

# ELLIOTT 7.4

Speed with ease is the hallmark of the Elliott 7.4 metre trailer yacht which is the latest offering from the young Auckland designer who is currently the pacesetter in New Zealand's performance sailing scene.

**N**ew Zealand designer Greg Elliott has been causing quite a splash across the Tasman in the last couple of years, with a series of innovative yachts which are truly high performance without being difficult to handle.

Here in the more conservative sailing climate of Australia we have only just begun to feel the first ripples of the Elliott effect across the Tasman, but at least those in the know realise that Elliott is indeed one very innovative designer.

In the recent Sydney-Hobart, the newly launched 17 metre mini maxi *Rager* showed just how potent Elliott designs can be in fresh downwind conditions. *Rager* finished a very impressive fifth over the line, despite failing to get the right conditions which could have seen the white hulled flyer pace it out with the really big maxis for line honours.

Like Bruce Farr and Laurie Davidson the young Aucklander, Elliott, has made his reputation in the non-rating, go-fast style of boats which Kiwis so enjoy. Some of these designs such as the Elliott 5.9 (AB April '87) lean more to



racing, while those like the trapeze-powered *Gorilla Biscuits* go all the way. However Elliott also designs some pretty nice middle of the road style cruiser/racers and in the next year we will see several of these designs come to Australia through the efforts of his local agent, Trans Pacific Yachts and Cruisers.

One of Elliott's first big cruiser/racers, *Transformer*, attracted a fair bit of attention here in 1986 when she won the Auckland-Brisbane race by

well over half a day. Now a smaller version of Elliott's quick but capacious boats has come onto the market, in the shape of the Elliott 7.4 trailer yacht.

This attractive cruising yacht has been a long time coming due to the fact that there were several modifications made to the proto model before the fibreglass model was put into production.

After a long wait, the local agents got their first fibreglass 7.4 metre just three days before the start of a major local trailer sailer event in which the boat had been entered. There was a frantic rush by the Trans Pacific team to get the boat ready, with every-

one from riggers to shipwrights and sailmakers all working on the boat to get it ready by Saturday afternoon.

Last minute boat launches are perhaps not the best time to fairly assess a new boat, yet we too were keen to see this new Kiwi machine and so jumped at the chance to conduct an early test.

When I joined the crew on the Sunday morning of the start the boat was just about ready to go. Down below the

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TEST

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boat was bare, a wilderness of fibreglass interspersed with headhunting bolts sticking through the deck, but at least it was sailable. The vang and other sail controls were lashed on and the main hoisted as we motored to the start, the jib went up with a couple of minutes to the gun, and the spinnaker set for the first time around the top mark.

Of course, after all this frantic preparation, the wind died and we never got to put the Elliott through its paces in the race. With score one for the wind and nil for the test team I had to wait another few weeks before getting a second chance at seeing how the Elliott performed.

## Design

The 7.4 is a bulkier boat than most of Elliott's designs. Although it is still very light, weighing in at 1 000 kg, the 2.45 m of beam, high freeboard and full ends make it a very big boat for its overall length. One recognisable feature is the typical Elliott skiff-like bow — nearly vertical, but with a rounded knuckle and U-sections which stop it from burying. As well as giving extra waterline length, the bow adds more internal volume, which is what the 7.4 is largely about. The boat is also a lot wider at the waterline than most of Elliott's yachts. Allied with the very wide transom and stern, it creates an exceptional amount of room down below for a yacht of this size. The hull lines are quite full, with the curving lines characteristic of Elliott's work — a straight line is hard to find on his boats.

Aesthetically, the boat looks a bit high sided, perhaps dumpy, however since we saw the boat before the marine artists got to draw the hull lines we suspect the boat will look a lot sleeker next time we come alongside.

Elliott has always liked bulb keels, but with the 7.4 he has gone even further and has finished the keel off with a large winglet. The winglet isn't a cosmetic trick, as it is on some yachts — it's an integral part of the keel and in fact carries the boat's 410 kg of ballast.

By concentrating the ballast some two metres below the waterline, Elliott has made it much more effective than the 41 per cent ballast-to-displacement ratio would normally suggest. As well, the winglets also provide a very effective end plate effect, making the keel more efficient.

The centreboard itself is a very high aspect foil, only 60cm wide. To support the wings on such a slender



*Silhouetted against Sydney city skyline the Elliott 7.4 displays its classic dinghy style rig.*

foil, Elliott has reinforced the centreboard with two RSJs running down the section. The centreboard is raised by a hydraulic pump, mounted in the cockpit coaming.

As with Elliott's other designs the deck layout is very simple. There's a large but slightly shallow anchor locker forward, a long and high coachroof, and then a large open-transomed cockpit. The coachroof has rounded edges to make deck work easier, while the wide cockpit coamings are comfortable. There are Barlow 16 winches for the jib sheets on the coamings and for the spinnaker sheets and halyards mounted on the cabin. The outboard (6-8hp) is mounted on a lifting stern bracket.

The only unusual aspect of the layout is the big icebox that sits under the cockpit floor, where it's within easy reach of a thirsty racing crew.

The sailplan is another of Elliott's trademarks. The powerhouse is the big (27 m<sup>2</sup>) mainsail, topped by a large roach supported by two full length battens. The big roach makes for a more efficient outline as well as adding area, and it's now becoming as popular on high performance trailer yachts as it has been on centreboarders.

The number one headsail is a small one, only 10 m<sup>2</sup> in area and 120 per cent of the foretriangle area. Because the overlap is small and the sail doesn't interfere with the spreaders, Elliott has made them very wide and heavily swept back. This way they support the mast very well, so the rig requires no running backstays. There isn't even a backstay so the rig is dead simple and quick to set up when trailing.

The simple staying and small jib make a very simple rig for a high per-

formance boat, but it's nonetheless effective.

Off the breeze, the little jib is complemented by a huge 44 m<sup>2</sup> spinnaker. The rig is low aspect, to make the boat more stable in a breeze. The combination of small jib and big main works very well when it's blowing, but in light airs it's less efficient.

### Down Below

For a 7.4m yacht, the Elliott's interior is huge. From the outside the 7.4 looks to be a bigger boat than the popular 7.8 m trailer yachts, and once inside the impression is reinforced — this is a very big 25 footer. Headroom is 1.75 m in the main cabin, with good sitting headroom in the forecabin.

The two quarter berths are nice and spacious and between them is a table that sits underneath the cockpit sole. It slides out when needed, propped up by a dropping leg. The starboard quarter berth leads into a settee berth which, with the backrest shelves outboard, takes up the rest of that side of the saloon.

Over to port the head of the quarter berth provides room for two to sit comfortably. Further forward is the galley, snuggled in behind the centreboard case.

The stove, a two-burner Maxi metho with griller, sits opposite the case against the hull side, with lockers and shelves below and above. Further forward is the icebox and sink, with locker space underneath. There are timber tops to fit over the sink and icebox to provide a minimum of work space. Forward of the galley unit is a hanging locker.

The forecabin gets almost complete privacy from the kauri bulkhead and folding door which blocks it off from the saloon. There's a large double berth with small lockers outboard, and a head below.

What the above pen sketch doesn't indicate is the sheer spaciousness down below. The 7.4 must come very close to having the biggest accommodation of any trailer yacht on the market. It's a very big step up in interior comfort from most yachts in this size bracket, and has size enough to take a family cruising comfortably. The only real reservations I have is the lack of working space in the galley, and the amount of room given over to the hanging locker. Few trailer yacht sailors go away with clothes that need hanging up, but to accommodate them the layout has given up the space that a cook needs when juggling four or five plates and a few pots and pans. Using the areas over the sink and icebox isn't a good answer because the cook will be using them all the time.



Cabin interior is neatly planned around the lifting centrecase with the galley offset to port.

Test yacht, *Enzed A*, was very well finished. The mouldings are clean and fair, and the finish down below is excellent. The bare hull areas can be covered with FrontRunner material as seen in the test boat, or flow coated. Timber trim around the windows, shelves, and the attractive timber bulkhead and bi-fold door (plus sheer roominess) make the 7.4 attractive down below.

### Construction

The test boat was imported, but later 7.4s are to be built by the New Zealand firm of Tauranga Yachts in their new factory in Ipswich, Queensland. The hull is built of two layers of woven fibreglass rovings and one of chopped strand matt either side of 3 mm of Coremat. The deck layup is similar but there is Divinycell in the large flat areas of the deck and in the

curved areas of the cabin. The rest is solid fibreglass. The interior layup is fibreglass and coremat. The boat isn't high tech or particularly heavily built, but it feels solid enough underfoot.

### Performance

The 7.4 is very much in the cruiser/racer mould, with speed compromised to give cruising comfort and stability, and she pays the penalty in some aspects of her performance. The boat is still comparable in speed to the perennial frontrunners of the T/Y fleet, the Ross 780s, without being the pacemaker that the other Elliotts are.

In a strong wind, the Elliott 7.4 is really fast. In fact, given the right conditions the Elliott could be the fastest production trailer yacht around. If the 7.4 has a weak spot it is potentially in light airs where its good fresh wind



Close up of galley shows an L-shaped unit with two burner stove, sink, icebox and roomy cutlery locker.

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attributes such as high stability and a wide, flat underbody tend to work against light air speed.

In the next race in which I sailed the Elliott we had a short blast of wind in what was otherwise a light air affair. We had lagged behind the front runners after the start but immediately the wind kicked in our speed went into overdrive and we soon shot up to just behind the leaders.

With the wind at 15 knots the Elliott felt very comfortable and fast. Sailing much more upright than the other big T/Ys and with more control and speed she caught up time on the boats ahead (save the leading Trailer-tri 720, which flew away from the monos on a long planing reach). Upwind she was feeling solid and pointing well, easily rolling past one of the light weather boats that had drifted ahead earlier.

Down the next shy reach she tracked true, bouncing onto the plane once or twice while most of the fleet was broaching occasionally. Just as we started to get back into the leading group the wind died off again, and so did the 7.4's performance. Downwind under the big chute the boat was more competitive, able to hold her own and more against the MASRMs and hanging slightly behind a Ross 780. But upwind the boat definitely lacked pace in the light winds, feeling underpowered and pointing low.

Since that inaugural race the 7.4 had been doing very well in midweek and twilight races. When the breeze is fresh the Elliott 7.4 has no trouble coming in just on the heels of boats as fast as the International Etchell 22 — impressive stuff.

My next chance to try the Elliott out came just before the next TYA event, in a 20 knot north-easter on Lake Macquarie. Under number one headsails and full main the boat felt fast and stable upwind. The helm was heavy, which is almost a generic feature of these wide sterned Kiwi light-weights, but the boat was not hard to sail. We were carrying full gear when most other T/Ys were reefing down and carrying small headsails, so the boat has plenty of stability. Under the number two genoa or a reef it would probably have been docile enough for easy family sailing.

But while the Elliott's performance upwind was quite impressive, downwind it was a delight. The spinnaker was popped on a broad reach, and the big boat simply took off. Directional control was excellent — she could be steered up or down, with no qualms



*Elliott moving at seven knots on reach shows off its long waterline and powerful hull sections. Design has more fullness forward than is usually the case with this style of yacht.*

about control or broaching. In the gusts the speed just rose and rose — up to 13½ knots, on a speedo that seemed (from our upwind performance and later sails) to be quite accurate. Our champion class crew onboard agreed that it was a stunning ride.

In performance terms the Elliott would appear to be a boat which is going to be competitive in medium weight winds (10-15 knots) and very competitive in fresh to strong winds (plus 15 knots). In winds under 10 knots it would appear that the large wetted surface of the hull plus the wings hold back performance so this will not be the boat's best area.

Light air performance may not be so bad once local owners learn to get the best out of the Elliott. Subsequent to our test sails, the test boat out performed all the top designs in a Victorian TYA event which was sailed in winds of only 5-10 knots. As with many of the other big dinghy type boats from across the Tasman, there will inevitably be a learning curve before the boat hits its optimum performance.

## Specifications

LOA.....	7.4 m
LWL.....	6.6 m
Beam.....	2.45 m
Draft.....	165 cm-81 cm
Dry weight.....	1000 kg
Sail areas	
Mainsail.....	22.28 m <sup>2</sup>
Genoa.....	11.4 m <sup>2</sup>
No 2 headsail.....	7.08 m <sup>2</sup>
Designer.....	Greg Elliott

At present the TYA of NSW has given the Elliott 7.4 a handicap which rates it midway between a MASRM 720 and a Ross 780, both of which are very fast boats. It will be interesting to see whether this handicap is adjusted upwards in the years to come as the local fleet of Elliotts gets more seasoned and faster.

The Elliott 7.4 is expected to be pretty competitive in price terms too. At present one can buy the boat in a virtual lockup stage for \$22 500 without rig. With the rig in and the extras added like bunk cushions, WC, stove etc. the price comes out to around the \$32 000 mark.

## Summary

The straightforward deck plan works as well as most. It has no real strengths, no great drawbacks. The deck gear is still in development stage, and there are some arrangements which will be changed in later boats.

With Elliott's racing reputation it is inevitable that a number of this design will be bought by racing enthusiasts. Hopefully the racing reputation of the boat will not put people off this boat as a family cruiser, for in this latter role it should be an excellent choice. With plenty of room below, an easily handled rig and very good stability, the Elliott 7.4 will be right at home as the family escape machine.

► The Australian Distributor is Trans Pacific Yachts.

