Reefrunner Jet —

Elliott's latest 'speed machine'

The Bay of Islands has long been recognised as a boating mecca and, over the years, many charter companies have offered leisurely tours and cruises to view the wonderful scenery, clear waters and the fish that abound in this area. Now there is something quite different — the 40mph Reefrunner jetboat drawn by Auckland yacht designer, Greg Elliott.

TOP: At speed in the picturesque Bay of Islands, Reefrunner Jet provides an exciting new way to view the scenery.

ABOVE: Driving from the bow requires a strengthened seat and seat belts for the "pilot".

RIGHT: For non-commercial use the stern could easily be remodelled to incorporate a large, comfortable sun lounge.

The *Boating* team was recently flown to the Bay of Islands by the charter company who are promoting this new concept which combines the thrills of jetboating and the beauty of the Bay of Islands' seascapes.

Those of us who were lucky enough to holiday in the Bay this summer were very impressed by the new Charter Pier which at last makes it easy for pleasure boats to come into Paihia for their stores. This, we feel, deserves a big "thank you" for the Northland Harbour Board and Charter Pier's owners for providing these facilities.

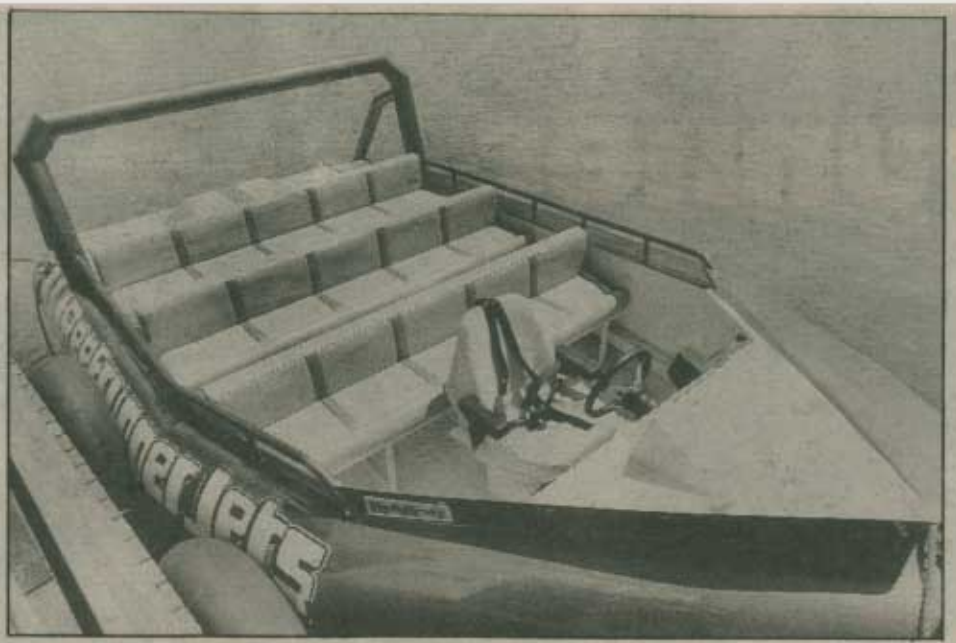
Tucked alongside this complex is the floating home of the company — Reefrunner Jets — whose boat we have come to test.

This floating dock is the culmination of 10 years planning and lobbying and Charter Pier's owner, Dennis Follett, says he could hardly believe it when he finally got permission to go ahead.

The pontoon has been so built that, using hydraulics, the whole thing is able to lift above water level, thus avoiding the heavy easterly swell which is, unfortunately, so frequent at Paihia.

Arriving at the floating dock, we look over our test boat — the Reefrunner Jet. This interesting boat was conceived by the owner, Dennis Follett, designed by Greg Elliott and built by Tony Ward of Kwik Kraft in Tauranga. Reefrunner is a 6m alloy hull rated to seat 15 passengers and is powered with a 460 cu in Ford motor, marinised by Kodiak Marine in the United States. The marinisation in this case is not designed to give high performance, but rather serve a commercial application with a high torque curve at low revs.

The Kodiak Marine marinisation has all been done to a high standard with a combined oil cooler-water cooler header configuration mounted on the front of the motor in one neat unit and running their own manifolds — giving a little added space around the tappet covers and from the high risers exhaust flows directly to the transom.



Reefrunner boasts seating for 15. The more adventurous sit at the front; the more timid near the rear.

The motor is fitted with a top mounted starter motor and general maintenance, other than to the oil filter, becomes simpler because of the easy accessibility.

Further accesibility is available, if required, by removing the bulkheads between the engine bay and the massive stowage lockers on either side. This is a quick, simple operation and makes any maintenance far easier.

There is good crankcase ventilation and the motor is fitted with a four barrel Holly carburetter.

The drive unit is connected to a new Hamilton 211 single stage jet unit.

The machinery is fed by twin 250 litre underfloor fuel tanks, built into the boat.

The basic hull design is a moderate vee, with half round pontoons welded to the topsides. These give separate flotation to either side of the boat which incorporates the advantages of an inflatable, while the straight side on the inner gunwale gives extra space inboard. The overall beam is 3m and approximately 2.5m of this is available for interior seating space.

An anti-roll bar across the back gives a sporty look and helps hold the construction together.

The hull has a 17 degree deadrise at the transom and there are three planing strakes on each side, plus a chine rail. These are all welded and incorporated into the hull.

The hull is painted in a very dark luminous blue with detailing and signwriting on the sponsons in fluorescent pink which, while striking and eye catching for a sporting boat, serves the double purpose of being easily visible in an emergency.

Seating for 15 is provided in four rows of padded bench type seating with comfortable back rests. The driver sits in the forward-most section with a wheel and foot throttle control.

We notice an automatic fire extinguisher system with jets facing the machinery in the engine room. Life jackets are provided and must be worn by all on board. Flares and a VHF radio are also fitted.

We step on board and leave the jetty. As with most jets, this boat can pull away from the jetty virtually sideways and the manoeuvrability is extremely good. It is quick to accelerate, but full power is needed to bring it on to the plane. Once on the plane, however, we can throttle off and cruise at a good speed at around 2500rpm. There is no speedo fitted but with our experience, we estimate the top speed at around

40mph. The boat weighs around 2 tonne (empty) and has a loaded capacity of around 3 tonne with passengers and fuel and is still able to maintain a good top speed fully laden.

We race off towards Opua in a light following chop; there is a little spray thrown on board and we experience a fairly bumpy — but exciting — ride. We throw the craft into some tight turns and the banking and turning is what one would expect from a sports jetboat.

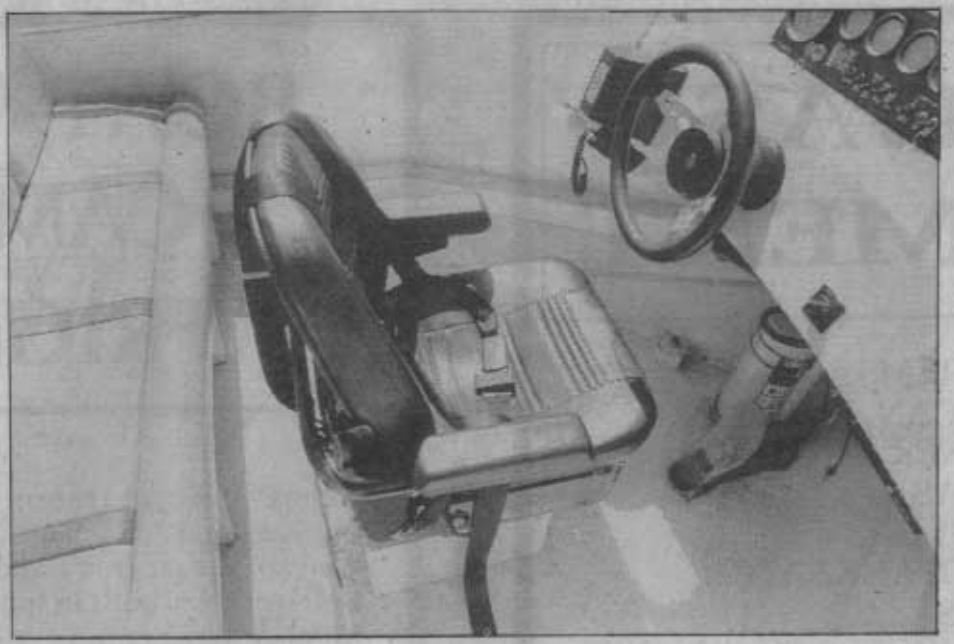
Reefrunner takes a little getting used to for those not familiar with jetboats. The foot throttle makes it easy to accurately control the speed of the boat in quickly changing conditions. It does, however, take some practice in the rough chop where a hard landing can jar the foot off the throttle and dramatically slow the boat.

Tight turning at speed is another area where new skills have to be learnt and we quickly discover that the most exciting turns are to be had by momentarily taking the foot off the throttle, throwing the wheel hard over and then "planting the boot" once again.

Having the steering station well for'ard has created some problems for the driver due to the "fulcrum" effect. Reefrunner's owners have countered this by installing a thickly padded truck seat (securely bolted to the floor) and installing seatbelts.

Reefrunner proves surprisingly easy to master and the team is soon confidently turning and charging at "full noise" (an apt description in this case) across the bay.

All too soon, however, we discover that tide, time and small aeroplanes wait for no-one (not even *Boating* test teams having a ball in the sunny Bay of Islands) and return Reefrunner to the charter pier.



The steering station boasts a converted truck seat, complete with seat belts.

Summary

Reefrunner fills a gap in the tourist industry and at the same time promotes the wide diversity of boatbuilding and designing skills in New Zealand. As a charter boat Reefrunner has a lot to offer, not least the fact that the straight open exhausts make a roar that gives passengers a sensation of speed even greater than actually achieved and a feeling of power, too. For the younger tourists this has got to be an extremely exciting way to sight-see in the Bay of Islands and among the Black Rocks and similar places.

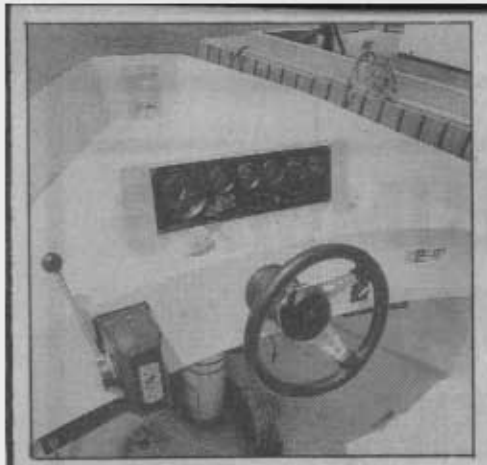
Manoeuvring, due to the shallow draft, can be carried out in complete safety in spots where most boats cannot go.

With it's 10mm thick aluminium plate hull, even a relatively serious mishap is unlikely to incur any major damage.

This is a purpose built boat and, although the added width makes it a little blunt in the entry (thus giving a slightly rougher ride than we are used to), load carrying capacity is, nevertheless, comparable to that of a similar length catamaran, with twice the turning ability.

We do notice, however, that some underfloor sections have come loose and, due to the rugged nature of the jetboat's work, we feel that some strengthening in this area is required.

We feel that as the boat travels through such beautiful scenic waterways (up to Haruru Falls, for example) maybe bypass silencers could be added so that when in the open water these could be open for the full benefit of the V8 throaty roar; while in more populated waters these could employed so as not to annoy the locals.



With a straightforward instrument panel, gear lever to port and well-positioned foot throttle the Elliott designed jetboat is easy to drive.

The drive system — the whale-tail-like Hamilton 211 single stage.

While Reefrunner is designed as a charter boat there is no reason why the concept cannot be extended to a fishing or dive boat — or even an ordinary pleasureboat. Some alterations would be necessary but they are not major ones. An extremely comfortable, large sun lounge could, for example, be installed aft with only minor modifications. In addition, with a steering position further aft, the ride would also be a lot more comfortable for those contemplating offshore boating.

As a charter boat (and quite likely as a pleasure craft as well) Reefrunner has loads of potential and is yet another example of the versatility of designer Greg Elliott.

The vitals

Length	*6m (19ft 8ins)*
Overall beam	*3m (9ft 10ins)*
Interior beam	*2.5m (8ft 2ins)*
Fuel capacity	*250 litres (55 gals)*
Engine	*Ford 460 ci petrol*
Drive	*Hamilton 211 single stage*
Seating capacity	*15*