

F STREET

TEST: ELLIOTT 7 & 7.8



Kiwi Greg Elliott's

designs are easy

to handle, easy on

the eye, as evidenced

by his new-generation

TSS. Mark Rothfield

looks at the 7m,

then James Hill

reviews the 7.8.

BOASTING the considerable design talents of Beale, Davidson, Elliott, Farr, Farrier, Ross and Young, New Zealand has long been a hotbed of development for performance trailer yachting. The sailing environment there is akin to a vast think-tank and, of course, none of them lacks that forthright Kiwi confidence, so collectively they've pushed each other to the fore.

One of the most prolific in this prestigious bunch is Greg Elliott, whose 7 and 7.8m trailables are the subjects of this report. His designs stretch in narrow increments from tiny TSSs to Sydney-Hobart frontrunners such as Kodak Express, and without exception they're exciting to sail, to look at, and to own. Elliott is not one to tinker with handicap rules.

His hulls share a common design theme of plumb bow, sharp entry, wide beam, powerful turn of bilge, flat run aft, balanced buoyancy distribution and deep bulb keel, manifesting into giant-killing performance on the race track. Atop these "overgrown dinghies" are

some of the most eye-watering cabin profiles imaginable, blended with racing-inspired cockpits, shallow and open at the transom. The impression is slick, ultra-modern.

Not that Elliott has a monopoly in this department. The designs of Jim Young and Murray Ross in particular employ similar concepts and a battle royale has developed in the mid-sized yachting classes. As an indication of the rivalry, Ross has called his latest boat *Pretty Boy Floyd* ... the gangster who shot *Elliott Ness*!

In the trailer sailer field, all three offer slick 7.8m linehonours contenders, along with Beale and Davidson. The later designs of Young and Elliott are currently slugging it out for supremacy, with a

hair's breadth between them, but any can win on their day. Add the Australian-designed Spider 28 and a stretched MASRM, and you get a veritable inferno of competition here.

Elliott's TS range comprises the 5.9, 7, 7.4 and 7.8, with something for every budget. However due to some politicking in New Zealand he's apparently only putting his name to the

"The bows of both boats leapt clear over each oncoming swell, before easing down into the trough to tackle the next one"





7 and 7.8. The Elliott 7 was created primarily for the lucrative Japanese market, debuting at the Tokyo Boat Show. Cleanest and sleekest of all his designs, it immediately caught the eye of the Nippon sailors — five were bought straight off the floor.

The order was matched in New Zealand and news soon spread across the Tasman, four being commissioned by NSW sailors. Now, Modern Concept Yachts in Sydney are fully manufacturing the E7, along with the 7.8.

Driving force behind the boat locally is Kerli Corlett, owner of The Sailing Scene at Mona Vale, who bought one of the initial batch himself to sail in TS events and twilight races on Pittwater; he's also the sole agent. Kerli's crew comprises his wife and two children so he has fitted the boat to be as simple, functional and bullet-proof as possible.

Rigging was done by Steve Kiely, based on a spun-tapered Goldspar mast supported by a set of wide, aft-swept Peelgrane spreaders. It's fractional, with sidestays and lowers; no backstay or runners. Tension comes simply from cranking the forestay down with the trailer winch, bend being controlled by the lowers.

The deck-stepped mast base incorporates a fixed pin for ease of raising, and also houses the exit blocks for the halyards and spinnaker topping lift. These run back along the coachhouse to a pair of small Barient winches, which are also the primaries for headsail and spinnaker sheeting.

Fittings and sails are left to the

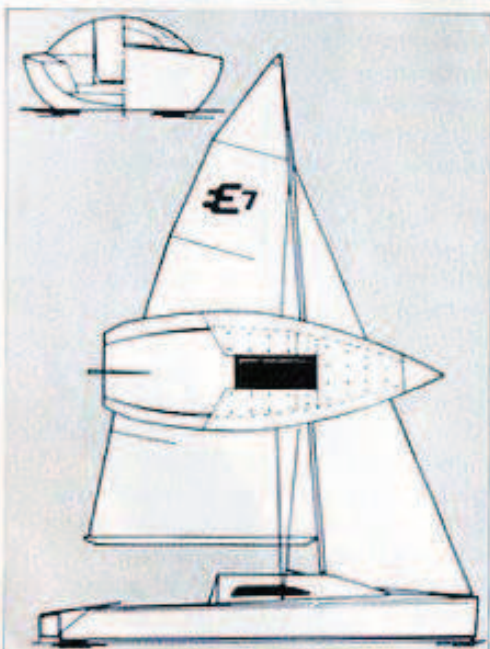


owner's discretion, the class' one-design aspect only covering the hull, mast and foils. Kerli has opted for Ronstan gear in his fitout, including the stylish new cam cleats and low-profile, recirculating-ball mainsheet traveller. His previous catamaran sailing experience is born out in his choice of mainsheet system, very Hobie 16, and sails, from former Tornado champion Chris Cairns.

Construction is Termanto foam sandwich with biaxial glass, a mid-tech laminate that's light (all-up displacement is 600kg) yet sufficiently strong to be low-maintenance. The keel, which has 250kg of lead in a bulb, drops to a depth of 1.6m via a self-contained pulley system, the control line running through a clutch jammer and finally on to the hard-working halyard/primary winch. Making light

work of the lifting process, it's an excellent piece of engineering. Ditto the dagger rudder which plunges into a handcrafted stainless steel case.

The only drawback of the vertical keel case is that it punctuates the cabin, blocking the vision of people sitting down below; still, there's adequate headroom and an attractive headliner finish to make it a comfortable place to relax after a race. Bunk cushions run from the forepeak to beneath the cockpit, accommodating four adults. There's good-sized storage bins in the bunks, plus a 2.5m tunnel extending below the cockpit, swallowing longer items, extra sails, and a decent-sized icebox. A portable stove and toilet could be added and a makeshift table erected around the centrecase or in the cockpit, but with its low freeboard hull and supersleek cabin this boat is an



From any angle the Elliott 7 looks stunningly sleek and sporty, and its performance lives up to these great expectations. What's more, it's backed up by user-friendly rudder, keel and sail control systems.

overnighter at best and there seems little point in making it anything else.

Racing's the E7's game, and after motoring away from the ramp under 4hp outboard it wasted no time in strutting its stuff. With a light breeze off our aft quarter, Kerli called for the chute and had it drawing smartly, the mark of a well-sorted system. The boat accelerated like Kiwi in the Melbourne Cup, and in a silky smooth transition to planing lifted its bow and left the stern wave behind. Aboard the GPS-equipped cameraboat, we were clocked at 10.3 knots, equal to, if not eclipsing,



the wind speed.

Helm feel was decidedly heavy, not only under spinnaker but also upwind, and I'm damned if I know why. The blade may be on the largish side but it was well balanced and certainly maintained positive control over the hull, enabling us to bear away in the gusts and maintain a level planing attitude. Also, tacking and gybing were vice-free. Probably you'd learn to live with the heaviness.

We were joined by Modern Concept's Elliott 7.8, being tested by James Hill, and the two red thoroughbreds made an impressive sight sliding downhill in unison. I expected the 7.8 to draw away, given its taller, twin-spreader rig, fully-battened main, asymmetric kite, and weight-saving carbon fibre fittings. Yet the 7 kept nipping away at its quarter wave, and it

would frustrate the hell out of a crew in a race situation, not to mention an owner who'd paid twice the price.

Rounding Barrenjoey and hardening up for a beat to sea, the two were still neck and neck. The bows of both boats leapt clear over each oncoming swell, before easing down into the trough to tackle the next one. Gradually but surely, the 7.8 began to break the shackles. It was a case of longer hull, more sailpower, deeper keel and two extra "males on the rail", and they climbed to windward of us. Still, the speed difference wasn't so apparent, the GPS reading around six knots for each, and the 7 was by no means disgraced.

We could've continued on for New Zealand, such was the comfort of the ride, but we'd eaten all the sandwiches and so, reluctantly headed for home. Another spinnaker duel ensued, one drawing away with a gust, then the other catching and passing it. Ultimately the 7.8 "won" by about 100m. In a three hour race, says Kerli, the difference is usually around two minutes.

Perhaps it's wrong to draw comparisons between the two Elliotts because they're different kettle of fish. The 7.8 offers more in the way of accommodation and mostly will lock horns with Young 7.8s and JOG-ers. The 7, on the other hand, is a day racer that will combat others of its ilk, as well as Spider 22s and the like. Judging from Kerli's race results there's little in it. He won the twilight race on the day of our test sail, lost the next week.

As far as cost is concerned, you can sail away for \$25,950, including a multi-roller Mackay trailer and two racing sails. That seems extraordinarily inexpensive but Kerli's reasoning is simple: "My philosophy is that I want to go sailing against a lot of the same type of boat".

ELLIOTT 7

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| LOA: | 7.00m |
| LWL: | 6.20m |
| BEAM: | 2.45m |
| DRAFT: | 1.60m |
| DISPLACEMENT: | 600kg |
| BALLAST: | 250kg |
| SAIL AREA: | |
| Main: | 18.5sq m |
| Jib: | 12.1sq m |
| Spinnaker: | 52.0sq m |
| PRICE: | \$25,950 |
| KITSET: | \$17,500 |
| BUILDER: | Modern Concept Yachts Ph (02)982-5936 |
| DEALER: | The Sailing Scene Ph (02)979-6546, Fax (02)979-6548 |



skiff-type TS hulls and this plays a major role in the boat's performance. By keeping the bow section relatively "full" compared to the mid and stern, the bows do not dig in when the hull heels.

With buoyancy more evenly distributed through the bottom area, the 7.8 maintains good speed upwind through a range of wind strengths, as well as planing early downwind — it starts at eight knots of breeze and is up and flying in anything over 15 knots.

In cross-section, the bottom features a soft-vee and relatively slack turn to the bilge to allow it to heel easily and still be fast. Stability tends to increase with heel angle due to the reserve buoyancy and the effect of the bulb ballast pack.

We sailed the builder's own boat. The Edge, the same day as we tested the Elliott 7. In the light inshore conditions, the bigger Elliott seemed only marginally faster than its swift little sister, but once out into open offshore water and a more steady breeze, one could see the extra power and speed.

Gradually we started to pull away from the smaller Elliott, which is exactly the way it should be when you have two very similar designs and one is simply bigger. Putting aside the comparison with the smaller Elliott, what I did notice about this boat was how easy it was to sail, even though it's essentially a racing machine.

Though initially sensitive to gusts, it has a steady feel through the water and tracks beautifully. From the skipper's point of view, the boat is nice to steer, light on the helm and has the sort of quick acceleration out of tacks which makes you feel confident of doing battle in a racing fleet.

The other appealing aspect of the boat is the spaciousness of the cockpit area. There's plenty of elbow room for all of the crew to move around without getting in each other's way. The racing version would provide even more room for a four/five person crew, but for our three man crew, the cruising cockpit gave us plenty of space.

The helmsman sits on the side deck with a good view forward of the headsail telltails. To make the seating position even more comfortable, the edge of the cockpit is rounded off so it doesn't dig into the backs of legs. The cockpit floor is shallow and has the central mainsheet system attached to a floor-mounted track. While this system works efficiently enough, the builder believes that it is not long enough to give full control over the mainsail. For this reason, the next boat will have a longer track mounted at deck level.

As with the smaller Elliotts, the deck gear on this boat is kept to the bare



minimum with the two cabintop halyard winches doubling up as sheet winches for the headsail/spinnaker. The main hatch cover is removed while racing so the main companion way can be used to hold the spinnaker bag. All the line controls are grouped together in one big string-console along the front edge of the hatch.

Ronstan headsail tracks are mounted on the cabintop and, like the smaller Elliotts, the headsails all sheet ahead of the swept-back shrouds. The shrouds are therefore carried out to the gunwale to give the maximum amount of support to the rig. Another interesting feature on the test boat was an experimental retractable bow pole and asymmetrical spinnakers. The pole's heel is attached to a deck track and is pulled into its fixed bayonet position by a sheet line.

Made from carbon fibre, the two metre long pole is held in position by kevlar lines and tackle. The system works well, but the loadings are very high and often the lines need readjusting. Darren is keen to keep the system but says he will have to see whether it is accepted by the trailer-sailer fraternity.

Even without asymmetric kites, the 7.8 still promises to be a competitive

Builder Darren Schofield's own boat features an experimental asymmetric kite set from a retractable bowsprit, and extensive use of kevlar fittings. Future boats may be less high-tech.

racing machine. Modern Concept Yachts have gone to great lengths to make this boat as light as they can, employing carbon fibre in much of the boat, including all the rudder assembly as well as the twin spreaders on the Goldspar mast.

The rounded, blister-style coach house is a feature of the Elliott designs which helps reduce weight in the deck area. However, this design goes one step further by having a moulded curve in the side deck around the cabin to aid structural strength and make a comfortable seating position for the crew. The hull, meanwhile, has a sophisticated quadriaxial cloth from SP System which is also being used on the latest Grand Prix ocean racers. This advanced cloth, combined with the latest resin, achieves a very strong yet impressively light laminate (900kg).

Down below, the test boat had no trimmings at all — not even bunk cushions, or a fitted WC. However, the basic furniture structure, which is made from white float-coated foam and fibreglass, is all in place ready for the finished trimmings to make it feel like home.

What you get is a forward double vee berth, starboard settee, port side galley and enclosed loo compartment, plus an aft double berth under the cockpit floor. Any additions to the interior will have to be added carefully so as to not increase total weight.

Another Kiwi surprise below is the open-sided centre case for the



daggerboard. It enhances the sense of airiness when the board is lowered, and there's no way water can escape into the cabin. The 400kg fin is raised with a simple trailer winch fitted with Spectra rope. Mounted on the centre case in the cabin, it works beautifully considering the weight of the board.

Priced at \$52,000, this boat isn't aimed at the mass market of TS buyers, but will certainly appeal to the racing

sailor looking for either TYA linehonours or JOG offshore racing. The value is tied up in sophisticated construction and not so much in creature comforts.

Looking at the price in detail, the 7.8 can also be made more affordable by buying a basic sail-away package for \$42,000. From this point you can add extra sails, trailer and electronic instruments.

To sum up, the Elliott 7.8 will undoubtedly be an excellent racer cum cruising boat for the experienced sailor. The low weight of the boat also puts it within the legal tow range of medium six cylinder cars and 4WDs. It can be towed on a single axle trailer (with brakes) for an all up tare weight of just under 1300 kg, putting into the NSW legal range for a Ford Falcon and other like medium-sized sedans.

ELLIOTT 7.8

LOA:.....7.80m
LWL:.....6.90m
BEAM:.....2.46m
DRAFT:.....0.45m/2.10m
DISPLACEMENT:.....900kg
BALLAST:.....400kg
SAIL AREA:

Main:.....27.9sq m
Jib:.....13sq m
Kite:.....45sq m
Asymmetric:.....60sq m

BERTHS:.....4/5

DESIGNER:.....Greg Elliott

BUILDER:.....Modern Concept Yachts,

Unit 9/8-10 Dympha Rd Dee Why,

Phone (02) 982 5936.