

# LIL' RIPPER

COMPACT KIWI DAYSAILER, NOW BUILT IN OZ, GIVES EXHILARATING PERFORMANCE FROM ITS SLEEK HULL AND SIMPLE BUT STURDY RIG.

MARK ROTHFIELD SURVIVED A WILD WESTERLY TO BRING THIS REPORT. PHIL AYSLEY TOOK THE PICS

**S**EAWATER spewed into the cockpit and the hull convulsed sickly as the mast gyrated like a go-go dancer, its tip only inches from the waves. Clinging white-knuckled to the windward gunwale, I began to think that setting the spinnaker had not been such a good idea . . .

The moment of sheeting the billowing sail had coincided with the arrival of a 35-knot squall from the west — having wended its way through the hills of Pittwater, building in momentum like a snowball, this bullet had our name on it. The impact was immediate, the bantamweight Elliott being king hit onto its side and rounding up savagely.

It floundered for what seemed an eternity, but probably was no more than 30 seconds, during which time not a word was spoken among the crew. The sheets had been thrown and there was nothing to do but wait. A pessimist in such situations, I pondered whether we'd be able to right the boat, while instinctively covering my face with a hand, half expecting the scantily-supported spar to explode, or a stay to snap.

It didn't. And nor did the manful little TS succumb, snapping upright once the gust had quelled, dumping its load of brine out the open transom, then running away with a semblance of control though the crisp sails still flogged mercilessly. With apologies to TS Elliott: "I've heard the Mermaids singing but I know they don't sing for me . . ."

The only damage done was to a 1/2-inch thick stainless gooseneck fitting, now bent at right angles because someone forgot to case the vang. But it was hanging in there. We sorted the spaghetti of ropes and sheeted home the kite, just in time for another squall to hammer us. This time, however, we were prepared.

Acceleration was dramatic, the slender bow dancing over swells and wide transom trailing a jetstream of foam, the resulting "swish" becoming intermingled with a pulsating centrecase hum to enhance the sensation of speed. Just when the boat

seemed to be going as fast as possible, 12-13 knots by my reckoning, it dug deeper for more, 15-16, and bounced with sprite. Yeeehah!

At one stage I turned behind to look at the MB cameraboat bounding off our aft quarter, two photographers perched in the bow with motordrives blazing, and it was then I noticed skipper Kerly Corlette; two hands strangling the tiller, genuflecting on the cockpit floor as though in worship, and eyes wide open! A former cat sailor discovering the thrills of driving a light, lively monohull!

After the spinnaker was quelled and stowed below (where perhaps it should've stayed had sanity prevailed) we turned for home. Revelling in the blistering two-sail reach, the skill reflexes — dulled by numerous sojourns aboard heavyweight keelers — came flooding back, and then it struck me. Here was the perfect set-up for the dinghy sailor entering the family ranks.



AS trailer sailer devotees would be aware, the Elliott 5.9 was first released in 1983 (in timber) and went into full production a year later. Since then more than 70 have been built, strong one-design and club racing fleets being established in native New Zealand. Only a dozen or so have been sold locally due to the expense involved in transporting them across the Tasman.

That changed when Pacesetter Yachts —

builders of the Elliott 9m and importers of the 10.5 — obtained a set of moulds, the first outside NZ. Their timing couldn't have been better since the depressed economy has opened the door for affordable and easily-towed craft of this ilk, and the world-wide sailing pendulum has seemingly swung towards outright performance.

Also, with trailer sailer development stifled by a late-80s market collapse, the ageing process has been kind to the little boat . . . It remains as sporty, racy and attractive as anything else available in Oz. Typical of the designer's work, the hull has a bluff, plumb entry leading into decidedly fine fore'd sections, and a flattish run aft from the centre case. A pronounced turn of bilge and angled top-sides reduce wetted surface, imparting initial tenderness then progressive stiffness as the extra beam and 250kg of ballast come into play.

Conceived as a club trainer cum match-racer, Elliott has specified an efficient fractional rig, practical deck layout and low-tech construction, shying away from exotics because of the associated difficulty in repairs. Solid 'glass reinforced with coremat in high stress areas is employed in the hull and deck, resulting in reasonable panel stiffness and a moderate displacement of around 600kg that's well within a four-cylinder tow vehicle's capabilities.

The cockpit has a wide, flat floor aft then kicks in sharply amidships to accommodate quarter berths within, and accordingly makes life somewhat cramped for the fore'ardhand. Side decks are generous, extremely comfortable, but need the added security of hiking straps (not included on the test boat). Access over and around the cuddy cabin is also good, or there's a large hatch, however the kithand ideally should possess the agility of a tight-rope walker to operate on the relatively narrow foredeck.

Deck hardware is an eclectic blend, various components chosen for price, performance, and weight rather than brand loyalty: Ronstan for the full-width traveller and small

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blocks, Harken for the ratchets, Performance for cleats, Bariet for genoa winches and EasyLock for the jammers. It's all light, dinghy style, and very effective.

Lifting the keel involves an ingenious procedure, the lifting wire being attached down at the bulb and running up the board's trailing edge to a cockpit-mounted winch operated by a detachable worm-driven handle. It's somewhat awkward to work, and the exposed wire obviously creates drag as well as harmonics in D-minor, but by successfully negating a high lifting point, inherently cumbersome, it pays for itself when approaching a beach under sail.

The board drops only a metre or so and is relatively narrow in profile, yet leeway and pointing ability is not too bad, suggesting a highly efficient foil shape. If 'beautiful' is the word to describe a rudder assembly, then that's what the Elliot's is. Constructed of stainless tubing, perfectly bent and welded, it is akin to a sports steering wheel, as well as being immensely strong and functional. The rudder itself is a deep blade that provides tremendous control and feel, though at high speed a slight rooster tail fans around the front of the casing.

Looking up, the mast is a lightweight, tapered section from Baverstock — as seen on Farr 6000s and Noelex 25s — that's bolstered by a single set of swept-back spreaders and lower stays . . . no backstay or runners. Having witnessed its resistance to inversion, I can attest to the strength. Raising it requires two people, one to steady the base, the other to 'walk' it up.

Forestay tension comes via a well-engineered Graham (NZ) turnbuckle at the bow, taking only a few minutes to tighten with a spanner. The chainplates are anchored with a flat steel T-piece glassed to the inside of the hull, exiting just inside the gunwale line to provide maximum mast support (the short-footed genoa is sheeted inside, to tracks atop the cabin, so pointing ability is not affected).

The 'iron spinnaker' was originally fitted

through a well amidships, primarily to centralise weight and maintain the transom's clean lines, but there are drawbacks: the resulting hole generates enormous drag and aeration, the engine is inconveniently placed to pull-start, takes up cockpit leg room, and is noisy. Though still available for those who prefer it, Kerly Corlette feels a custom-made bracket that enables the 3.5hp donk to swing into the cockpit from the transom, popularised by the Spider range, is a better option. He is specifying this in his factory orders.

Down below, designer Elliott has made clever use of the limited amount of space, but the level of finish is very much no-frills: flowcoat and gelcoat, with the only warmth coming from the cushion covers. The slim forepeak is filled by a vee berth, dissected by a mast compression post, and these run into decent-sized settee/quarter-berths either side.

The Corlette clan — comprising husband, wife and two young children — plan to go camping in the boat by carrying a portable one-burner metho stove to use in the cockpit, and a cooler. With sitting headroom in the cabin, perhaps a boom tent added, it would be quite adequate for over-nighting. Also the fine-bodied hull would be slowed by any unnecessary weight.

### Performance

THE 5.9 looks fast enough the moment it rolls off its submerged trailer, the bow floating above the knuckle, the low-slung cabin melding handsomely into the sweeping hull lines, the open transom enticing with its promise of an invigorating view astern.

Hopping aboard, there's no disappointment. You feel low to the water, immediately at one with it, and when the first gust hits the boat responds like a greyhound, blasting from the box as bums hit the gunwale.

Tacking is lightning fast, tracking is viceless, even when the lee rail dips — though that is the signal to ease up. Experienced crews would find the sensitivity



abundantly challenging, yet the stability and handling is such that beginners would scarcely get into difficulty.

For optimum upwind performance the co-ordination between skipper and sheethand is all important. The former controls the pace, wagging the helm as the breeze dictates, while the latter pumps the powerfully-cut North main in unison. In the most overwhelming gusts we found it was also necessary to throw a little jib sheet, the skipper having decided not to reef.

By pulling onto a shy reach and cranking the boat constantly, we entered the planing zone. Picture a race horse breaking into a canter, or a sports car finding an extra gear, and you will have some idea of the sensation.

After working upwind for about 20 minutes, Kerly made that fateful call for the

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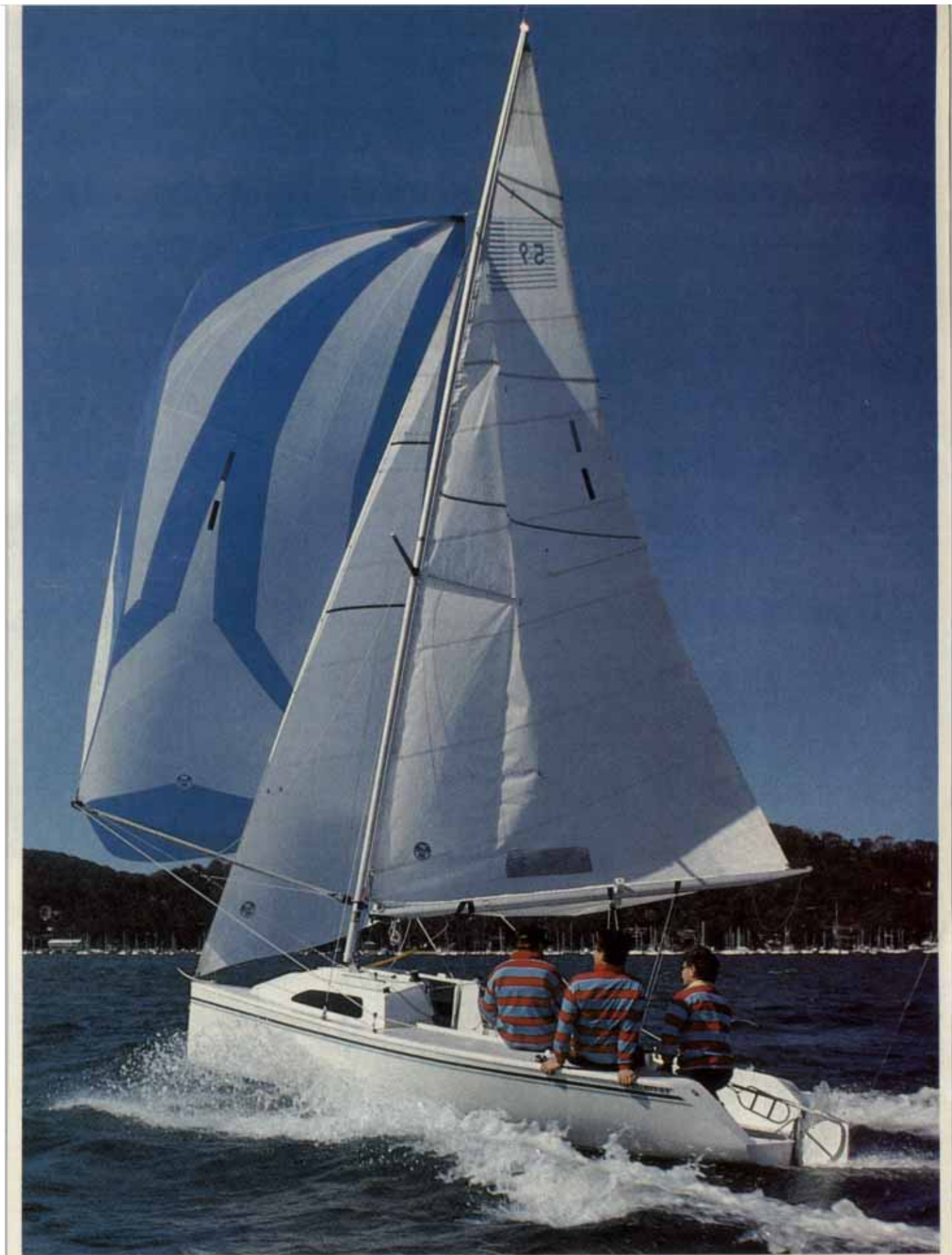
One-man mast raising.



Protruding bulb.



Bare essentials.





spinnaker. The crewman ventured forward to thread the brace, the boat showing no nosediving tendencies as it sliced through the chop, and it took a few minutes to sort out the clews, halyard and barber haulers. Stored on boom hangers, the pole was set in seconds, then the kite crackled up to its fractional posting without drama. All was going smoothly as the skipper cleated the brace home . . .

"Let out the main," Kerly cried. "I HAVE!" I responded, gesturing to the figure-eight knot butting against the Harken ratchet. The spinnaker sheet had also been thrown, but in an instant, whammo, we were laid down.

It occurred to me later that this had been the ultimate test for the pocket trailer sailer and its equipment, and it had come through unscathed but for the gooseneck, a credit

to the Sydney-based builder, Pacesetter Yachts. Ditto for sailmakers North and mast manufacturer Baverstock Spars, from South Australia. The knock-down may have been hair-raising but the conditions were extreme; such an occurrence would be rare, so fear not.

The boat is available in various stages of construction, with kits for home handymen to complete. The mast brand, sail dimensions and hull shape are predetermined by an owners' association, but some flexibility is allowed for choice of sailmaker, fittings and the like. You'd be hard pressed bettering the test boat.

In a nutshell, if a gin palace is what you seek the 5.9 is not your boat. But if speed and responsiveness is your bent, along with affordability and ease of handling, then it's eminently appropriate. ☺

## ELLIOTT 5.9

LOR.....	5.90m
LWL.....	5.60m
Beam.....	2.45m
Draft.....	1.30m
Displacement.....	600kg
Ballast.....	250kg
Sail area.....	24.6sq m
Prices (as tested).....	\$24,000
Stage One.....	\$13,331
Rigging.....	\$3295
Fittings.....	\$2636
Sails.....	\$2950
Trailer.....	\$1850
Designer.....	Greg Elliott
Builder.....	Pacesetter Yachts, "Itchenstoke", Mount Tootie, Bilpin, NSW 2758
Test boat by Sailing Scene, (02) 979 6546.	