



REAL SHIPS 77

**NO-NONSENSE OFFSHORE
VOYAGER LIVES UP TO ITS NAME**

**STORY BY CHRIS CASWELL
PHOTOS COURTESY OF REAL SHIPS**

I was to join *Aventura*, a new Real Ships 77 custom yacht, on one of the south docks at Ft. Lauderdale's Bahia Mar marina, but I didn't know which dock. So I called Joe Johnson, president of Real Ships.

"Which dock is the boat on?" I asked.

There was a long moment of silence, and then I could hear the grin in his voice. "Oh, don't worry. You'll find us."

He was so right.

Looking over slips filled with marina queens and houseboats masquerading as yachts, *Aventura* stood head and shoulders above the rest, like one of those pictures of the Matterhorn towering high above the Alps. As I stepped closer, I realized this was a yacht with all the subtlety of a chainsaw on a shelf at Tiffany's, a main battle tank in a parking lot of Yugos, an AK-47 among water pistols.







the map with one simple concept—steel is the safest hull material for serious passagemaking—and that’s an important point to understand about *Aventura* and her sisters. The Real Ships name isn’t just fluff. Each of these yachts is a small ship.

When it comes to the design of offshore voyagers, Pat Bray is the go-to naval architect, and the lines for *Aventura* reflect his no-nonsense approach. Underwater, *Aventura* has massive bilge keels forward of the active stabilizers, as well as prop keels with boxed bar skegs that protect the props and hold the rudders. If you have a moment of navigational brain fade, you’ll be relieved to find that the Real Ships 77 can sit upright on her three keels. The keel and stem have 1.5-inch plating—inside and out. The hull bottom is 3/8-inch steel plate, and the topsides are 5/16-inch plate.

It might have been simpler for Real Ships to carve *Aventura* out of a billet of solid steel.

Unlike many steel yachts, however, *Aventura* isn’t about



Top left: Maneuvering *Aventura* is simplified by the wing stations on the Portuguese bridge, equipped with shifters, thruster controls, and a joystick for steering. Above left: Owner Chuck Johnson, left, and builder Joe Johnson at the wing station. Above right: The 19-foot Nautica jet-drive RIB is easily launched on either side of the yacht by the 4,000-lb. Steelhead crane.

She is, quite simply, a magnificent yacht.

As grand as she is, I’ll admit she’s not for everyone. If your idea of a great day on the water is sitting tied up at the marina with the barbecue going, this is not the boat for you. If you think a voyage is a few days cruising the Intracoastal Waterway, keep walking down the dock.

This is a yacht meant for grand adventures. For pushing your bow into an iceberg to chip off ice for cocktails. For venturing up a muddy river through a steaming jungle. For crossing oceans and visiting faraway shores.

If you want a plastic boat or a wood boat, you’ve come to the wrong place. Joe Johnson put Real Ships on

flat panels and rough welds. She has a yacht-like finish to the hull with laser-cut compound curves and enough camber to the foredeck to dump off tons of water quickly.

But, while steel is the Real Ships preference for the hull, it’s also heavy. So the superstructure is made from plasma-cut 1/4-inch aluminum plates to lower the center of gravity, with corrosion protection from Detaclad bimetal strips. The deck transverse frames are 5 inches on 36-inch centers, with 2-inch longitudinals on 18-inch centers.

Aventura doesn’t just look like the Matterhorn. She’s built like it.



The pilothouse, nicely shaded by a sun top on a stainless steel frame, boasts a dining area and what the owners call their "monument to barbecue."

MUCH MORE THAN BRAWN

All this muscle is merely a prelude to the 77's luxuriously finished appointments. Owners Chuck and Jaina Johnson (no relation to Joe Johnson) wanted the interior of a 1930s-era yacht with quiet elegance, and that's exactly what they got. Gladys Landa of Innovative Interiors delivered a saloon with a white-planked overhead and teak-and-maple sole, and Real Ships provided the superb teak joinerwork from old-growth Burmese teak. There are reminders of the offshore heritage of this yacht, however, such as the husky Pacific Coast Marine aft and side doors with hidden dogs. The saloon is the living room, with a dedicated dining table for six (no dinettes, please) and a comfortable built-in leather couch.

Open to the saloon, the galley is arranged for one-person efficiency and features a gorgeous green granite breakfast counter. The chef enjoys a four-burner Viking gas stove with oven, a restaurant-sized, double-door, reach-in stainless steel fridge from Northland, and an under-counter stainless Viking dishwasher. With a full-size pantry and numerous drawers and cabinets, there's liveaboard stowage. Before we leave the saloon, take note of the beefy rail running down the centerline

overhead for sure footing in any sea. Glass doors enclose a bar with storage for glassware above and wine bottles below; behind a fold-down counter, Real Ships cut the cabinet to precisely hold the Johnsons' preferred potables.

Let's save the pilothouse for last and take a look at one really cool master suite. This isn't just a cabin, but a split-level retreat entered from the central passage. Continuing the classic yacht styling, the upper level is a sitting area with lounge chair, bookshelves, and a low counter that separates it from the bedroom a few steps below. There, a king-size berth rests against a padded headboard. There's also a curved bureau and hanging lockers and, with more than 9 feet 6 inches of headroom, a ceiling fan over the bed! The flat-screen television is visible from both areas, and a door opens to reveal a tank alley under the passageway that stretches all the way to the bow. Aside from allowing one to inspect all the tankage easily, it can be used for storing provisions and spare parts.

The master head is equally appealing, with an onyx-topped vanity above a teak cabinet that shows off the Real Ships joinerwork. Other highlights include a spacious marble-lined shower with a Roma steam bath for easing away aches.



Top: In the saloon, beautiful old-growth Burmese teak and a white-planked overhead re-create the elegance of a 1930s-era yacht. Above: Highlights in the galley, surrounded by green granite, include a four-burner Viking gas stove and a restaurant-sized, double-door, reach-in refrigerator and freezer.



Top left: In addition to the helm, the pilothouse is furnished with a leather settee, a pilot berth for the off-watch, and a ship's office with a computer and file storage. Top right: Five waterproof Nauticomp monitors line the helm for easy scanning, and all electronics are duplicated for redundancy. Above left: In the split-level master suite, the king-size berth is located on the lower level. Above right: The upper level of the master stateroom features a sitting area with a lounge chair and library shelves.

A VIP stateroom is forward, featuring a raised queen-size berth with drawers underneath, an en-suite head with oversized shower, and a huge hanging locker. Just aft is the day head, which has been fitted with a comfortably large spa tub that is the height of luxury. A double cabin is to starboard, with a fold-out Murphy bed and berths aligned fore and aft at staggered heights, which allows for a full-size washer and dryer underneath the forward berth and an exercise bicycle aft. The en-suite twin crew cabin sits just off the engine room entry and is finished to the same high standards as the rest of *Aventura*.

REDUNDANCY, AND THEN SOME

The pilothouse...ahh, the pilothouse. This is an "office" for the true seaman to appreciate. Visibility in all directions is superb, thanks in part to steeply raked, five-paned, 1/2-inch-thick forward windows with oversized pantograph wipers. The instrument panel,

in gorgeous teak, easily accommodates five large Nauticomp waterproof monitors that present every bit of information a skipper might need. With all the monitors and electronics, Real Ships vented the backs of the instrument panel to create a passive defrost system using the excess heat.

The Johnsons—owners and builder alike—wanted plenty of redundancy, and Unlimited Electronics of Ft. Lauderdale met that need with twin Furuno radar sets, dual Nobeltec charting software that overlays the radar, and two Simrad autopilots to assure an Iron Mike for steering. *Aventura* is equipped with a comprehensive networked SiMON monitoring system that covers engines, generators, tankage, safety and vessel alarms, and other systems, and it can be viewed from the master stateroom. Eight Palladium cameras cover the usual deck and engine room views, as well as the forward and central bilges.

A sophisticated ESI fuel filtration and monitoring



The spacious engine room features 7 feet of headroom and a wide center walkway, plus room outside the mains for service access.

system allows fuel conditioning and transfer between the six tanks at the touch of a button, with precise control.

Dogging doors on each side of the pilothouse lead to the Portuguese bridge, and another leads to the aft deck. A button-tufted leather settee with a beautifully burlled table is to port, with a pilot berth behind it for the off-watch to catch a few winks. To starboard is the ship's office, with a flip-top concealing a laptop computer, and an onyx-countered wet bar nearby. A day head fills the aft corner of the pilothouse.

The deck aft of the pilothouse is shaded by a canvas sun top on a custom stainless steel frame. There is space for a teak table that seats six, a couple of chairs, and—tada—what the owners call their “monument to barbecue.” This is a stainless Viking grill set in a tiled recess and surrounded by granite counters. It vents into the stack so, according to Chuck Johnson, “When we’re burning a steak, it looks like we’re going really fast!”

Permanent wing stations are on each side of the Portuguese bridge. The searchlight joysticks, along with the expected shifters and thruster controls, are a thoughtful touch to make night operations easier.

Forward, the cargo deck easily handles the 19-foot Nautica jet-drive RIB, which can be launched on either side by the 4,000-lb. Steelhead crane. Because the tender is diesel powered, it can be refueled safely via a

retractable hose reel on the aft swim platform that draws from the day tanks.

SMART SYSTEMS

Everything already mentioned is really just the frosting on the Real Ships cake; experienced owners will make a beeline for the engine room. First, they'll pass through an air conditioned utility room that contains all electrical panels, a pair of True freezers, an ASEA seamless shorepower system, and a large workbench with tool cabinet.

Aventura has a sophisticated “smart inverter” system with two 3,500-watt inverters. If the shorepower goes off, the system automatically switches off the air conditioning and draws from the inverter, starting the generators as needed to replenish the batteries. After five hours, it calls the owner's cell phone to report the outage. When the power is restored, it returns the system to its original state and restarts the air conditioning.

Once inside the engine room, take time to walk around and admire the installations. Walk around? In an engine room? Aboard *Aventura*, there's a spacious walkway down the centerline, big enough for two men (even chubby me) to pass each other. As elsewhere aboard *Aventura*, headroom is greater than 7 feet.

REAL SHIPS 77 AVENTURA

LOA	77' 7"
LWL	71' 5"
BEAM	22' 4"
DRAFT	6'
DISPLACEMENT	115 tons
BRIDGE CLEARANCE	34'
FUEL	5,624 U.S. gal.
WATER	500 U.S. gal.
HOLDING TANK	550 U.S. gal.
GENERATORS	Two 25kW Kohlers
ENGINES	Twin 341hp John Deere PowerTech 6125AM75s
MAXIMUM SPEED	12.5 knots
CRUISE SPEED	10 knots
RANGE AT CRUISE SPEED	3,100nm
DESIGNERS	Pat Bray Design; Real Ships
INTERIOR DESIGN	Innovative Interiors
BUILDER	Real Ships

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Power comes from a pair of John Deere PowerTech 6125AM75 diesels rated at 341hp that have six cylinders, displace 12.5 liters, and have aftercooled turbos. This particular Deere model was chosen because, as Joe Johnson says, "It's a strong engine, with more displacement for the horsepower. As a result, the engine works less. At 1400 rpm, it's barely awake. When you run continuous duty, it's going to last a long time."

The transmissions are Twin Discs with Quick Shift gears and 3:1 reduction, spinning 42-by-35-inch, five-blade nibral wheels. WESMAR power take-offs are on each engine for redundancy, since just one can easily handle the 100hp thrusters, stabilizers, crane, and windlasses.

A separate generator flat is located aft through a watertight door and is accessible from the aft deck, as well. *Aventura* has a pair of 25kW Kohler gensets in sound shields; the space also holds a Village Marine




Matterhorn tough, *Aventura* is made for offshore cruising.

watermaker and provides access to the rudderposts and Jastram steering hydraulics.

All the plumbing and wiring is designed and installed to meet or exceed ABS and ABYC standards, with great accessibility throughout. Full engine instrument panels are neatly mounted, and Delta "T" vents include dual 15-inch intake fans with automatic dampers linked to the Sea-Fire extinguisher system.

Under way, *Aventura* feels like a yacht that wants to go around the world: solid, confident, and seaworthy. Even in the lumpy mishmash of seas in the Gulf Stream, she had an easy motion.

Three performance numbers are worthy of note. First, she slides along at 9.5 knots at just 1300 rpm. Second, at this speed, she uses just 9gph on each engine. Last, I measured 59dBA in the pilothouse (that's whispery quiet) and only 61dBA in the master stateroom, thanks in no small part to the highly effective Soundown package that insulates the accommodations from the hulls.

Needless to say, *Aventura* is one of those yachts that lingers in your mind, popping back up when you think about casting off lines and just heading out. There's a whole world to explore, and this is a fine yacht aboard which to do it. 

Aventura is a one-of-a-kind yacht. Joe Johnson has since started a new company, Long Range Marine, building expedition yachts out of Korea. For more information, visit www.longrangemarine.com or send an email to joe@lrmarine.com.