

Supersized Ambition

By Kim Purcell

Ronald Morgan doesn't mess around with the little things, especially when it comes to the ambitious acquisition of a Riva 33 Aquariva from MarineMax.



The acquisition of Ronald Morgan's Riva 33 Aquariva pays homage to a man who doesn't hesitate when it comes to making bold decisions, or think twice about turning them into bigger ones. And it's not uncommon for people to honk, wave, giggle or gawk when they see this Florida man hauling an Italian 33-foot luxury boat with a Chevrolet Kodiak show truck and customized MYCO trailer.

"People don't put Rivas on trailers like I do," says Morgan, who grew up on the lakes of Northern California. "I prefer not to be locked into a body of water. I'm from California, so I'm used to trailering. We had a myriad of lakes to choose from, so most everyone trailered because we had so many options."

Morgan, a Florida resident who splits his time between Jacksonville, Florida and East Ryegate, Vermont, didn't forget his trailering roots when he moved to the East Coast. Although he

considers Floridians the most boat-focused people he knows, he rejects the common "boat-to-dock" mentality that has many boaters locked into one place: "Down here in Florida, most people just stick it in a dock, and they're stuck wherever they are."

Searching big began early for Morgan, who grew up cruising on Correct Craft Ski Nautiques but always knew he wanted a Riva. "I was born and raised in Sacramento and educated at UC Davis, and later I was in the mortgage business. I made my first millions before I was 30," says Morgan. "I met a guy named Oz Guetche in Las Vegas — a trust-fund baby — and he had Rivas. I remember he told me it was the 'Rolls Royce' of boats. From that point on, I've always wanted a Riva. That was in '83."

Morgan eventually settled in Florida and started the EverGreen Paper and Energy Co. in Jacksonville, Florida, which recycles landscape "leftovers" and turns them into energy. After selling a por-



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tion of the company's land and turning it into profit, he split his hefty earnings with his partner and started looking for Rivas.

After researching online and making direct calls to Italy to look for Aquarivas, Ronald was informed that MarineMax was his local dealership. "I was originally looking for a new one, but the problem was the delivery time," says Morgan. "I didn't want to wait. I got online and saw all these boats and their location. There was a boat that I wanted to buy called *Blueprint* down at the MarineMax in Pompano, but I heard that a silver one was coming in, so I contacted Tom Houliares at MarineMax and said that was the one I wanted." Morgan made a quick decision to purchase the silver 2002 Riva 33 Aquariva and signed a wiring agreement.

"I never saw the boat initially, even after I wired the money," says Morgan, who purchased the Aquariva with the support of Lisa Wagner and Phil Vitale at MarineMax-Pompano. "I didn't see it for a month, but MarineMax did everything for me, including insurance and service. Lisa was great; she did all the paperwork. And Phil, who is head of service, was just perfect. He's detail-oriented and a good guy — best guy in the world."

"Mr. Morgan was also very detail-oriented with the paperwork part and wanted to make sure that everything was handled properly," says Lisa. "Phil Vitale did a good job for him on the service end since he was into fixing it up the way he wanted and making it perfect."

The Aquariva was a lucky find for Morgan, who named the boat *Stone Soup* after the Irish fable, which symbolizes how the contributions of a few people to many can attribute to success. With only 82 hours on it, the boat was practically brand new and had a one-of-a-kind design not found on other models. "The silver one is painted, whereas the other ones have gel coats," says Morgan. "The millimeter depth of the paint is different now; it's a lot less now than what it was in 2002. And the boat has all leather."

After approximately a week, Morgan had his Riva and was ready to find the perfect haul for this 12,500-pound boat, which turned out to be a massive Chevrolet Kodiak concept truck. "I went to my local dealership in Jacksonville, and they suggested that I go online to look up Monroe Trucks Equipment in Wisconsin," says Morgan. "I looked online and saw this white one that had exhaust pipes in front of the wheels. It's essentially a GMC TopKick 'badged' as a Chevrolet." He immediately called Monroe Trucks and asked if he could buy it. He was informed that truck was a 2006 show pickup specifically upfitted for the Detroit Auto Show and unavailable for purchase. After a quick negotiation, Monroe Trucks offered the truck to Morgan for \$120,000 and pulled it out of the show.

Monroe Trucks sent the Chevy Kodiak "TopKick" back to Wisconsin for maintenance and detailing, which included the



installation of two safety cameras and lights placed under the hood. “They put everything but the kitchen on it,” says Morgan. “Everything is diamond plate — every bit of my bright work. My chrome is polished stainless steel. It’s got three TVs in it, and air bags under the seats, cab and under the back of the truck, so the whole thing is air-bagged, just like a big diesel truck.”

To top it off, Morgan had MYCO Trailers in Bradenton, Florida, customize a 3,000-pound gooseneck trailer with a matching tri-coat of white diamond pearl custom paint for the Riva. “It had to be a special gooseneck trailer because of the height of my truck, which was jacked up on 22 1/2-inch tires,” says Morgan. “I also put some lights under the left rear fender where you flip up the gooseneck ball, so you can see it at night.”

Morgan’s truck arrived in June 2006 at MarineMax-Pompano, which was keeping his Aquariva while his MYCO custom trailer was being built. “While it was there, I had them do additional service work, and I took a couple of captain’s classes to learn how to maneuver and use the controls,” says Morgan. “I would take it out when nobody was around, and MarineMax would show me how to use it. I was essentially ‘dating my boat,’ just to get used to her.”

With the delivery of his customized MYCO trailer, Morgan immediately took his Riva on the road. “The truck is dedicated to the trailer and the boat, and it doesn’t get used for any other purpose,” says Morgan. “Each thumbs up that I get when a driver comes by is worth a hundred miles to me.” And Morgan has had his fair share of interesting encounters.

On his first road trip to the 34th Annual Lake Tahoe Concourse, sponsored by EverGreen and Energy Co., Morgan recalls a family

pulling up alongside his ride. “The two young girls — they must have been 13 or 14 years old — were sitting in the backseat of their parent’s car,” says Morgan. “They rolled their windows down and were giggling and taking pictures with their cell phones.”

“It’s unbelievable — I had to drive 63 mph because if I didn’t, I was backing traffic up,” says Morgan. “Every time I would load up for gas, it took 45 minutes to an hour because I would have to answer questions.” The hour-long event had people sitting in his truck and checking out the back of *Stone Soup*. “They either love the truck, love the Riva, love the trailer, or they love the whole rig.”

Morgan plans to continue hauling around his Riva 33 Aquariva wherever he goes and has even built a custom garage on his land — a 30-acre paper mill — for when he drives up to Vermont. “My garage is 22,000 square feet,” says Morgan. “When I bought my boat, I knew that’s where I’d park it. It’s air-conditioned. It’s a brand-new building. I can drive it straight in.”

