

# Small Boat Big Plans

Recent visitors to Auckland's Viaduct Basin might have been intrigued by the sight of an Elliott 12.5m yacht clearly set up for adventure with its watertight companionway door, heavy duty equipment, extensive array of solar panels and RNZYS insignia on the transom.

This is the *Astral Express*, which Christchurch sailor Graeme Kendall intends sailing non-stop around the world via the Arctic North-West Passage. The great Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen completed the first successful transit of the passage in 1905 with the ship *Gjøa*. Since then only

about 60 transits have been completed, although rising temperatures and new satellite technology for revealing openings through the ice have increased the chances of success.

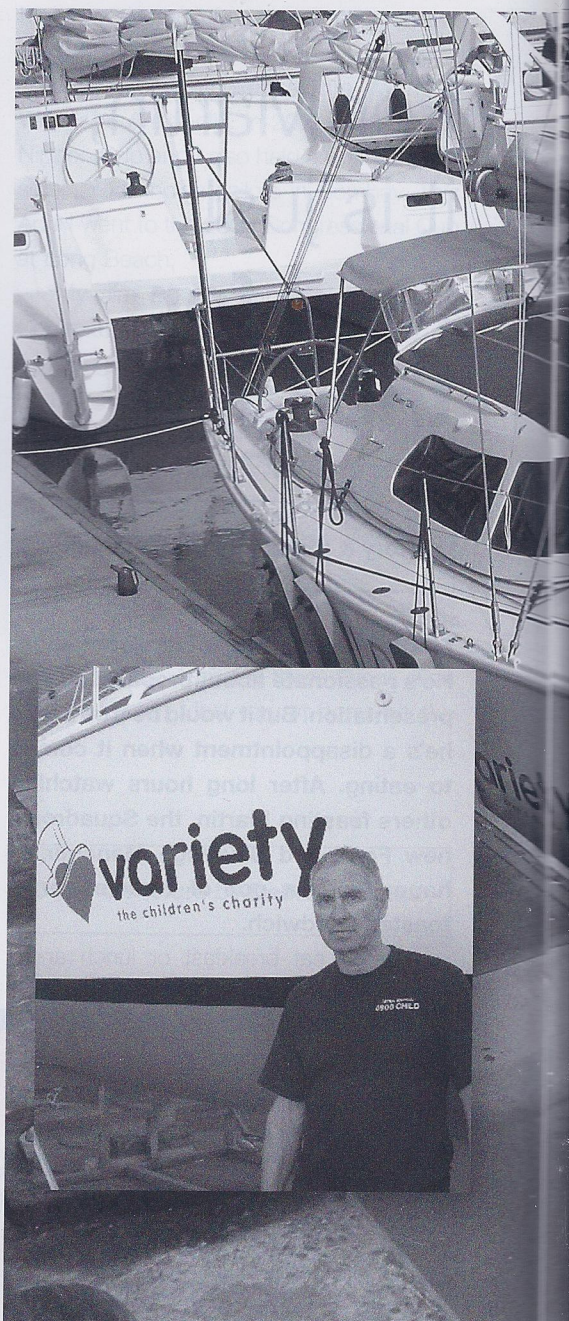
Nevertheless, it is an extremely challenging passage in a brutal environment that has thwarted many well-found expeditions over the years.

The planned voyage was to clear North Cape, head westward pass the north of Australia, round the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, north across the Atlantic to the Alaskan coast and then into the Northwest Passage. Having made the transit, the

plans are for the yacht to head south back across the Pacific Ocean to Auckland.

According to a media release, "It is estimated the trip will take 150 to 180 days and cover 28,000 nautical miles, unaided with no stopovers, but relying on the latest technology available."

Designed by Greg Elliott, the *Astral Express* was built in Melbourne. Again relying on the media release: "Built of kevlar to a specification stronger than alloy, with a reinforced bow and steel retractable keel ... this is a high performance yacht developed for long-distance passage-making with a small easily managed sail plan." It also has built-





in buoyancy to render it unsinkable and inside steering position.

Kendall is an experienced yachtsman who has sailed more than 100,000 miles, including the Melbourne-Osaka Race, the Whitbread Race and numerous passages around New Zealand and the Pacific.

He is funding the trip himself and intends to raise \$25 per kilometer for charity, primarily for Variety – the Children's Charity, but also for Cholmondeley Home in Christchurch and the Christchurch Bone Marrow Cancer Trust.

*by Ivor Wilkins*

