

CLASSIC DRIVER

The iconic MonteCarlo Offshorer returns as a restomod powerboat

Lead

We meet Giorgio Colombi in Sardinia, the man breathing new life into one of the most famous powerboats to ever grace the Côte d'Azur and Costa Smeralda in the 1970s and '80s: the MonteCarlo Offshorer. Restomodos are immensely popular in the car world – could the same be said for boats in the future?



If you'd have strolled around the ports of Cannes or St. Tropez in the 1980s, there's one particular boat that you'd have seen more than any other: the MonteCarlo Offshorer. If you were a somebody during that time, it's likely that you owned or at least had access to an Offshorer. The sleek and slender day cruiser, with its innovative stepped hull, central driving position, generous sun deck and racy graphics, is as synonymous with the era of excess as synth-pop, pastel-coloured linen suits and big hair.

There were two men instrumental in bringing the Offshorer to fruition: Carlo Riva of the history-steeped yacht maker, and the Italian entrepreneur, petrolhead and three-time offshore powerboat world champion Renato Della Valle. Shortly after he sold his eponymous brand in the early 1970s to Bertram, Riva travelled to Florida to meet Bob Hobbs, a naval engineer, mathematician and close friend who had developed an innovative 'V-step' hull that drastically improved both performance and control across the water.



The trouble Hobbs faced, however, was manufacturing the hull in Florida. Involving Cal Connell, the founder of Crusader, Riva concocted a plan to build a boat utilising Hobbs' new hull back in Italy. Enter Renato Della Valle, who at that time was one of Italy's most powerful businessmen. He bought the small *Mare e Sole* shipyard in Ventimiglia and established PowerBoat in Monaco, the company through which the boat would be distributed. The MonteCarlo Offshorer was born.

So what if it didn't have the soft and feminine lines of a classic wooden Aquarama – Carlo Riva understood that times were changing and not only was glass-fibre practical to work with and easy to maintain, but it also performed exceptionally well in the water, especially when 'stepped' according to Hobbs' concept. And few could argue that Riva's dashing design for the Offshorer is not exceptionally beautiful, could they?

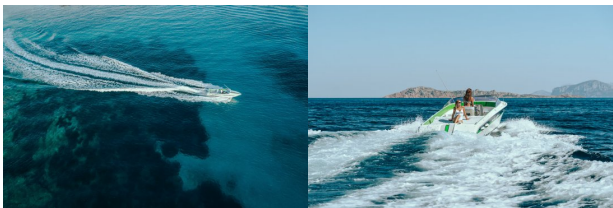


It didn't take long for the stylish Offshorer to become a real status symbol on the Riviera, with everyone from eccentric playboys and billionaire heiresses to wealthy families and charter yacht guests enjoying its unparalleled lounging space and exhilarating performance on daytime jaunts out on the crystal-blue water. The MonteCarlo Offshorer is no stranger to the silver screen, either – it starred in *Yuppies 2*, a hugely popular Italian flick that's now so symbolic of the flourishing 1980s, and more recently under the control of oh-so-suave Pierce Brosnan playing 007 in the James Bond film *Goldeneye*.



Interestingly, Riva-MBS, a company owned by Carlo Riva and his daughter Lia, also distributed and maintained Offshorers in Monaco, and still provides servicing to this day. Over the course of three decades, an impressive 343 Offshorers were built, of which the 42nd example has been owned for over 30 years by the family of Giorgio Colombi, the man behind The Restorer, a new project dedicated to restoring these magnificent powerboats to safe and reliable modern-day specifications while preserving their quintessentially 1980s aesthetic. Colombi was born on Lake Iseo, the home of Riva yachts, and grew up quite literally surrounded by beautiful boats.

“I remember my father, who was a director at the Riva shipyard, at the helm of our Offshorer 30, while I was anchored to the sofa as the boat flew over the waves,” he recalls. “The MonteCarlo is the classic boat on which to enjoy an afternoon at sea – there’s a large sundeck at the stern with a retractable ladder, the sofa in the cockpit is spacious and comfortable and the central driving position affords an optimal view of the whole boat.”



The Restorer offers two distinct Offshorer models – the Connoisseur and the Resto Mod. Both feature entirely new electronic and hydraulic systems beneath the surface, offering owners precision, reliability and peace of mind while at sea. The difference between the Resto Mod and the Connoisseur is that the former employs new, more powerful fuel-injected engines while the latter preserves the original carburetted motors for collectors who want the most authentic experience. Those opting for the Resto Mod will be able to choose from multiple engine options offering up to 430HP each, including a unit powered by electricity. To say we’re intrigued by that would be an understatement!

Both boats result from an exhaustive restoration process, which Colombi – a self-confessed perfectionist – briefly outlines. “The process starts with the disassembly of the boat, before it is completely repainted in its original factory colours. All steel parts, such as the windscreen, bollards and edges, are replaced. New electrical, hydraulic and mechanical systems are then installed, but we preserve all the original instruments and controls for that authentic patina. Finally, there’s completely new upholstery inside and out, before the finished boat is tested on Lake Iseo by our technical experts and then delivered to the client.”



If you’re wondering about the price of the transformation, the ballpark figures are as follows: a donor boat, supplied either independently or by The Restorer, will set you back around 30,000 euros, while the restoration process and the overhaul or replacement of the engines cost a further 160,000-200,000 euros depending on the chosen specification.

Out here on the beguilingly blue waters of Sardinia (exactly the sort of glamorous destination frequented by sun-seeking, champagne-sipping Offshorer owners in the 1980s) The Restorer’s first Connoisseur looks nothing short of majestic. Being one of just four Offshorers originally fitted with powerful and characterful BPM Marine engines built in Verona, the question of parting with them simply wasn’t one that registered for this boat’s jet-set owner.



It's the Offshorer's split personality that comes to the fore during our jovial day on the Costa Smeralda. One minute you can be soaring across the waves at speeds that would exhilarate even the most hardened adrenaline junkies or nimbly carving around corners that a boat of this size has no right to navigate. And the next you can drop anchor, switch off the engines and simply lounge lazily in the sun with your nearest and dearest listening to nothing but the gentle lapping of the ocean against the bobbing hull. It's sheer bliss – could there possibly be a more stylish way to relax?



Automotive restomods, pioneered by the likes of Singer Vehicle Design in California and Alfaholics in the UK, have surged in popularity in recent years thanks to their creative makers' ability to inject exquisite aesthetic detail and modern-day, reliable performance, the like of which simply wasn't possible when these classic cars were originally built. The Restorer largely follows the same concept, though Colombi is not confident that the craze will be adopted by the nautical world. "Several companies have 'restomodded' boats, but our philosophy is unique in that we keep the originality of the aesthetics and update everything underneath."

Powerboats from the 1980s such as the Offshorer appear to strike a real chord with people on social media of late. And we can't say we're surprised – the imagery is usually so evocative, blending beautiful sun-kissed people and seascapes and often tongue-in-cheek humour with the sheer brazenness of the era. But Colombi suggests their appeal extends much further than nostalgia. "These boats have a unique elegance and flavour, yet their build quality is very high and, being made from glass-fibre, they're not expensive to maintain," he concludes.



In returning these nautical icons to their former glory and glitzy holiday hotspots, Colombi is also doing his bit for the environment, avoiding both waste in the process of constructing new glass-fibre hulls and pollution in the disposal of existing disused boats. "Why on earth would you buy a new boat when there are so many beautiful,

fascinating ones already out there? Especially if they're as good as the MonteCarlo Offshorer." We couldn't have put it better ourselves, Giorgio – now, to the Côte d’Azur?

Photos: Andrea Luzardi for The Restorer © 2020

Gallery

Source URL: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/yachts/iconic-montecarlo-offshorer-returns-a-restomod-powerboat>
© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.