

TEST: ELLIOTT 770

E-XOCET *missile*

MARK ROTHFIELD HAS A BLAST IN THIS HIGH-SPIRITED
25-FOOT FAMILY RACER/CRUISER.

A test sail with Kerli Corlett is never dull. In conditions that would have other boat retailers reaching for the reefing lines, or their mobile phones to cancel, the Sailing Scene owner gleefully packs the spinnaker. It's a sign of his confidence in the Greg Elliott-designed trailer sailers that he sells.

My first experience came with the Elliott 5.9 day racer back in 1991. A wild westerly was throwing 40-knot punches like Mike Tyson, and one of them caught us flush on the chin, flattening the craft in an instant.

"Seawater spewed into the cockpit and the hull convulsed madly beneath the gyrating rig, the mast tip only

inches from the waves," I wrote at the time. "Clinging white-knuckled to the windward gunwale I began to think that setting the spinnaker had not been such a good idea."

And thus it was with some trepidation that I boarded Corlett's new Elliott 770 and headed onto a white-capped Pittwater. Bigger boat, bigger rig, bigger spinnaker, black nor-easter ... same result. As Corlett called "I've lost the steering", the hull careered onto its gunwale and the boom began skating across the water. De ja vu.

The hull settled briefly at 80°, and all thoughts turned to self preservation. Every man for himself. I'd long since thrown the spinnaker sheet so I could concentrate on staying aboard. Corlett's 12-year-old son, Dan, was next to me,



clutching a turning block for dear life.

With the squall still pinning us down, the hull shuddered between the duelling forces of tall rig and heavily ballasted bulb centreboard. Nothing gave way and strangely there was no panic on board. We all knew that the Elliott would eventually pick itself up from the canvas.



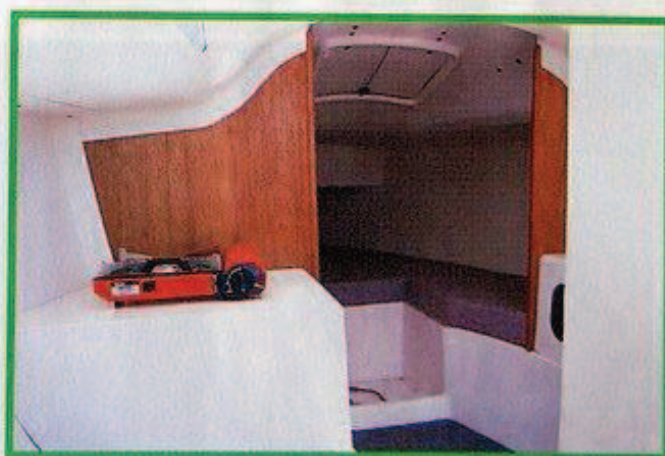
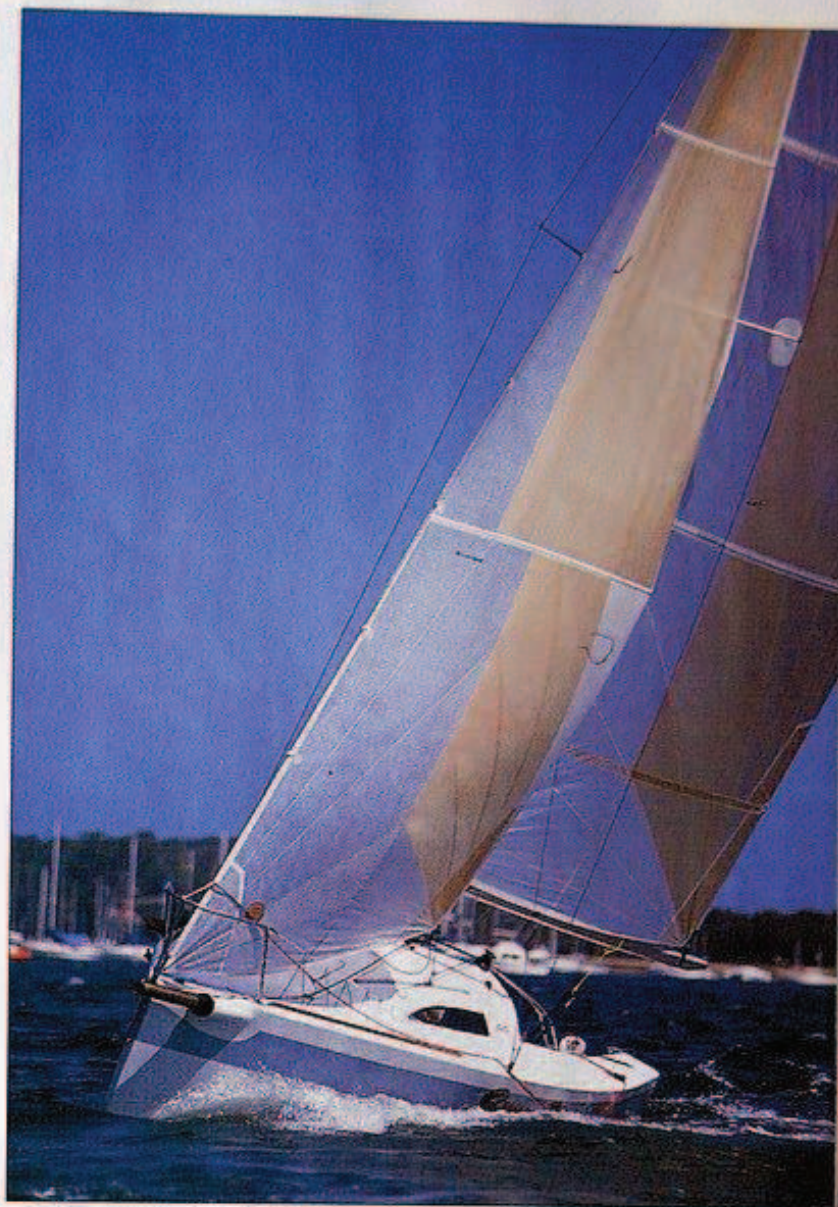
This it indeed did, groggily at first as it shook saltwater from its sails, then more purposefully. At around 45° heel the rudder regained bite and we bore away. The sails were re-sheeted and the 770 resumed its wild, surging gallop as though nothing had happened. It had survived this examination of structural integrity with flying colours.

Such wipeouts won't be common, nor are they the result of design fault. It was crew error, nothing more. When we were better prepared for gusts — Kerli signalling the arrival with a "3-2-1, GUST!" countdown — the big TS skimmed across the waves like a skiff, with spray cascading from the bow in great solid sheets. Speed bursts in the low-teens were unravelled with relative ease.

Upwind performance was equally impressive, if not as electrifying. After quelling the kite, we settled onto the work, Kerli managing the main and tiller while we perched on the gunwale — it loves weight out wide. Speeds of around six knots were achieved and it seemingly pointed high. Tacking, too, was fast since the headsail is small and easily managed. This ability was confirmed a few hours later in the Pittwater twilight race, in similar conditions and against a strong and varied fleet. Starting slightly late but at the windward end, the 770 powered through the field. We were third at the windward mark, behind the JOG champion Gingerbread Man and an Elliott 7 — more importantly, from the skipper's perspective, we had blown away the Elliott 780 Blown Away, owned by builders Darren and Nicky Schofield.

It was a temporary measure, though, for they came back at us on the reaching leg by being privy to a private gust. We rounded the final mark with horns locked, a four mile run to the finish remaining. The two boats continued their private war, leaving Gingerbread Man and the 7 in their wakes. At times we'd hold a narrow lead, then they'd claw back at us — gusts were proving the deciding factor.

As fate would have it, Blown Away grabbed the last gust and thieved the gun from under our noses by a mere half-boat length. A lousy two seconds separating us after a 50 minute drag race! Our skipper looked a tad tormented, though over the season he's tasted success more often than not. The 770 is scratch boat. ➤



While the interior is threadbare in keeping with the sporty image, there's more room than you find on other top-level racers, certainly enough for weekenders.



The 65sq m spinnaker combined with 20 knots of nor-easter ensure an exciting ride. Moments later, when the kite sheetband was too slow, the Elliott was flattened ... it recovered quickly, however.



"We didn't set out to beat the 780 when we commissioned the design from Greg Elliott," Corlett explains. "It just happens that in most airs we're as fast."

The aim of the 770, rather, is to appeal to families who enjoy one-design racing and want live-aboard facilities for occasional cruising. Corlett sees no overlap with the other Elliotts, saying that the 7 was more a daysailer (it lacks a galley) while the 780 was a development class with associated higher costs and complications.

Its visual links with the 7 are apparent in the hull shape, however. Elliott simply stretched the bow and stern then employed the same deck, adding 70cm to the cockpit. It is proportionally narrower on the waterline and slightly more rockered, while the increase in volume allowed him to bolster ballast by 110kg and sail area by around 30%.

Suddenly you have a boat that behaves more like a small yacht than a big bouncy dinghy. The 770 is more powerful than the 7 but somehow doesn't offer the same seat-of-the-pants sense of speed. At the same time it's

decidedly easier to sail than the 780, a racing crew of four having been specified in the 770's design brief, as opposed to six or seven.

The rig, designed by Pittwater's Steve Kiely, comprises a conventional single swept-back spreader set-up on a spun-tapered Goldspar mast, with no backstay or runners to worry about. It lacks the flexibility and grunt of the 780 rig, but then the 770 hull is more easily driven.

A retractable pole is employed for the asymmetric spinnaker — it was adopted from the 780 system which Darren Schofield and Steve Kiely devised and is definitely the way of the future. The photos hereabouts show an alloy sprit; this has since been changed to carbon fibre, with a smaller outlet in the bow.

Intrinsic to the overall success is the kite cut by sailmaker David Eichmeyer, who helped pioneer asymmetries on TSs with his boat Hot To Trot (indeed, his company, Performance Sails, is supplying the entire sail inventory to maintain a one-design philosophy).

SPECIFICATIONS

ELLIOTT 770

LOA:	7.70m
Beam:	2.50m
Draft:	0.55m/1.60m
Displacement:	820kg
Ballast:	350kg
Sail areas:	Main 27.3sq m
	Genoa 14.2sq m
	#2 jib 11.15sq m
	Spinnaker 65sq m
Price (as tested):	\$46,500
	Sailaway \$39,900
Builder:	New Yachts
	Ph (03) 587 5461
Dealer:	Sailing Scene
	ph (02) 9979 6546
	fax (02) 9979 6548



Any water that comes through the pole outlet will be trapped in the for'ard anchor locker and drained out. Really, the only drawback is that the spinnaker pole sits over the double vee berth when retracted. It could be extended when the berth is needed, but then it may foul the anchor gear.

Another penalty of performance comes with the centreboard case that runs fully from floor to ceiling in the middle of the cabin. It's obtrusive but necessary. At least the 770 benefits from a galley unit, albeit a very basic one — a single burner stove to port, amidships, and a single plastic sink directly opposite. There's room for more lavish facilities if you don't mind the weight. The cooler sits under the companionway steps, the portable loo betwixt the vee berth; the remaining space is taken up by berths.

Back on deck, the 770 is simply but cleverly equipped, a blend of Ronstan and Lewmar fittings being favoured. Corlett's years of racing experience and dabbling with various boats has seen this perfected.

The prototype didn't impress me completely because of its outboard well; a long, deep recess cut into the cockpit floor. The skipper tended to trip in it and, furthermore, full mobility of the rudder was prevented when the engine was down. This has been addressed, current boats having a 300mm shorter well and a lid. The fuel tank, meanwhile, has been moved to its own cockpit locker.

The test boat was built in New Zealand but the moulds have since gone to New Yachts in Melbourne, builders of the Elliott 96. They've added backrests and lockers to the saloon and apparently made a much better fist of the overall finish.

Construction comprises E-glass and Klebecell foam of varying thickness. Extra glass is applied around the underbody to withstand trailer loads, and for topside stiffness there's a structural internal liner incorporating the furniture glassed to the hull. Hull and deck are epoxy glued for an imperceptible, toerail-free join, and the chainplates tie into the topsides to create a wide rig base.

Sailing Scene is offering the 770 at a home-completion stage for \$39,497, saving \$2500 on the fully-fitted boat.



Berths run fore and aft, sleeping a family of six at a pinch but more comfortable for four adults.

Top: Multiroller trailer made light work of launching, while bull weight is within the limits of Commodores/Falcons.

All the major structural work is done and the kit includes everything from outboard bracket to spinnaker pole. All you have to add are a trailer, bunk cushions and a few odds'n'ends.

This places the 770 neatly between the 7 (around \$30,000) and the 780 (around \$50,000). Savings over the 780 come in the less exotic rig and hull laminate, while the one design racing aspect will help peg further costs. Also in the 770's favour is the ability to be towed by a Commodore or Falcon, dry weight being 1400kg.

To summarise, a boat for relaxing cruising this ain't, but nor is it a Formula One racer — it slots in neatly between those extremes, perhaps leaning more towards the performance spectrum. For twilight and class racing, with a touch of overnighing, the 770 would be hard to beat.

