



Bellisimo!

– the ultimate
cruising experience

We sample the luxurious Riviera Syndication lifestyle on behalf of the soon-to-be-announced lucky winners of our latest **Six of the Best!** prize.

By Liliana Engelhardt

The journey started with a drive through Sanctuary Cove and the Marine Village on the Gold Coast on a quiet Thursday morning towards the end of October. Half an hour into the 'whirlwind' tour, I reminded myself that repeated gushing of "OMG, look at that!" is not age-appropriate. As I seriously contemplated delaying climbing aboard the luxury cruiser I was scheduled to experience as part of our **Six of the Best!**



al fresco lifestyle. Thoughts of lattes and shopping distractions instantly evaporated as I was drawn to my home for the next two days. I was now in a very different world.

The attention to detail is impressive, with many custom-made extras added by Riviera Syndication owners John and Sharon Russell to make *Bellini* one of the stand-out sport yachts to come from the Riviera stable. Whether it's practical details, power in the engine room, quality of the furnishings, or comfort of the sleeping quarters, it's all there to impress and spoil guests round the clock.

I stepped aboard and was greeted by a very generously proportioned cockpit area with an al fresco dining table large enough to comfortably seat eight on the leather-clad bench and custom-made pouffes. An electric barbecue in one corner promised gourmet delights and a three-seater, L-shaped lounge in the other looked very inviting, while the teak laid floor felt so nice under my bare feet.

GREAT GALLEY

The large sliding door and lift-up window were open, giving way to the inside area and creating a smooth transition from exterior to interior. I couldn't help but inspect the galley before I admired the rest of the boat: it's exceptionally well appointed, U-shaped with plenty of bench-

promotion in favour of a spot of shopping and a latte, we pull up at the marina – and there she was.

Bellini is simply breathtaking. Officially a Riviera 5800 Sport Yacht, she's really 60ft of pure splendour, subtle power and sportive elegance. Moored as she was in her customised 'pole-position' berth at Sanctuary Cove Marina, it was plain to see *Bellini* was created for luxury cruising, relaxed comfort and an ultimate on-water



*Comfort certainly is spelt in
big letters all over Bellini.*



Top: Comfort with a capital 'C' ... the saloon and helm are designed to pamper.

Above: The author comes to grips with the Riviera Syndication lifestyle.

top area to work on, heaps of storage space filled with all the kitchen equipment, crockery and cutlery I could wish for; Miele appliances including dishwasher, induction cooktop with three cooking zones, rangehood, convection microwave oven, fridge/freezer; large sink; and possibly the most essential bit of equipment – an ice-maker. I couldn't wait to unleash my cooking abilities in this space!

Reluctantly I dragged myself away from the galley and ventured further inside. The saloon features a wide lounge covered in the same soft leather that features throughout, making it awfully comfortable and very difficult to leave. The table is mounted on an electric pedestal that can be lowered and, with the addition of some cushions, turns the area into a daybed with additional sleeping for two. While seated there, iced drink in

hand and nibbles on the table, I looked across to port to watch the 40in LCD TV with integrated Bose Lifestyle 48 system. It was also easy to be distracted by the view through the large, wrap-around windows and massive open sun-roof.

Skipper Jimmy was at the helm preparing everything for departure, and explained all the equipment he has at his fingertips. A quick run-down included the Joystick Docking Controller; Raymarine GPS/fishfinder/radar/autopilot with dual touch screen displays and more features than I can remember, plus the radio and various other essential gadgets. And, of course, there were the controls for the three massive Volvo IPS 600 diesels that were currently slumbering, waiting to leap into action at the turn of a key.

Below deck, on the way to the aft-placed master cabin that was to be my new home, I spent some time inspecting the beautifully detailed fittings, the built-in Miele washer/drier hidden away where you'd never expect it, the 'kids' lounge, complete with LCD TV and DVD, the leather wall-cladding and gorgeous wooden panels. Everything was smooth, solid and of the best quality.

My 'cabin' was impressive. A king-size double bed, walk-in wardrobe, lounge seat under one window (I'd call them port-holes, but they're too large for that) and cabinets under the other, more cupboard space than I'd know what to do with and a gorgeous bathroom (note: the glass washing bowl) make this private zone more like a hotel room than a boat cabin. Comfort certainly is spelt in big letters all over *Bellini*.

Bellini is simply breathtaking.



The forward cabin presents itself beautifully too, with queen-size double bed, LCD TV and DVD, plenty of storage, and en suite

bathroom. The port and starboard double-berth cabins feature the same excellent furnishings and beddings and, although they share a guest bathroom, are larger than expected.

And just in case uninvited guests turn up – or you have some crew in need of accommodation – there is a compact space aft with bunk-style sleeping room for two.

Above: Riviera Syndication's John Russell (left) and Skipper Jimmy.

Right and below: Additional compact sleeping space is located aft and accessed by a concealed hatch in the rear lounge.



So much about life on the Queensland coast is centred on the beaches, the water and enjoying life outdoors. With so many beautiful waterways to choose from, it's only logical that boating is one of the favourite ways to relax, re-charge or simply spend time with family and friends.

OUTDOOR BOATING

While many boats are designed to isolate and protect their passengers from the elements, Bellini invites the outdoors in and opens the indoors up, allowing the fun to flow in all areas and her passengers to maximise their enjoyment and feel part of the action (or lack of it) no matter where on deck they are. She's created to entertain, impress and offer the very best in ultimate on-water cruising and al fresco living. At the risk of repeating myself, there's nothing wanting on this gorgeous boat and if you do find you're lacking something – ask John or Skipper Jimmy and they'll arrange it for you.

Since I was to experience *Bellini* on behalf of the soon-to-be-winners of this issue's **Six of the Best!** prize, and since I'd be spending two days aboard this luxury cruiser on the Gold Coast's Broadwater, I had visions of being pampered in total luxury and having my every whim catered for. I wasn't disappointed.

It went beyond having soft beach towels laid out for me on the foredeck's sunpads; further than lunch being prepared and delivered while I lazily watched the shore go by; well past not being able to decide which of the deliciously soft leather-clad couches to recline on; and a long way away from feeling like royalty aboard this magnificent motor yacht. It was also the

sheer enthusiasm that Sharon and John Russell displayed as they shared their love of all things on and around the water, including the passion with which they do everything they can to make life before, during and after time aboard their fleet of Riviera Syndication boats that extra bit special. They have a genuine need to ensure that time on their boats leaves guests with an urge to come back for more.

While our lucky **Six of the Best!** winners will likely experience a different area of the Queensland coast, depending on when they take their prize and where *Bellini* happens to be at the time, my time aboard was spent on the relatively sheltered Broadwater. I was given the option of heading out through the nearby seaway for a taste of ocean cruising, but with decidedly lumpy conditions beyond the rock walls, I decided that I didn't want to risk spilling my drink and so we meandered through the coastal waterways, along the way checking out the many islands, islets and scenery unique to the area.

But having read various tests and other material on the Riviera 5800, I had no doubts that it is built to take on most seas that it is likely to be confronted with, inshore or out wide.

On to some facts about where we cruised: Sanctuary Cove opens up to the Gold Coast Broadwater, which is a large shallow estuary of tidal water reaching from Southport just north of Surfers Paradise, to the southern part of Moreton Bay. Dotted with sandbanks and lined by bush on the eastern shores and waterfront homes on the western banks, it's separated from the ocean by a thin strip of land called Stradbroke Island. For



those looking for more action than the calm and protected Broadwater offers, head out to open seas via the channel opposite Wave Break Island. Or cruise north at a leisurely pace, meander past dozens of islands, enjoy the wildlife as it slips past,



Top: The Broadwater provided a sheltered environment to enjoy Bellini.

Left: For a change of pace guests can try paddle power.



and then head out between North and South Stradbroke Islands for some action on the ocean.

NIGHT LIFE

Eventually we dropped anchor for the night in Marine Stadium, affectionately known as 'Bums Bay', and it was now my turn to shine in the galley – the least I could do given that the aim of the exercise was to convey a full sense of life aboard *Bellini*. With a host of fresh provisions at my disposal, I set about preparing a feast for four. A day on the water can generate a powerful appetite and it was a grand way to wind down the first day aboard our prize craft as we dined on barbecued Scotch fillet, washed down with cool Coronas and crisp white wine.

Safety is paramount for the team at Riviera Syndication, so they've commissioned RFD Australia to supply everything that might come in handy in the unlikely event that something does go wrong. Equipment such as EPIRBs, life vests, flares, even a life raft are onboard at all times to ensure passengers are as safe as possible.

Safety gear aside, it's assuring to know that the skipper, if he is booked for a cruise, can manoeuvre a boat out of practically any tricky or



Top: The hard-working crew tuck in after a tough day on the Broadwater.

Above: The author comes to grips with joystick docking.

BELLINI IN A BOTTLE

Bellini is a refreshing and fragrant cocktail composed of Prosecco (Italian sparkling white wine, available at almost all wine stockists), fresh white peach juice and a few drops of raspberry syrup.



Created between 1934 and 1948 by Giuseppe Cipriani, founder of the famous Harry's Bar in Venice, Italy, Bellini was named by Capriani after the colour 15th-century Venetian artist Giovanni Bellini used for the toga of a saint in one of his paintings.

The Canella winery near Venice, Italy, produces ready-made Bellini in a bottle. The one we enjoyed is a rarity in Australia, as Australian importers no longer carry it since the introduction of the alcopop tax, and came straight from the Russell family's private cellar.

To make your own Bellini, take fresh, ripe white peaches and grate them on a cheese-grater into a bowl (or pulse very briefly in a food processor), catching all the juice and pulp. Spoon one part peach into chilled champagne or white wine glasses and top up with three parts well-chilled Prosecco. To give it a pink glow, add a few drops of raspberry syrup (good quality raspberry cordial is fine). Swirl gently with a cocktail stick and enjoy.

potentially dangerous situation – and smile while he's doing it. Skipper James 'Jimmy' Thorn was at the helm while I was on board *Bellini* and added greatly to the safety factor. Hearing of his exploits, including decades of off-shore experience on commercial fishing boats, big charter boats and ferries, plus years working as test-driver for new Rivas coming off the production line, and I felt even more relaxed as the night wore on. Holding a Commercial Boating Licence, Master Class 5 and an MED Grade 2, it seemed as if Jimmy was almost over-qualified for our current cruise, but it added to the overall feeling of pampered security.

And as if that wasn't enough, as I was sipping my second latte the next morning – perfectly brewed by the skipper – he had already fixed a loose door handle, scrubbed the tender, the kayak and their holding bay, checked the entire boat for anything that might need attending to and cleaned up the mess we'd left at breakfast. A moment later, he'd raised the anchor and we were off again on our lazy Broadwater exploration. Definitely the host with the most...



Eventually, as all good things do, my time aboard *Bellini* came to an end. As I stepped reluctantly back onto dry land, it occurred to me that a *Club Marine* subscriber and their partner will shortly be having an even better experience aboard this majestic cruiser simply by subscribing to the magazine I work for. While I was sad to leave, I felt happy that somewhere out there, two people would soon be walking in my footsteps sampling the ultimate in luxury Queensland coastal cruising. Whoever you are, enjoy!



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