



Bronzed Aussie boaties will form a truly, madly, deeply affection for the Azimut 42. As for boating amovist David Lockwood, love (Italian-style) was in the air everywhere he looked around this flashy flybridge cruiser

Te ne innamorati a prima vista might sound like double-dutch to you, but it's Italian for love at first sight. And that's exactly the reaction this pretty Italian-made boat will elicit from certain people. A perfect companion for an urban professional with eyes for something new, a contemporary waterfront home or apartment with a mooring out the front, the Azimut 42 is both daring by design and a darling to drive.

Unlike many imported boats, the flashy Azimut flybridge cruiser is totally unrestrained. A contemporary design, it feels, sounds and performs like nothing 40-odd feet long that I've messed about in before. Not that the Italians design boats any other way.

Indeed, Azimut rides the notion of innovation (selling boats like a cowboy on a horse in a spaghetti western). But while the company distinguishes itself through innovation, it doesn't challenge convention at the expense of practicality. Its boats have a reputation for being user-friendly, which is why you can find them tied to marinas all round the world.

Yet the Azimuts that usually stand out from the crowd are twice as big as this one. The third biggest boatbuilder in the world is better known for its motoryachts than its middle-sized cruisers. Its biggest boat, the 100 Jumbo, is about to be surpassed by a 112-footer.

While the local Azimut importer has a 39 and 46-footer coming in, it has already sold a 100-footer here and a 68-footer is due for delivery to the owners, who will holiday with it in the Mediterranean before they ship the boat and themselves back to Sydney, next year.

I mention this big-boat thing because the Azimut 42 borrows many of the details that distinguish the company's motoryachts. Design touches, flashy finishes and designer features, such as frameless windows, hippy curves and big chrome deck fittings, are common to both this 42-footer and the company's Jumbo.

Yet there is something even more special than looks and a big-boat feel in the Azimut 42. The boat drives not like a 42-footer and, well, not like a motoryacht at all. The middle-sized cruiser responds to the throttle like a boat half its size, and its ride and handling is perhaps more suggestive of a sports car than a cruiser.

Tilt steering, elliptical electric helm window, a trick dash panel, white wheel, and switchboards are all inspired by the automotive industry. The eagle-eye saloon windows and rakish cabin, which are the work of designer Stefano Righini, and the feature headliner panels inside are also said to come from car design.

As for the performance, well, the Azimut 42 responds to the throttle and leaps bodily out of the water like something which might screech about the cornices of Italy. The combination of modish looks and mobility should appeal to big-city boaters with modern tastes.

ENGINEERED FOR THE SEVEN SEAS

Azimut is respected for the nuts-and-bolts side of its boats. The hull supports and superstructure are fashioned from foam sandwich, while the underwater section is solid hand-laid fibreglass with multiaxial cloth saturated in vinyl ester resin. It's this built quality that helps make Azimut popular.

While there is no rear watertight bulkhead to the engineroom, there are dual access points through either a hatch in the saloon floor or a door in the lazarette. The boat has three automatic bilge pumps and a manual bilge pump system draining three watertight compartments, and plenty of space for gensets, air conditioning units and so on.

The 42's exhausts are a trick underwater design which, along with soft-engine mounts and lead vinyl sheeting on the bulkheads, helps dampen noise. There is an exhaust bypass for low-speed work so the boat doesn't gurgle annoyingly at idle, which can be a problem with underwater systems.

You get Racor fuel and water filters, PSS-type shaft seals, and the option of a Vetus bow thruster (taken up on this Azimut 42). Generators are sourced from Kohler, airconditioning comes from Cruisair, while the heads are Vacuflush models, which are inspired by airline technology and de rigueur these days.

Yet despite the nouveau styling and the good gear packed aboard, the Azimut 42 is more than a concept craft. It works on a number of levels, including the great outdoors. This is one boat that's all-over accessible and totally useable and which will appeal to sun-worshipping boaties such as Australians.

OUTDOOR LIVING

The cockpit is big enough to stage an alfresco lunch for six, with a useful amount of shade derived from the bridge overhang, and twin transom doors inviting a swim off the integrated, one-metre-wide moulded platform. There is no ladder up the bridge from the cockpit - no, you get a moulded stairwell that's an integral part of the boat's design.

To reach the foredeck doesn't require clambering around some overly fat cabin superstructure. Instead, moulded steps lead from the cockpit to lovely big walkarounds. These are, in fact, mini-bulwarks backed by a high bowrail that doesn't ravage the hull lines. Anyone, including the kids, grandparents or girls, will find it a mere waltz to reach the foredeck and sunpad.

Deck gear includes everything you need to moor or anchor at short notice. There's no need to run from one end of the boat to the other. A windlass and 20kg anchor, fender lockers and cleats dot the foredeck. The stern cleats are set behind moulded fairleads, just like the company's motoryachts.

Refuelling and water intakes are beneath grills recessed in the bulwarks, and there is plenty of storage. The twin lift-out bins beneath the moulded cockpit lounge and the side cockpit lockers are handy. You even get a boathook, mooring lines, and fenders with the Azimut 42.

OPEN-PLAN LIVING

A big stainless-framed saloon door opens into the saloon. If not love at first sight, then you'll be smitten by the light and airy feel of the interior. Big frameless windows, a ceiling that's higher than many larger boats, and light-coloured liners add to the clean and modern look. At night, the halogen downlighting is said to be spectacular.

The furnishings are in keeping with the proudly Italian flavour of the Azimut range. There are white crepe drop blinds, lacquered cherrywood joinery, a removable champagne-coloured carpet, and a wonderful U-shaped lounge to starboard finished with soft blue leather. You seat six people around the burl and cherrywood dinette.

A cherrywood cabinet with CD player and television is on the port-side of the saloon facing the lounge. Azimut doesn't hold back with its inventory: the cabinet has drawers with blue velvet inlays to hold the house cutlery, crockery and the glasses which come with the boat.

Available in two or three-cabin layouts, our Azimut 42 had the latter. While you lose some floor space with this design, the views and social interaction that comes from a galley-up layout are incontestable when entertaining.

Granicoat or Granulon, a type of easy-clean moulded surface, is used for the galley benchtops. There are twin sinks, a single mixer, dedicated receptacle, cherrywood storage cabinets, and an opening porthole. The three-burner electric cooktop sits atop the bench, but the microwave and fridge are under the benches, which necessitates bending down to use them.

Meanwhile, the lower helmstation, with a leather bench seat and designer backrest, makes this an all-weather cruiser. Flanked by an electric elliptical opening window, the helm offers a good outlook through the raked windscreen across a mock walnut dash. There are simple but stylish switchpanels, engine gauges, electronic throttles, and room for flush-mounting the GPS plotter, radar and so on.

BIG BEDS AND HEADS

A twin-head and three-cabin cruiser might sound tight on space, but not in this case. The saloon shows no sign of being pinched, and the three cabins are all perfectly roomy. Photographer John Ford, a fair lump of a professional snapper, tested the bunks and gave them all the thumbs up.

The smallest cabin immediately to port might be used by the kids or guests. It doesn't have a lot of floor space, but the twin bunks are adult-sized. It's very sleepable, with a cherrywood hanging locker, trendy porthole, big drop blind and stylish flexible reading lamps.

The bedspreads used in all cabins were a terrific Indian-cotton print with red animals and yellow-and-blue splashes. The spread looked the part in the main guests' cabin to starboard, which has plenty of floor space, headroom, dressing room, and sitting room over the twin single berths. There's a cute cherrywood bedside table, Art Deco lamp, and a wardrobe.

Direct access leads off the main guests' cabin, as well as the companionway leading for'ard, to the first of two heads. Open the door and you're hit for six by the sheer size of it. Fat Albert could park himself on the loo and fit in the full shower stall with extracting screen. You also get a washbasin, lots of storage, trendy chrome fittings, and a porthole (an extractor fan would be nice).

Needless to say, the owner's cabin in the bow has an inviting island double bed. It's surrounded by a soft-touch blue panel or cornice. But the decorating wasn't fussy like some English owners' cabs. A circular hatch overhead and portholes provide natural light that is reflected by a mirror running across the bedhead. Cherrywood wardrobes and sideboards add a sense of style.

The owner's ensuite is no less spacious than the big day and guests' head. It also has a full shower with sliding plexiglass door, blue Granicoat washbasin and curvaceous moulded storage compartments.

A chap called Carlo Galeazzi is responsible for the interior design and the cheerful theme which flows from the saloon through to the cabins. Integration is a big part of the Azimut 42. Even the flybridge station takes on the curves found throughout this boat.

SHEER DRIVING PLEASURE

Access to the bridge from the moulded stairwell in the cockpit is straightforward thanks to a large cut-out which prevents you hitting your head. A clear hatch drops over the access steps so the skipper can still see the transom for parking. Vision across the bow and to the port-side of the boat was excellent.

The skipper had a two-person bench seat fronting a trick helm, with a big white wheel and a simple dash. The lack of clutter makes for an easy drive. No matter whether it be the anchor-up button or the nav lights you're after, everything is easy to find.

The reversed tinted perspex windscreen did an admirable job cutting the wind. There was just an occasional whisk of spray courtesy of the 30kt southerly buster and big swells, but also due to the fact we were banking the boat hard about for the photographer.

Passengers have a big circular lounge from which to enjoy the voyage, and on better days the aft sunpad atop the bridge overhang would be the best seat in the house. A bimini top would make the bridge more comfortable in the height of summer; it was due to be fitted soon.

With a bow thruster and Mathers electronic controls, the boat must rate as one of the more user-friendly 42-footers about town. Despite brisk winter weather we stuck it out on the bridge to take in the views.

There was action aplenty during our cruise across the Heads. The wind was raging, a giant swell was rolling in, the US aircraft carrier Kittyhawk and its escorts were departing the harbour, ferries crisscrossed the waterway, helicopters buzzed overhead, and a rainbow appeared right on cue.

The rainbow traced a curve not unlike the lines of the Azimut 42. And like a pot of gold, the boat puts a welcome new spin on flybridge cruising. There is none of the lag which you get from some electronic controls and motor combos.

Lean on the throttle and the 42-footer jumps straight up to planing speed and roars along like a nimble sports car. The twin 3126 DITA Caterpillars have the herbs needed for this nifty boat. Top speed was around 32-34kt and you could cruise at 28-30kt if you wish.

A sharp 17° of deadrise at the transom cuts the swell in half, with only the biggest rollers necessitating backing off. At displacement speeds the boat doesn't have a bow-down attitude and isn't prone to scooping up seawater. It looks good just sitting there under a rainbow.

If there was one thing that sums up the Azimut 42 it is that it's fun.

It's a concept boat which really works. While it turns its back on tradition, it opens up a new realm of powercruising. And it's a complete rig right down to the complimentary box of Italian wine and champagne.

At end of the day, I can see the Azimut 42 parked outside an apartment with a gaggle of well-dressed young professionals climbing aboard. The Italian beauty has love-at-first-sight lines, sporty performance, and the excitement to win over a whole new breed of boat-owners - the kind who don't wear blue blazers!

HIGHS

- Smart styling, great access to the decks, a lively interior with two XOS bathrooms, three spacious cabins, and a galley up top so the cook can enjoy the cruise.
- Performance is nothing short of dazzling, with acceleration that will rip the top right off a cappuccino.

LOWS

- Who knows, maybe the design will date. Price is high for a 42-footer.
- With the microwave under the bench, you'll need to take care cooking to keep the carpet in good nick.
- The high-gloss timber finish is prone to marking.

Azimut 42
Options Fitted
Vetus bow thruster, airconditioning, generator, television, CD stacker, holding tank, chain counter, bow sun cushions, bimini top, leather interior and so on.
General
Material: Fibreglass with composite decks
Type: Deep-vee planing hull
Length (overall): 13.07m
Beam: 4.10m
Draft: 1.07m
Deadrise: 17&176
Weight: 20,000kg (dry)
Capacities
Berths: Six
Fuel: 1200lt
Water: 500lt
Engine
Make/model: Twin Caterpillar 3126 DITA diesels
Type: Six-cylinder diesel engine (with turbocharging and aftercooling)
Rated hp (ea): 390hp
Displacement (ea): 7.2lt
Weight (ea): 785kg plus gearbox
Gearboxes (Make/ratio): ZF 1.95:1
Props: Four-blade bronze
Supplied by Grande Imports, Mosman (NSW), tel (02) 9969 8611.



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