



RIVIERA

THE MAGAZINE FOR OWNERS OF FINE PLEASURECRAFT | ISSUE TWENTY-TWO | 2007

BUILDING A MODERN CRUISER

From the desk up.

KEN WARBY

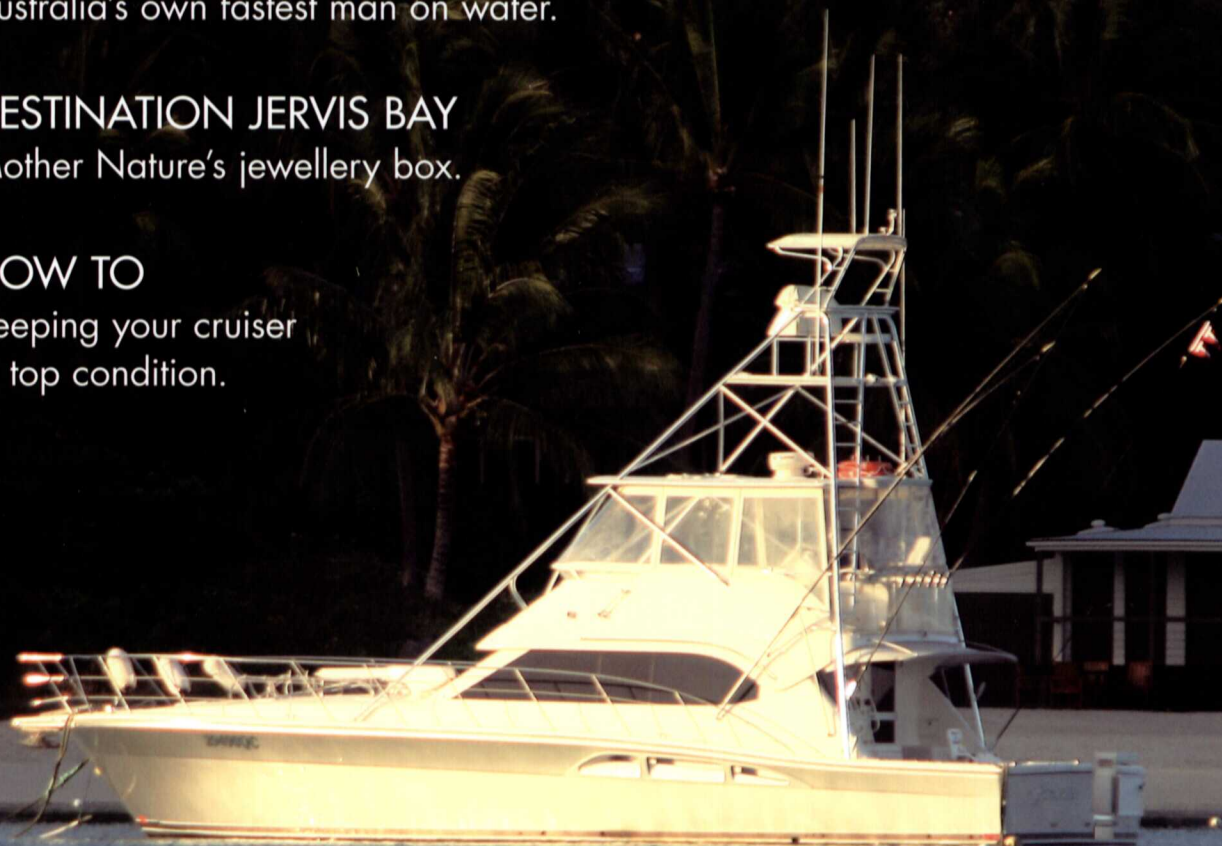
Australia's own fastest man on water.

DESTINATION JERVIS BAY

Mother Nature's jewellery box.

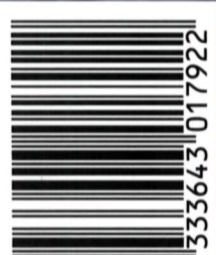
HOW TO

Keeping your cruiser
in top condition.



YEAR OF THE GIANTS

LIZARD ISLAND BLACK MARLIN CLASSIC



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BOAT REVIEWS

Riviera 56 Enclosed Flybridge.
Riviera 4700 Sport Yacht.



A new Riviera brings in a Vacona.

After 10 years of game fishing, Mark Rein bought a new Riviera 47 Series II, *Big Kahuna*, and almost immediately fulfilled his dream of hooking a giant tuna.

Main: A rustic hotel perched between the Mexican jungle and the rocky ocean. **Top left:** Author Mark Rein (centre) with friend Kevin Kelley and his son KJ. **Top right:** Palm-fringed beaches at Puerto Vallarta.

Photograph: iStockphoto.



My original plan was to go to Puerto Vallarta in November 2005 with my friend Rick Levenson, who has a Riviera 42 called *Something's Fishy*. He was influential in my decision to buy my Riviera 47 Series II, *Big Kahuna*, which now lives at Paradise Village Marina in Puerto Vallarta.

This resort town, about halfway down the West Coast of Mexico in the middle of the broad arc of Banderas Bay, was once a small fishing village, but today there are more than 300,000 residents sprawling over more than 1,200 square kilometres. In the end, I didn't get to Puerto Vallarta until the first week of July – high summer. The summers are very hot and humid so I am sure glad I got the air-conditioned flybridge option!

I chose PV because of its reputation for very large yellowfin tuna and a broad range of warm-water fish like blue and black marlin, sailfish, wahoo and roosterfish that I could never catch out of San Diego. It is also an easy two-hour flight from my home in Phoenix, Arizona. The water is frequently lake smooth in this area and it is easy to see fish breaking the surface from a distance.

This was our third fishing adventure since bringing the boat to PV and Captain Tony Ocaranza was again along to show us the ropes. He is a local charter captain I hire to provide some local knowledge and expertise. He has big-fish experience from fishing all around the world and comes from a family of fishermen in Puerto Vallarta. My crew also included my friend Kevin Kelley from Newport Beach and his son, KJ. We headed for Corbeteña Rock because we heard the Bank, El Banco, had been spotty. "The Rock" is about 18 miles from Punta Mita, the point at the north-west corner of the massive Banderas Bay. The Rock looks to me to be the remnant of an island with now only a small 200-square-metre rock protruding above the water. There is a shelf surrounding The Rock that attracts bait fish and the big predators follow them into the shallower water. This is where most boats stop on their way out to see how the action looks. The Rock and El Banco are the two primary fishing destinations offshore. If it is quiet at The Rock, most boats head to El Banco, which is about another 16 miles farther out. This is another shelf that goes from 2,000-plus feet deep to only 60 feet at the highest points. Bait fish swarm on the high spots and the big fish attack them most frequently very close to the high spots. The high spots also hold a lot of other fish like big Cubera Snapper that are common over 50 pounds, jack crevalle, rainbow runners and occasionally wahoo.

The primary fishing method for targeting big tuna and marlin in this area is slow trolling live bridled skipjack tunas. I find it funny that fish that we would frequently



target for fun in San Diego are used for bait in Puerto Vallarta and “don’t count” when asked if you caught anything.

After a while we noticed some larger tuna crashing the surface about a half mile away so we raced over there. We worked the area for several hours for nada while most other boats moved on. But we hung in as there was still lots of bait in the area.

About 1.30 in the afternoon we stopped to throw some caballitos near a bait boil but left the skippies we had been trolling in the water. A caballito is a small baitfish also known as a goggle eye.

I had nosed the boat up to the bait boil slowly in hope of not spooking the fish and the guys began casting baits from the bow to have the best casting angle. The water was very smooth and the boat has high rails so it was very safe.

Just as Tony was returning from the bow to get another caballito, the port rigger loaded up right next to him and let go with a pop as the clip released. Tony grabbed the pole and put it into freespool to feed the bait to the fish. When he thought the fish had eaten the bait he locked the drag down and I moved the boat forward to help make the line come tight. Game on.

Tony and Kevin, being the gentlemen that they are, invited me to fight the fish, which they thought might be a big one, and the first for *Big Kahuna*. They knew that this was the reason for me getting the new boat and coming all the way down there so they were very courteous to let me fight the fish. KJ asked Tony if he thought we were hooked up to a big tuna. Tony replied, “Did you see how big the bait was? Yeah, it’s a big fish.”

Needless to say I was down the ladder fast. I started the fight with my little leather fighting belt on and quickly requested the harness when I realised what I had on the line. The harness allows you to use your body weight instead of your arms. If the line breaks, you go flying though. Fortunately that has not happened yet.

This sucker could pull and I needed to be able to use my weight against it. The first hour I got to the mono topshot once. We use 800 yards of braided Spectra line, a 50-yard “topshot” of 100-pound mono and a 15-foot 200-pound fluorocarbon leader. When you finally wind the mono on the reel, you know the fish is only about 50 yards away from the boat.

During the second hour I got to the mono four more times before we pushed the drags down and started the end game.

The whole time I was talking to myself saying, “Don’t mess up, keep the line tight, keep pressure on”. I didn’t want to have to tell the story of “Well, we had a big one on but it got away”.

At one point the fish charged the boat and, even winding as fast as I could and Tony moving the boat forward, we could not keep the line tight. I saw the disappointment in Tony’s eyes as the line went slack. He asked “Is it gone?” I hung my head and then the line came tight again! We later discovered the fish completely swallowed the skippy and the 12/0 circle hook was down deep too.

Finally the leader came up and Tony was out on the swim step waiting with the gaff. By this time we knew we had a cow on but nothing can prepare you for the first time

you get a glimpse of a fish this big as it comes up from deep color into full view. What a thrill!

The thing looked huge in the water as Tony wrangled it towards him and sunk the gaff in its stomach and rolled it over. Kevin attacked next with a well-placed second gaff and began the tug to get this monster up on the step and then through the transom door. I was in awe as the fish came through the door. A new boat and a year of planning and preparation later, I had become unbelievably fortunate to land my first vacona (Spanish for “big cow”) almost one month to the day after arriving in PV. Tony estimated the fish at 280-290 pounds. It taped out at 278. Good guess, huh?

I spent 10 years fishing out of San Diego and never fulfilled my goal of catching a 100-pound tuna. There had been those days when I was right in the middle of a bigeye tuna bite but never got lucky. Today I finally got lucky.

To catch this fish so soon after arriving in PV was awesome. Back at the dock, a couple of other guys said they had been trying for 12 months. This year has been slow for tunas in PV compared to last year, so I felt extra lucky. ☺

Top left: *Big Kahuna* arrives in Puerto Vallarta. From left, friends Brian Amster and John Koen, skipper Steve Williams and Mark Rein. **Below:** Mark Rein and local charter captain Captain Tony Ocaranza with the “vacona”.

