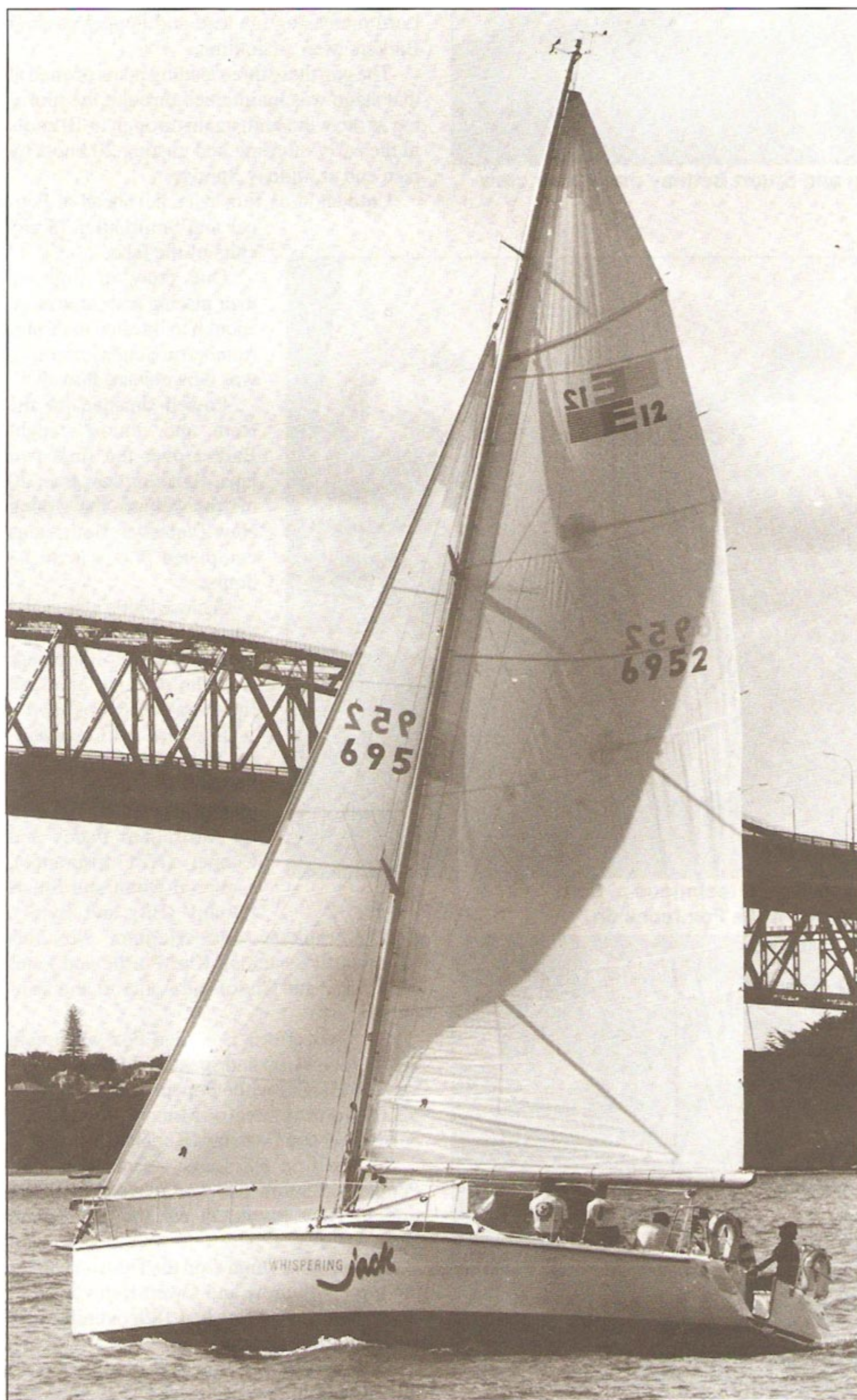


# Whispering Jack



**E**lliott boats seem to have an extra something that sets them apart.

Their stark functionality has often had them being labelled as ugly, but they have the chutzpah — and the speed — to carry that “ugliness.”

And you can't argue with the racing scoreboard.

Greg Elliott-designed yachts are experiencing a surge of interest almost at odds with the prevailing mood of the boat market. And — shock, horror — some of the interest is coming from committed cruising types, people who would normally be expected to be more comfortable with a more conventional, if not traditional, yacht.

Whispering Jack, the first of four Elliott 12s to be launched this summer, will go a long way to dispelling the popular (mis)perception of Elliott boats as fast but tender, or eccentrically radical.

Form should succeed function and mainstream yachties might soon be following this new vision of what makes for a fine, fast cruising yacht.

Owned by Ross and Jill Blair, Whispering Jack is possibly the first Elliott yacht of this size conceived primarily for cruising. The Blairs intend an 80-20 mix of family cruising (with some extended ocean passages) and short-handed racing. So the yacht's character

Hard on the wind, Whispering Jack displays her (his?) distinctive Elliott lines. Note the full-length top and extra-long battens. The spinnaker pole is stowed along the guardrails as a temporary measure.

By ALEX STONE



**This stern view shows Whispering Jack's substantial overall beam and stern boarding platform. The low-level dodger has room for winch handles underneath, yet barely disturbs the lines of the topsides. The helmsman has ample visibility above and to the sides of it.**



is decidedly un-Elliott — though not in sailing ability.

It is an interesting mix, but it all comes together in a way that makes Whispering Jack a memorable vessel from many points of view.

A sampling of the blend: Whispering Jack is certainly the first Elliott boat with a teak deck; but halfway through the recent Coastal Classic (before the night-time lottery set in), she was alongside the likes of Longfellow and Peacemaker, giving another dimension to the notion of sailing speed combined with cruising comfort.

Whispering Jack opens up a whole new avenue for Elliott's design talents and one which Elliott Yachts' managing director Garry Banks is characteristically excited about.

With names like Pighunter, Pork Chop, E Type and The Butcher, Elliott racing yachts have created an aura of aggression for themselves. They've been the avant garde of yacht design in New Zealand recently — perhaps the most appropriately named is Future Shock.

But Whispering Jack adds a touch of gentility to the grunt, in the same way luxury carmakers build on the racing success of their prototypes.

The analogy remains apt when you get to steer the boat. Her surge of acceleration, her controlled sense of power, and the positive yet light feel to the helm left me casting about for the right phrases.

But, of course! The rare occasions I've driven a Jaguar or a Mercedes sports — it's exactly that feeling. It's as if all of Elliott's hotrods have come of age at once.

Then there's something else about the boat, something that says here is a concept that's strong, manifest in a project that has "clicked." It's the rapport and mutual respect evident between Blair and boatbuilder Terry Bailey.

During our sail, they each chose a private

moment to say to me "I don't want him to hear this, but really he's been bloody good to work with" — almost the exact words from both of them.

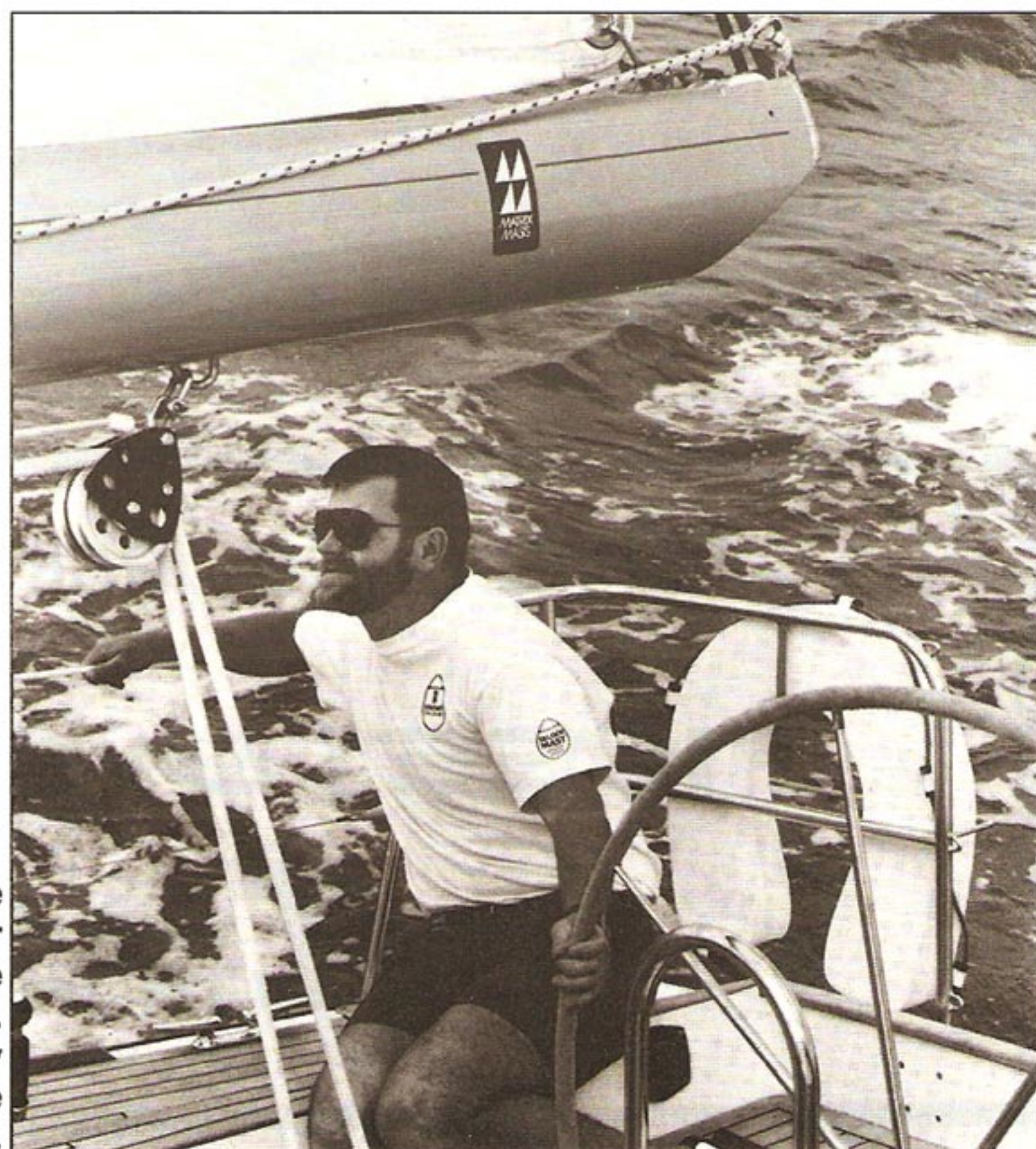
They're perfectionists: Blair kept stalling me on this review for two months while he sorted out the boat. But it was worth the wait. Whispering Jack is immaculately presented.

Bailey's perfectionism is evident everywhere, from the engineered rudder bearings to the clever stowage ideas in the galley. Bailey managed the construction project from the deck hardware down, while Blair

arranged the contracts for rigging, spars and sails.

Blair has been sailing since he was seven, starting on an old heavy clinker dinghy. He's owned a Townson 32 ("fabulous little boat") and for the past four years successfully campaigned the Davidson 37 High Society. When he's not sailing, he manages an Auckland paving company.

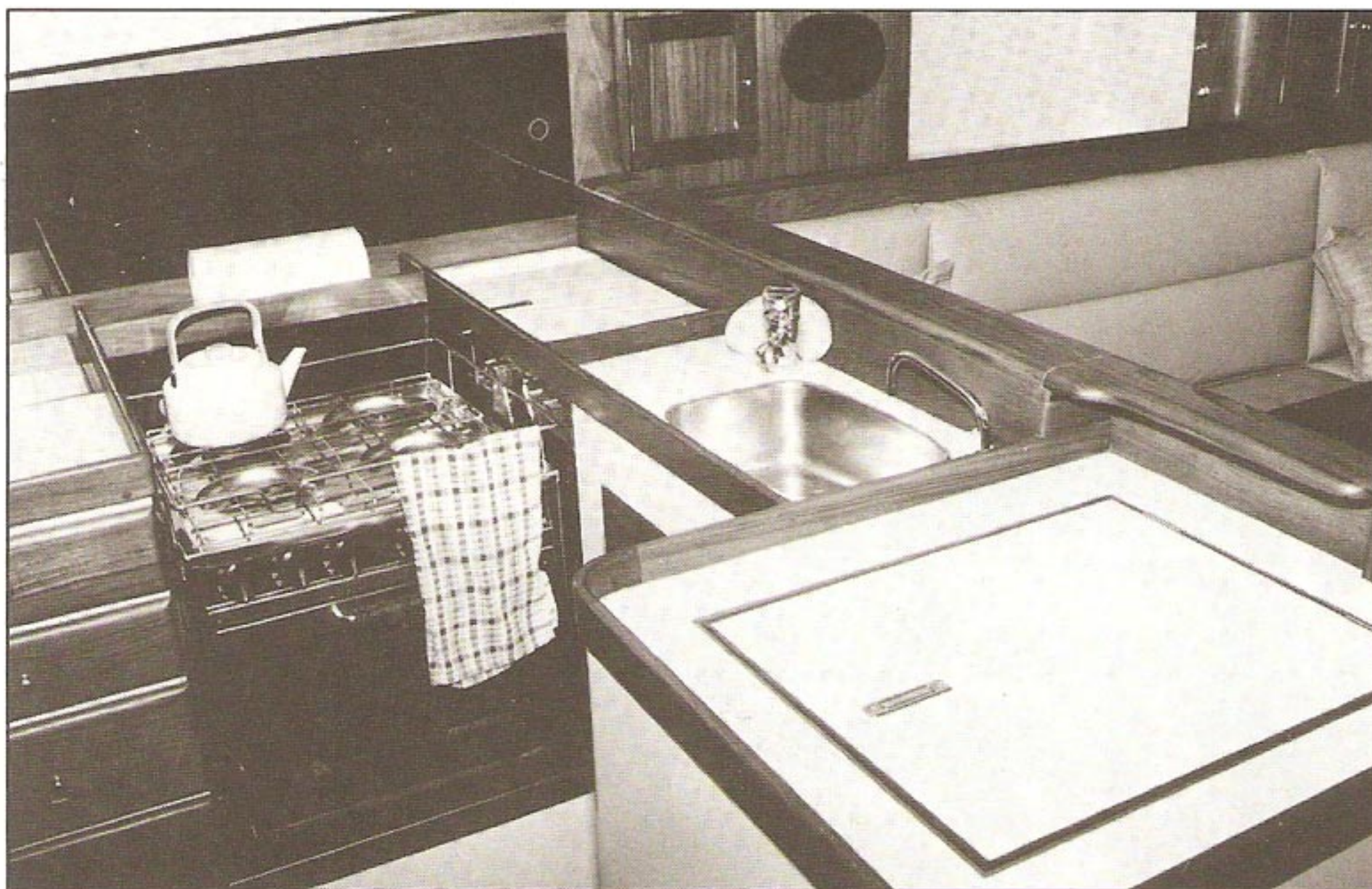
Jill is equally enthusiastic about sailing, having discovered it some four years ago. They met when Blair was short of crew for a Wednesday night race and now they are the



**During our sail, the boat proved easier to steer from the leeward seat. Boatbuilder Terry Bailey enjoys the feel of the helm.**

*January '91*





**Whispering Jack's galley ... clean and plenty of wood. Plates are neatly stowed vertically in the coaming between basin and settee berths.**

**The boat has a surfeit of cool storage, with fridge tucked under the chart table and freezer in the galley.**



crew for Whispering Jack's double-handed races.

Whispering Jack is a big powerful boat for two people to handle, but neither seems daunted by the task. The boat is well set up for short-handed sailing with a Profurl system for the genoa, a comprehensive control line keyboard above the companionway and the mainsheet winch positioned right next to the helmsman. An Autohelm system has also been installed.

But they also kept reminding me to see Whispering Jack as a cruising yacht. The racing, they insist, will be lower on their list of priorities. It takes a significant change of mindset to perceive any Elliott yacht as a cruiser, especially when it has the performance of this one.

The cruising bias is evident in the selection of much of the hardware. Everything looks sturdy and Blair confirmed that almost every item, from basics to frills, is somewhat over-spec.

The hull is built up to ABS standards and is "bulletproof" in Bailey's view. The Autohelm 7000 is top of the range, probably too strong for the boat, but that's how it's meant to be.

Whispering Jack's hull is built from 18mm strip-planked cedar, with triaxial glass both sides. Exotics are kept to a minimum, with some kevlar reinforcing in the frames. This is reflected in the final price of the boat — around \$270,000 — which compares favourably with some recently launched smaller boats from custom builders or the imports.

Without a backstay, the mast needs to be especially strong. It is sleeved up to the first spreaders and has had jumper struts added above the hounds as an extra. During our sail, the runners remained tied forward to the shroud bases. Blair reckons they'll only be needed in a real blow. As added security, there's always the option of securing the boom topping lift to the transom in hard running conditions.

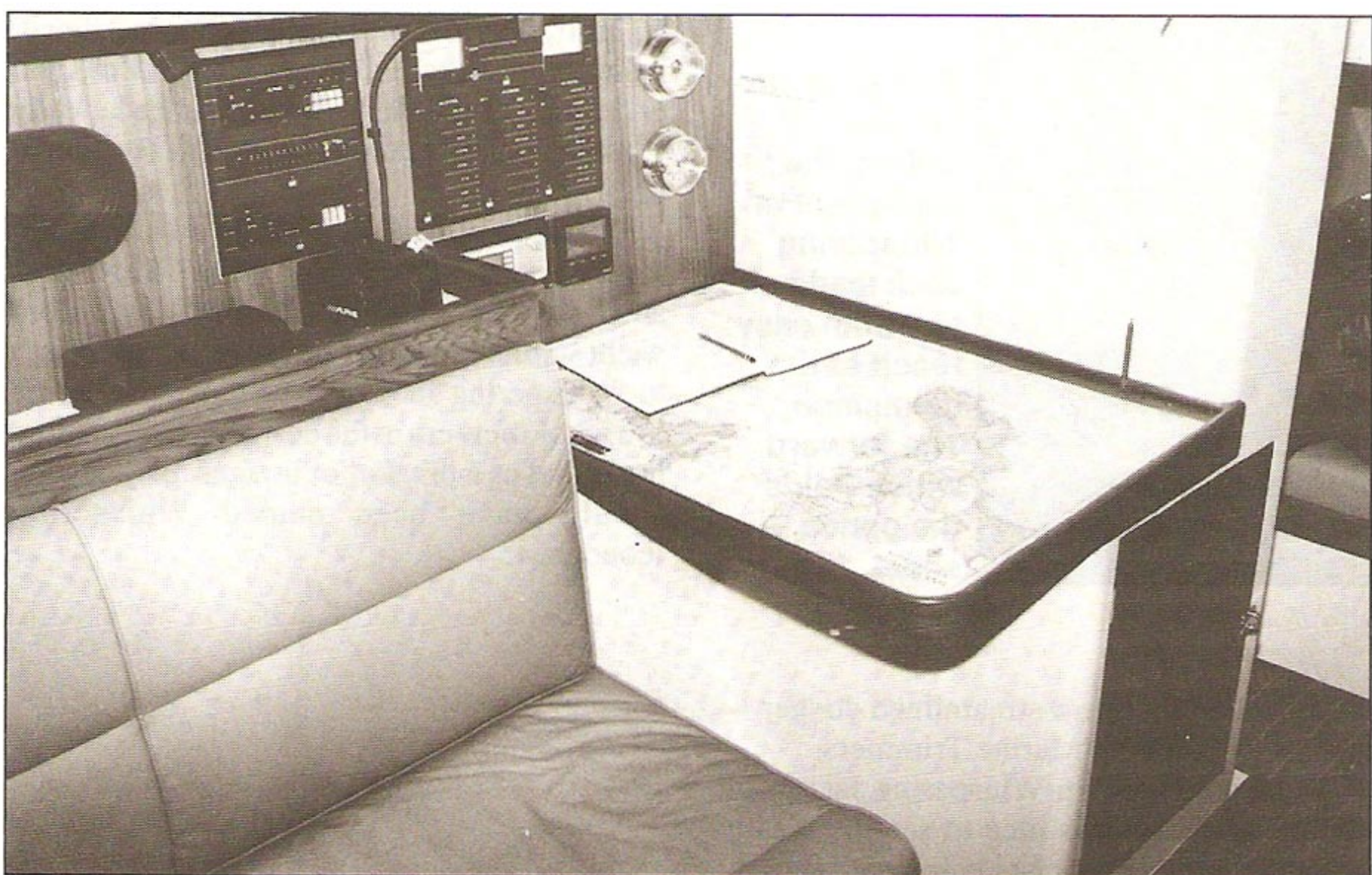
Closehauled in nearly 20 knots of apparent wind, the mast (by Matrix Masts to their usual high standard) had an even curve of about 25cm throughout its length, but showed no signs of movement or whipping.

The same feel for quality extends to the sails from Rick Royden's loft. Though they're





**Looking aft in the saloon through to the aft cabin.**



**The equipment is all quality but may be awkward to get at in the navigation area.**

generally not made from the latest shimmering exotic laminates, they look good and durable.

The mainsail employs a full-length top batten and looks like a hotbed of horsepower. Blair has opted to avoid a masthead spinnaker, reminding me again that this boat is not going to be a gung-ho racer. The No.1 genoa is of a mylar/dacron laminate, with the mylar protected by being on the inside.

Ever since her lines were released, Blair had been interested in the E12. With a former crew member of High Society wanting to buy that boat, it seemed a perfect time for a move.

Whispering Jack was commissioned in November 1989 and launched on August 8, 1990, the day before the Imtec boat show. From her showing there, Bailey has secured two more jobs: He'll be finishing off the interiors of another Elliott 12 and an Elliott 10-50 destined for Japan.

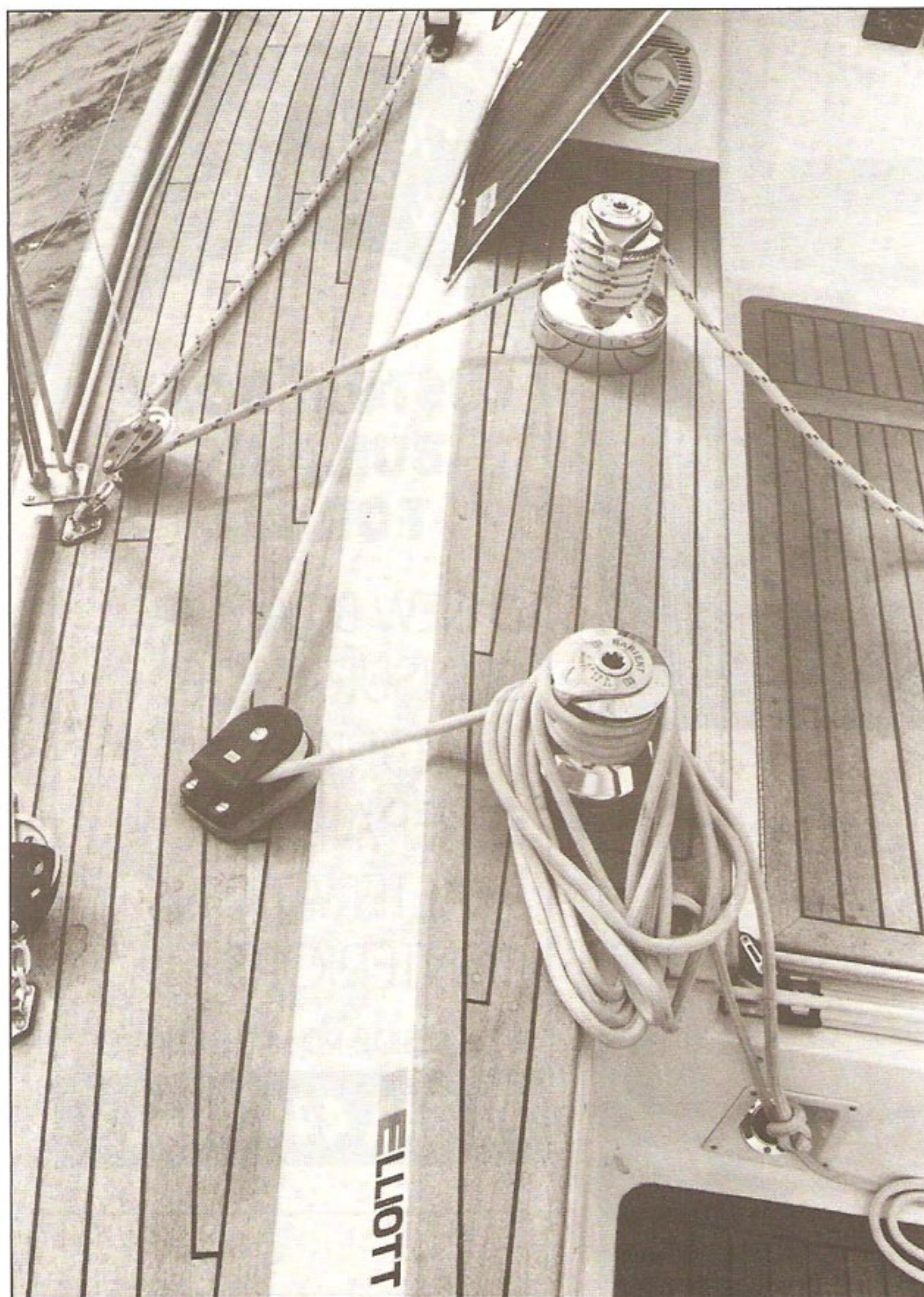
We took Whispering Jack out on the Waitemata on a perfect Saturday afternoon.

The breeze was light for starters and built nicely for the beat home. Running, we lost most of our apparent wind — at one stage we were doing five knots, with only four across the deck.

Dropping the kite and heading off on a fetch was when my amazement set in. The boat's surge of speed once again made it hard to believe the cruising yacht story. Upwind, under full main and No.1 genoa, she settled in at 7.4 knots and displayed impressive stiffness after a certain angle of heel. I'm sure a good helmsman more familiar with the boat could get that upwind speed up a notch, to 7.7 knots, as we did on occasions.

The feel of the helm was a pleasure. Direct and positive — a centimetre or two on the wheel — and the bow would immediately waggle. In the construction, Bailey was well aware of the potential problems created by the trend toward deeper, bigger rudders being hung from an ever-narrower bearing spread





**Set up for two-handed sailing, the mainsheet on Whispering Jack leads aft to within easy reach of the helmsman. The forward winch holds the genoa sheet.**

between cockpit floor and the bottom of the hull.

The smallest amount of twist in the hull can effectively lock up the rudder and this has been experienced on some yachts. Even when hard pressed, Whispering Jack helmed light and true.

The wheel is large, but not quite wide enough for the helmsman to have a good view from the windward deck. With the touch on the helm being so sure, I reckon a tiller extension clipped to one of the wheel spokes would be a viable idea for upwind steering. Still, the leeward helming seat was a fine spot from which to steer.

Standing at the wheel, visibility forward is

unimpaired by the low streamlined dodger — another neat job by Marine Trimmers.

Deck hardware on Whispering Jack is all quality stuff and it is nice to see the locally produced Weaver hatches being chosen.

A 44hp Yanmar diesel with conventional shaft drive provides the auxiliary power. There's enough push there, with a large safety factor built in.

Down below, Whispering Jack's interior reflects the positive co-operation between owner and builder. She's a wide boat to start with and Blair has emphasised this by taking the interior volume right out to the hull sides in some places, thereby creating an expansive horizontal volume, rather than a narrow tunnel.

The illusion is such that you feel there's not going to be enough headroom. But there's plenty, even for this giraffe.

The colour scheme of cream paintwork, saffron leather upholstery with much varnished timber, keeps the feeling of warmth without it being claustrophobic.

A neat idea is the "wet seat" immediately to port of the companionway steps, where one can shrug off foul weather gear and throw it in the stowage area behind.

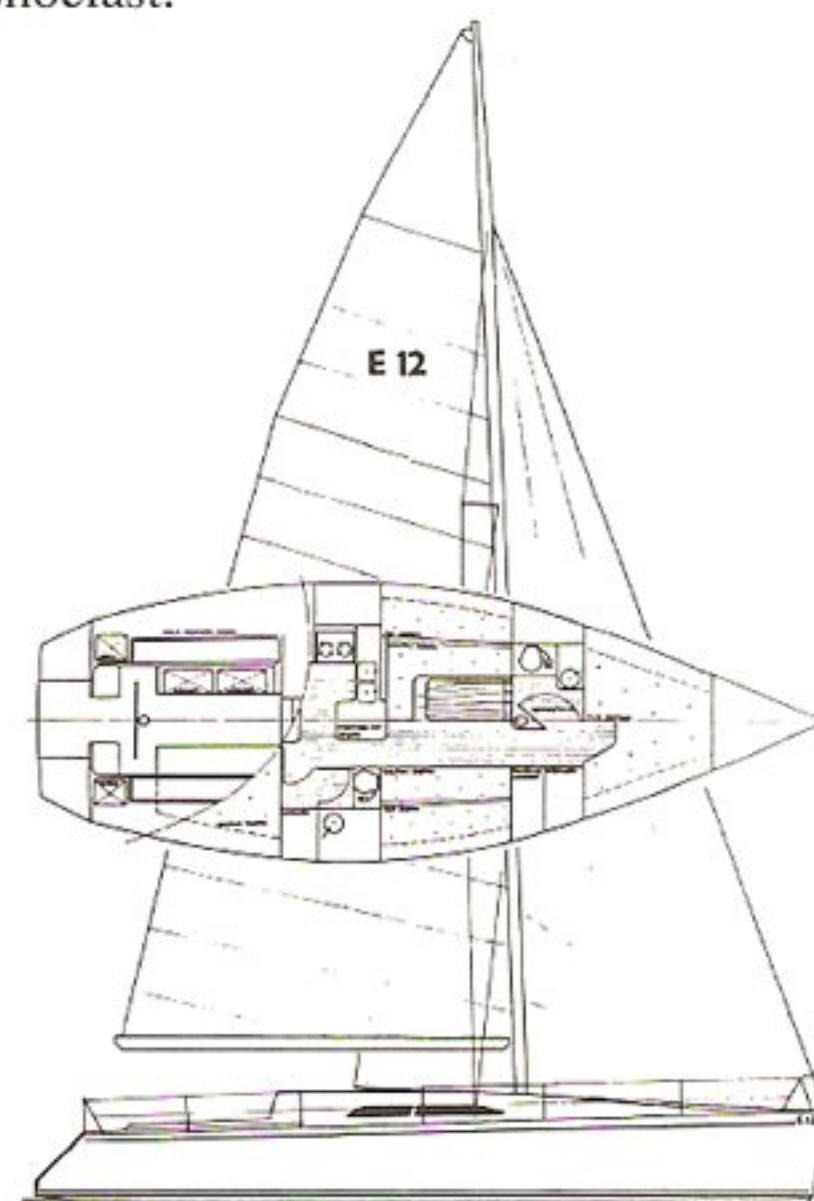
I especially liked the paucity of doors in the interior — in my view, too many boats have too many dinky little doors which turn the floor space into a maze. In deference to the masses and with a view to possible resale, provision is made for extra doors to the front and aft double cabins.

Elliott's interior plan allows for two heads, one adjoining each double cabin. The Blairs have opted for only the front one and have turned the little room into one of astounding size. There would be space for a shower party in there.

Hull sides in the forecabin are carpet-lined, which methinks is a pity. In places, the underside of the deck reveals the cedar strip construction and I contend it needn't be covered up.

Whispering Jack is a lovely boat to sail, a lovely boat to simply be on board. The Blairs and Bailey have combined to create an Elliott yacht with a new kind of "special" about it.

Whispering Jack may be quietly ushering in a whole new era in the design of fast cruising boats and as a breaker of images, perhaps she should have been named Whispering Iconoclast.



## WHISPERING JACK

LOA	12.15m
LWL	10.90m
Beam	4.30m
Draft	2.13m
Displacement	5500kg
Designer	Greg Elliott
Builder	Terry Bailey
Owners	Ross and Jill Blair