

Hello, sexy!



The French singers Michel Polnareff and Gilbert Bécaud on a Riva in 1972

BOATS WITH CURVES, CLASS AND A HINT OF NAUGHTINESS. BY STEWART CAMPBELL

THE 1960S WERE A GOLDEN AGE for the south of France. The Riviera had always been special, playing muse to Matisse, Renoir and Picasso during the interwar period and, before them, great dynasties such as the Romanovs, who would visit in a private train – the Gulfstream of the day. But it was the marriage of the film star Grace Kelly to Monaco's Prince Rainier III in 1956 that focused Tinseltown's attention on the hundred or so kilometres between Saint-Tropez and San Remo. Soon, you couldn't buy a croissant on Cap Ferrat without bumping into David Niven or Brigitte Bardot – or seeing a royal or actor speeding along the coast on a speedboat.

Getting between lunch dates on this craggy coast needed a special kind of vessel and, fortunately, there was a boat cool enough for the newly arrived A-list: a gleaming, impossibly varnished mahogany Riva. Princess Grace loved her 26ft Riva Tritone and Bardot owned a 20ft Riva Super Florida. But it was the Riva Aquarama, launched in 1963 and built in Italy, that was most sought after by the Côte d'Azur elite. This was yachting's E-type, an instant classic and a boat so sexy and stylish that it remains a reference point to this day. Good examples command top dollar at auction houses around the world; the last wooden-hulled Aquarama produced, hull number 774, which was delivered in 1996, sold for

just under \$1 million in 2011 at an auction in Florida.

No runabout since then has quite conjured the same kind of magic, although there is a crop of modern boats seeking to claim the Aquarama's crown. One of them is the 42ft J Craft Torpedo, which channels all the charm of those midcentury classics but without the attendant issues of a 60-year-old wooden boat. J Crafts are built by hand on the Swedish island of Gotland, with each one taking 8,000 hours to complete. The yard combines fibreglass construction with varnished mahogany, leather and stainless steel to create a boat that will set you back a touch under €1.3 million, but will provide all the romance of an old Riva and enough modern muscle to get you to 44 knots. A little further south, in the Netherlands, there is another

manufacturer whose dedication to form is total. Zeelander was founded in 2002 by the entrepreneur Sietse Koopmans with a goal to create "timeless icons". The yard's latest launch, the Zeelander 5, will feature the same stunning compound curves and sweeping lines as its predecessors, but mix in cutting-edge technology that will let you control the yacht from your Garmin smartwatch. When it launches in mid-2022, the speedboat will be quiet too – reaching just 70 decibels at its top speed of 45 knots and 46 decibels at anchor. "We are obsessed with noise and vibration control," Koopmans says.

For me, though, the UK can rightfully claim to have produced the most beautiful recent runabout and a worthy heir to the Aquarama. It's called Gaya and was built in Cornwall by Cockwells. It was a custom commission by the South Korean artist Minjung Kim. Whereas the Riva has curves, the cedar and teak Gaya has clean, contemporary lines. "Gaya is like a sculpture on the sea that can provide both the peace and tranquillity of being close to the water and the exhilaration of incredible speed," Kim told *Boat International*. And, for its reputed cost of £1 million, you would hope so. But it's not about the money; Gaya is utterly timeless and, like the Aquarama, an instant classic.

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