

TEST:
ELLIOTT 5.9

HAURAKI HOWLER

An 18-Footer with a cabin on it is how some might describe this quick Kiwi trailable, and there's no doubt that the designer was more interested in skifflike performance than elaborate accommodation.





TURN up with this little rocket at the yacht club car park, and you're greeted with gawks and stares, a lot of tyre-kicking and comments like: "What's this, then, an 18-Footer with a cabin on it?"

The purple paint job and pastel pink interior draw attention, but it's when the wrist-thin mast and big-roached, big mainsail go up that the comments really start to flow. Wherever it's raced since its arrival in Sydney in June, the first Elliott 5.9 in Australia has turned heads, caused plenty of debate about how quick it will or won't go, and led to the denial of many rum and coke bets by owners of much bigger boats, in no hurry to wager that they can beat this unknown quantity which looks odd — and simply fast.

Young Aucklander Greg Elliott designed this cuddy cabin day racer a couple of years ago, and enough have been launched for class racing with a fleet of 10-15 to get going there. A recent change of builder, along with the appointment of an agent in Sydney, has led to this attempt to infiltrate the Aussie market. New builder of the 5.9, Gary Banks, brought Moroccan Roll to Sydney for the Trailable Yacht Association of NSW's Pittwater Islands Race in June, where it showed a lot of light airs speed, but was hampered by the crew's lack of local knowledge on a day when Pittwater was in its trickiest mood. Banks left the boat with buyer Morris Short, a young wine merchant who, as Australian agent for the Elliott 5.9, is very keen to promote it and get class racing going.

Short has been racing Moroccan Roll during winter in the CYCA's Sydney Harbour series, as well as with Port Hacking Open SC. It's been doing well, but the racing's been mostly against small keelboats like Swanson Darts, J24s and Diamonds. The real test must wait until October, when the TYA of NSW's series of summer racing gets underway.

Design and Construction

Calling the Elliott 5.9 an 18-Footer with a cabin isn't that far from the mark; the designer's intention has plainly been to provide a high performance trailer sailer with sailing characteristics that will appeal to skiff and dinghy sailors, while also providing extra stability and the interior space to sleep, or at least get out of the weather, that off-the-beach boats just don't have.

While the latter consideration hasn't been an afterthought, it certainly has



taken second place to sailing performance. The boat is mostly cockpit, with the cuddy cabin looking small and rather odd, but still serving its intended purpose.

The hull lines are fairly tortured, with a fine plumb bow leading out to very beamy sections just aft of amidships, with flared topsides to enable crew weight to have maximum effect keeping the boat on its feet and a flat bottom from the centreboard case aft to promote planing.

The centreboard has all its ballast in a long bulb, a method of providing self-righting ability also seen on the maxi-TS Noelex 30. According to Short, the 5.9 self-righted herself immediately in NZ tests with the keel fully raised, bulb up against the hull (she is trailed that way, too).

Construction is fibreglass sandwich, using Coremat in the hull and Divinycell in the deck. There'd be no point in building a boat like this if you didn't keep weight down; stated displacement for this production version is 896 kg, with 496 kg in the centreboard bulb. You could go lighter using exotics in the lay-up but the price would become prohibitive for production hulls.



Layout and Rig

Below decks there's not a lot to describe. Fibreglass bunk mouldings run along each side, enclosing storage and providing the space for up to four adults to sleep, two head-to-foot each side. There's sitting headroom in the cuddy, space to crawl around aft under the cockpit, but not a lot of it.

The centreboard case emerges into the forwardmost section of the cockpit, operated on this boat by a simple worm winch which is very, very heavy duty labour to operate. Short is considering offering a hydraulic system as an alternative and, believe me, it would have to be worth it. The current set-up is a real gut-buster.

Aft of that is a well for the outboard motor, on this boat a Mariner four hp which was more than adequate for flat water motoring. Given the open transom (keeping weight out of the ends and making boarding very easy) and the desire to keep the significant weight of the outboard centrally positioned, this is a logical solution which is well-executed. When sailing, the outboard hinges up on its bracket and a trapdoor is inserted underneath.

I guess the drawbacks of this system — smoke and fumes from the outboard blowing straight into the helmsman's face when motoring, 4-6 inches of water slopping around in the well when sailing, and some inconvenience for the mainsheet hand who must quickly learn to step around, and not into, the well, are just necessary evils. I can't think of any better way around it.

Immediately behind the outboard well is the mainsheet traveller, which is most easily operated by the skipper while the mainsheet hand works the sheet from blocks in front of the well. The helmsman also has the spinnaker sheet and brace blocks at his fingertips and in practice he or she tends to work these through gybes. The boat is most easily raced by a crew of three, though two could cope without drama. Squeezing a fourth person aboard would be inconvenient when racing, given the small amount of area to work in forward of the traveller. For social sailing, though, the cockpit could accommodate five or even six.

Jib sheets, halyards and sail control lines lead back to cleats at the aft end of the cuddy cabin. It's only a little jib, with a large proportion of the 24.6 m²

Spartan interior is light on appointments, aims at keeping weight low.

Lots of main and powerful hindquarters could call for close helm/sheethand co-ordination on a shy reach.

sail area going into the mainsail. But jib trim can be easily adjusted via simple rope barber haulers, with these provided for the spinnaker as well.

The deck-stepped mast is a NZ Matrix section by Murray Jones, set up with one pair of very long, swept-back spreaders (no backstays), wire rigging and Graham screw fastenings on deck.

Foredeck work is a little perilous, given the lack of area and the non-skid surfacing which could be improved, but the forward hand can stand in the forward hatch for more security. It would be good to see stowage provided for the spinnaker pole along the boom, dinghy-style to get it out of the way but still easily accessible.

The fibreglass rudder blade bolts into an alloy frame rudder box with a nice long tiller and extension; fastening the bolt tightly holds the blade in place, but it will swing up if it touches bottom. The cheeks were showing a bit of wear around the bolt — perhaps large washers would help — but it's basically a good system.

Performance

Having watched the 5.9 overtake and skim past us with a minimum of fuss in the light Pittwater Islands Race, I had no doubts she would be a good light weather performer. That was confirmed in our first attempt at a boat test, when the breeze peaked at about five knots.

This wasn't what you'd call a real sail, though, so I had another go, in a race at Port Hacking run by the PHOSC, and this time there was a breeze of 8-10 knots at times and again flat water. (On weekends, at least, it's been a *light* Sydney winter!)

My impressions are that this boat will provide a helluva lot of fun for grown-up off-the-beach sailors. The helm's light and responsive, there are plenty of sail controls to play with to tweak up the rig, and there's lots of speed out of the blocks on every point of sailing.

The boat is weight sensitive and tends to hobby-horse in any chop in light airs — ferry or hydrofoil wake, for example — which leads me to suspect that it will require some measure of finesse in a breeze to keep the bow from diving. There isn't a lot of volume for'ard, and I would think the 5.9's best race performances will be on flat water courses. With her big mainsail and beamy aft hull sections I think this will also be a demanding boat shy reaching in a breeze, requiring coordination between the crew to prevent broaches.

If all this sounds like conjecture, the facts of our actual race were that we finished behind a couple of J24s (one being the National champ), and ahead of the rest of the mixed fleet of more J24s, Diamonds and the like. Against the J24s we were lower and slightly faster upwind, just about even downwind except when the breeze died and they tended to carry way. A certain amount of dill factor sprinkled on our crew work didn't help, but how often do you sail the perfect race?

Summary

This boat is targeted at a quite specific market; buyers who want a high performance small boat and who'd also like a bit of cabin space and stability, but don't want to trade-off much performance for those requirements. It's a boat in which you *could* take the family out sailing, and in which you *could* overnight, but it's more likely to be used primarily for racing hard around the buoys, and in that area I expect it will be very successful and give bigger trailable yachts a real push in the hands of a keen and a competent crew.

Most other small trailables have made more concessions to interior comfort, their manufacturers looking to widen their market. The only other boats I can think of as comparison points are the Blazer, which has sold well but is quite a lot bigger, and the Status Slipstream, a modified version of the Status 580 which has performed well for its promoter Jon Simonds, but which has never really caught on.

My feeling is that the market for this boat is fairly limited, but that those who do get hold of one will have a whole lot of fun. (And I bet they'll be grown up off-the-beach boat sailors.)

Morris Short intends to import a larger Elliott design when it becomes available in production version later in the year, and I'll be interested to look at this 7.4 m yacht.

Vanessa Dudley

LOA	5.9 m
LWL	5.6 m
Beam	2.45 m
Draft	1.3 m
Displacement	896 m
Sail area	24.6 m ²
Price (as seen, minus outboard but on trailer)	\$16,000
Builder: E Type Yachts, Box 8504, Symonds St, Auckland.	
Australian agent: Elliott Type Yachts, 263 Storey St, Maroubra, NSW, 2035.	
Ph: (02) 344-5329.	