

Riva Aquarama

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By Simon de Burton, journalist and contributor to GQ and the Financial Times.

"A few hours of sleep were sufficient, and then we were ready to begin all over again – and at the moorings, always a Riva ready to welcome us..." So said Gigi Rizzi, the 1960's playboy and one-summer-lover of Brigitte Bardot for whom a Riva speedboat with a hull of richly-varnished mahogany was as much a gentleman's essential as a beautiful blonde, a Ferrari coupe and a waterside home with a well-stocked wardrobe and private jetty.

Riva's roots go right back to 1842 when a young Pietro Riva began repairing and building yachts at Sarnico on Lake Iseo, northern Italy. But it was his great grandson, the legendary Carlo Riva, who had the vision to create a range of wooden-hulled boats that went on to become the epitome of the jet-set era that Rizzi was a part of. Carlo was inspired by the products of the American Chris-Craft company – for which he was an agent – and used Chris-Craft and Chrysler engines in Rivas before developing the firm's own 'Crusader' power units that prevailed from 1967 to 1996.

The arrival of glass fibre as a boat-building material seemed to sound the death knell for the viability of wooden Rivas and, although Carlo introduced the plastic-hulled Rudy in 1969, the future looked bleak and he sold the business in 1970. A succession of owners followed until Riva was bought and revived by the Ferretti Group in 2000, right on the cusp of a boom in all things 'vintage' that was driven by a wealthy, middle-aged demographic who were out to buy the now-classic cars, watches, motorcycles and boats that they could only dream of in their youth.

Under Ferretti's ownership, the contemporary Riva brand successfully combines the best of modern materials with aesthetic touches from historic models to evoke the style of a classic wooden boat without the drawbacks of the real thing, which can be easily damaged, difficult to repair and demanding to maintain – and, above all, fiendishly tricky to build in the first place. For true aficionados of those elegant craft of the past, however, only wood is any good when it comes to owning a launch with real soul – and that, combined with the world's ever-increasing number of billionaires, has sent the value of original, all-wooden Rivas rocketing.

In 2012 a 1962 Super Ariston called 'Dracula III' that had belonged to the legendary German playboy Gunther Sachs sold for a triple-estimate £385,250 at Sotheby's. A Tritone, meanwhile – commissioned in 1958 by a Milanese textile tycoon as a gift to Prince Rainier III of Monaco – soared to more than Euros 400,000 10 years ago when it crossed the block at an auction in the principality (helped, no doubt, by the many images showing the Prince and his young wife, Grace Kelly, having fun in the boat 'in period'). And in 2011, U.S. auction house Mecum set a saleroom record for a classic Riva when it sold an Aquarama for \$975,000. Completed in 1996, it was the last new, wooden-hulled Riva to have been sold to the public and was delivered to the founding family of the giant Sony Corporation on December 23, 1998. One of six 'end of an era' commemorative editions produced, it had clocked-up fewer than 20 hours of use in 12 years before the original owners consigned it to auction – their most ambitious voyage having been a return trip across Lake Garda for lunch. But anyone with greater maritime ambitions should take a look at the exceptional Riva Aquarama Special that will be available to buy at this year's Treasure House Fair.



Above: 1986 Riva Aquarama

A 1986 model powered by twin, 350 horsepower Crusader engines, it spent part of its life in Singapore before returning to the Riva shipyard in Sanico which is now home to Riva Classiche, the specialist service with an international reputation for maintaining, preserving and rebuilding original wooden Rivas. Having been restored to near perfection by the yard, this particular Aquarama has appeared in numerous photo shoots and on hours of video footage as a star exhibit in Riva Classiche's museum collection.

Now on offer at an asking price of €800,000, it is offered in turnkey condition and ready to go. It really is a case of 'just add water'...