

## DESTINATIONS

### Activa 52/55

**The Activa 52/55 demonstrates how the collaboration of a knowledgeable dealer and a quality builder can create a serious cruiser.**

By George Sass, Jr.  
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I'm sorry can you spell that again?" A-C-T-I-V-A. Hmm, I had never heard of the brand, and it's my job to know about as many boats and builders as possible. Sigh. Maybe I was washed up—already a has-been in the world of boat testing. I was pretty sure there are no convalescent homes for the likes of me. I needed to bounce back and get on track.



I decided to do a little investigative reporting to find out some of the background of this new builder. A few calls turned up the fact that there is nothing new about Activa's builder. In fact, it is a yard whose offspring I knew well that built this boat. Like many yachts that hail from the Far East, the Activa is one of multiple brands built by Charles Chang. Chang began building boats in Taiwan more than 30 years ago, and over the last eight he has also operated a yard in China. In addition to the new Activa 55, his yard is also responsible for the stalwart Global Arrow 68 and the Altima series of powerboats. It's common practice for many Far East yards to build a variety of brands and models. And it turns out that the same boat is often marketed with different branding in various countries. I can hear a collective gasp from all the marketers in the audience, but the practice is decades old.

In order to ensure a successful design, you need more than just a quality builder. In my experience, the odds of producing a winning build with a low-volume formula, such as the Activa 55, are improved when a knowledgeable dealer and designer are woven into the process. Enter Richard Boland of Richard Boland Yachts of Alameda, California. His desire to produce a semi-custom yacht, equally at home cruising sunny tropical islands as it is the

rocky shores of Alaska, was the driving force behind this new model.

Like Chang, Boland has been selling boats for 30 years, operating as a dealer for Viking and Riviera among others. His front-line experience gave him a particular insight into what works and what doesn't, as well as the confidence to try to new ideas and concepts. The Activa 55 Skylounge Motoryacht started life as a 47-footer designed by naval architect Howard Apollonio. (Please note we ran a 52-footer that is the same boat, but with three feet less cockpit as per a customer's demands.) As happens with many projects, the 47-foot hull grew to 55 feet after Boland met with retail customers. The beam was also increased to 16 feet, 8 inches. Apollonio certified the change in length and beam, and this is key. I've crawled around in boatyards from Kaohsiung to Shanghai and have seen wedges and extensions worked into existing tooling. To say the least, this is not always a scientific procedure. Having an experienced hand like Apollonio involved is the third critical element to the success of this collaboration.

Due to the yard's experience, Activa buyers shouldn't shy away from semi-custom changes. In fact, Boland encourages the practice within reason. He continuously pointed out options during my visit. For example, our test model featured a large galley forward. But one available option places the galley aft, allowing for side doors. This arrangement is becoming more popular. Personally, I'm a fan: The seamless transition between the galley and afterdeck works well.

On our test boat, there were four U-Line refrigerator/freezer drawers, a three-burner propane stove, as requested by the owner, and plenty of stowage for a cruising couple on an extended voyage.

The fit and finish were well executed. The teak was blended expertly, with grains and shades matching almost perfectly. This is not easy to accomplish and reveals the attention to detail by the yard. Owners can choose alternative woods.



The salon features a 42-inch flatscreen television to starboard, a wine cooler and a trash

compactor. Although the interior is finished in teak, the result is not a dark hovel, thanks to swaths of natural light streaming through side and front windows.

The skylounge above the main salon is a bonus room. If this option is properly executed—and it is on the Activa—then you gain a second salon and a lot of useful space. There's an L-shaped settee with a decent-size table that could easily serve as a watch berth during a passage. Two Stidd chairs flank the helm station. A bar unit to starboard offers additional options. Although I'm not a fan of multiple televisions on boats, if you have kids, a television in this area could be a good idea. You'll gain a family room of sorts while the adults can enjoy the salon below—the more social areas, the better.

The helm is well laid out and all of the analog gauges are arranged properly with ample space for electronics. My skin crawled when I discovered the absence of a compass. Boland planned to install a unit. The Quick Shift Twin Disc controls are a joy to operate. But Boland's experience led to the addition of a manual backup that is easily engaged in case there's a failure. Side and stern thrusters make dockside maneuvering a breeze for a cruising couple. There is a remote station abaft the skylounge bulkhead with good sight lines.

On the first 55, the owners chose to reduce the overhang of the upper deck over the cockpit in order to make room to pull some large fish on board. If you're cruising in colder climates and have the more extended overhang, this area can be enclosed and offer yet another place to hang out and chill.

Below, I challenge you to determine which of two larger staterooms is the master. On our test boat, the owners were using the forward stateroom as their lair. The six-foot, nine-inch berth and seven-foot headroom will accommodate the power forward on your team. Plenty of light comes in through the overhead hatch.

Abaft on the starboard side is another double stateroom with a walkaround berth and large side windows. A third single stateroom could also be converted into a decent onboard office.



Underway the Aactiva benefited from a hard reverse chine and sharp entry forward. The motion was easy and gradual as we made our way under the Golden Gate Bridge into a moderate swell. Several different engine options are available and Boland plans on incorporating a package with Cummins Zeus pod drives as well. With the Caterpillar C18s you can expect a cruise of 20 knots. Back off the throttles and 15 knots feels just fine. The engineroom is well executed and all equipment is easily serviced. An after compartment holds the generator, watermaker, and pumps.

The Aactiva represents a growing trend in the ever-changing yacht marketplace: niche builders working with knowledgeable and passionate dealers to produce fine builds for serious yachtsmen. Maybe the masses will never think of the name Aactiva off the top of their heads. And maybe that really doesn't matter in the big picture. What does matter is that a first-rate, semicustom cruising yacht has been born quietly, and is ready to take you to your dream destination.

**Activa Motor Yachts, +(61) 75 529 7155; [www.activayachts.com](http://www.activayachts.com)**

**Richard Boland Yachts, (510) 521-6213; [www.richardbolandyachts.com](http://www.richardbolandyachts.com)**