlin as it struck the bait with a force that only a marlin is capable of. He set the drag and the marlin was hooked! He gave me the signal and we steamed off, away from the clutter of boats.

We slowed the boat down so that it was only just in gear and began what could be a very long battle. The marlin pulled powerfully as they are known to do and quickly stripped hundreds of metres of line off the reel to the point where it became critically low. We turned the boat and pointed the bow towards the general direction of the fish and slowly engaged in gear to gain back some line. 15 minutes into the fight we could see the angle of the line decrease and out of nowhere the large marlin breached out of the water to give us a clear view of just how colossal this fish was!

After about 30 minutes of regaining precious metres of line, bit by agonising bit, the line suddenly went slack. It had cut through the line with its rough bill...

We were disappointed but at the same time we were so pumped up with the excitement and the experience we had all just been a part of. This would have been Nishaad's first marlin (he had lost one marlin the week before on his own vessel) and it was a great start to the boat's future fishing exploits and certainly the first of many that Ismail and his family and friends will enjoy.

After we 'long-distance released' our marlin we headed back towards the trawler where we managed to land two more small blue sharks and lost a third. It was close on 16h00 when we upped lines and headed to our new home in Gordon's Bay harbour. It was a comfortable run as we set the auto pilot and sat back and reminisced about the day's experiences on board this luxury Riviera sports fisher.

We had had a fantastic day's fishing with several serious highs and some lows which taught us a few lessons and which we gained priceless knowledge from. It can be extremely dangerous fishing in the rough seas off South Africa and you need to take extreme caution and plan ahead. We urge all boaters not to 'skimp' on safety equipment and be prepared for any kind of situation. Check local weather stations before going offshore and make sure your boat and electronics are in good working order.

Happy boating and tight lines!

