BOATING Test

Huszar II — Elliott's right royal steed

ABOVE: Huszar II — a beautifully traditional displacement launch.

RIGHT: Sheer efficiency makes the launch semi-displacement in nature.

BELOW: Tasteful upholstery and conventional woodwork — a most attractive blend.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The table has a gentle fiddle to satisfy the card sharps.

Designer Greg Elliott is well known for his modern, sometimes radical, always fast, small to mid-sized yachts. We were somewhat surprised, then, to discover that he had designed and built a launch, and, even more astounding, a displacement launch.

This displacement launch — 12 metres in length and named Huszar II — has been an opportunity for Elliott to experiment in ways not possible on a performance yacht.

Weight is perhaps the most obvious of these. Performance yachting calls for minimum baggage, whether it be in the choice of construction materials, the amount of tankage allowable or whatever. On a displacement vessel, however, weight is friend and Elliott says he found the mental change required "interesting".

Our first glimpse of the Elliott 12m is at its berth in Auckland's Westhaven Marina. There, in perfect contrast, it rests alongside Elliott's radical Gorilla Biscuits — a yacht which has attracted more than its fair share of controversy in its short life.

The irony of the boats lying next to each other is not lost on Elliott. The yacht many consider to be the fastest of its kind, an outrage that should be banned, an ugly duckling, a marvel of modern thinking or any one of hundred other strongly held opinions (emphasis here is on strongly) provides an apt counterpoint to that most staid of vessels — the displacement launch.

Elliott is aware of the diverse views that surround Gorilla Biscuits (and some of his other designs) and the "ugly" label is one in particular that he would like to shake off. Beneath the designer's usual bluff good humour is the suggestion that these gibes do not pass unnoticed, that the hurt is felt. Huszar II is in some ways a chance for him to design a pretty boat — one that attracts attention for its looks.

Huszar II's full for'ard section keeps the bow riding high and tracking well down hill.

In that Elliott has no doubt succeeded. Those that know his yachts might expect that a displacement launch from his pen would look like something out of Star Wars (at the very least). This is definitely not the case. Huszar II is (at first glance at least) an incredibly traditional-looking displacement launch although not even the most avid speed fan would take a quick glance and suggest something canine or porcine.

Like many owners of displacement vessels Huszar II's skipper is a retired yachtie. Age and (to a greater extent) a hip injury have forced Jack Banks to give up a life under sail although there was no suggestion of giving up the sea. Originally he had requested that Elliott (his nephew) draw up an 11m launch but the designer soon convinced him to move up to 12m. Strip planked kauri with a diagonal skin, glassed over, has been used for the hull with huge hardwood engine bearers running the length of the boat adding (among other attributes) more weight low down. With the lowest part of the boat well for'ard it is here that the bilge pumps have been placed.

Tankage is fairly well aft (just for'ard of the engine). Fuel capacity is 900 litres (200 gallons) of [illegible]

into the cockpit floor and is relatively easy to open should the need arise. Seating is by way of a couple of curved seats aft that house such useful stuff as fenders, mooring lines and hoses. To port a self-draining gas locker also doubles as a seat while to starboard there lives a small sink complete with telephonic shower and hot and cold water. Under this is a two-shelf locker with a hose outlet — handily placed for rinsing out the cockpit after a successful day's fishing.

The saloon is a vast comfortable area with the unsupported, curved topside adding to the spacious feeling. Obviously the superstructure is supported but there are no beams running across, just a knee or two, with the curved shape doing the rest.

The galley is to port with cooking duties handled by a Mariner Princess two burner stove and oven. There is working space and stowage galore as a large bench separates the galley from the dinette for'ard. There is a huge freezer set into this bench and a fairly large fridge below. The two sinks are served by a Challenge Yachts Aquatouch faucet and a vege wash on a telephone shower. Ventilation is provided by the aft port window and one out into the cockpit, both of which open.

Above the sink is a suppressed fluorescent that has a versatile shielding system that allows strong lighting for working or a softer, more mellow glow for romantic occasions.

The entire saloon has great expanses of kauri everywhere and these are beautifully offset by the superb upholstery in the dinette, on the settee and in the accommodation up for'ard. Jack Carter of Carter Upholstery is responsible for the coverings which are

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Tankage is fairly well aft (just for'ard of the engine). Fuel capacity is 900 litres (200 gallon) of both diesel and water. Hot fresh water comes from a 67.5 litre (15 gallon) hot water cylinder working off the motor. The "donkey" on Huszar II is a Hino 165hp marinised truck engine.

Banks chose this as a result of his experience in running a fleet of trucks when the Hino really impressed. The marinisation was carried out by McMillan Ford and Banks says fuel consumption (at nine knots) is 9 litres (2 gallons) per hour.

Commencing our inspection in the cockpit (or rather below it) we find a large locker where the huge hardwood engine bearers are clearly visible. The transom door is of the lift-out-and-slot-into-the-transom variety and there is a bait tank in the middle of the boarding platform.

Access to the steering stock is set

beautifully offset by the superb upholstery in the dinette, on the settee and in the accommodation up for'ard. Jack Carter of Carter Upholstery is responsible for the coverings which are mauve with purple and pink streaks. If that all sounds horribly garish it isn't. It is very attractive and if anything understated rather than "over the top" but it is somewhat difficult to accurately describe.

The large kauri table has soft fiddles — a must apparently for serious card players — and this drops down to create a quite large double berth.

To starboard is a long settee which could be used as a berth should the need arise, with a ton of stowage under.

Further aft is the bar with grog and glass lockers. Above the bar on the aft bulkhead hangs a picture of a huszar with the information that: "A Huszar is a crack cavalry officer famous for his bravery, chivalry, swordsmanship, drinking and love of women." The picture shows a Huszar on his way to

Elliott need have no fears about this one — Huszar II is definitely a "pretty" boat.

rejoin his unit after a night with a local maiden and while we are reading the legend Banks explains why his boats (he previously owned an extremely competitive Stewart 32) are named after this royal Hungarian horseman.

While he was building the Stewart 32 an Englishman cruising here with his Hungarian wife fell victim to yellow jaundice. Banks allowed them the use of his mooring and helped them in other ways. When the lady's father was out here (he was a journalist doing a story on Arthur Lydiard) he visited Banks to say thank you. After clicking his heels and bowing to Mrs Banks he presented the couple with the photo and a red, green and white spinnaker — the Huszar's traditional colours.

One of the Banks' original requirements when the design was discussed was the ability to sleep six up for'ard. Elliott has achieved this with a four-berth focsle and a main cabin to port. There is of course stowage under the bunks but in the main cabin Elliott has forsaken the more common positioning of access bins under the squabs for a shoreside system of pull out drawers under the bunk. This he contends, has more practical and avoids having to remake the bed every time something is required from the locker.

To starboard is the head with an electric flush RM toilet and a Dorf hot and cold shower. The hull has been painted (except in the cabinets where the wood has been left bare) and this looks attractive as well as being easy to clean — just a wipe down doing the trick. Water from the shower and basin drains into the sump and is then pumped out.

The lower steering station is a gorgeous piece of nostalgia, although by no means out of date.

Sited to starboard with a sliding door allowing quick access onto the side decks the station boasts a brass and kauri steering wheel and an old Sestral heavy duty swing compass.

A simple VDO panel has all the necessary info clearly displayed (revs, hours, volts, oil, water) and there is a switch panel for the nav and anchor lights, the fridge, the freezer).

A Sumlog SL log and speedo and a Navico ES120 depth sounder complete the simple picture. A foot rest complements the leather-squabed skipper's chair that hinges down to allow more room for those who prefer to stand. An AWA Pilotphone XI VHF radio is housed above the station and also up above is a hatch that allows for communication between this station and the one up on the flybridge. This was originally installed so that Banks could keep an eye on children playing with the lower station while he was on top. It also has the advantages of allowing a flybridge-based skipper to see the instruments and gauges on the lower station. And of allowing cool refreshments to be passed up to a thirsty driver.

All cables and wires run up a post immediately aft of the lower station and there is a locker handy in the companionway for the rest of the DC circuits. Morse MT2 throttle and gear levers have been used and there is a change over switch to ensure that only one station at a time is in operation. The station affords excellent visibility but it is the sliding door to the side decks that really steals the show.

A spacious interior with splendid upholstery and great expanses of kauri ply.

The idea of the door is to allow the boat (with only one person on board) to safely come into a marina or mooring. Ease of access is especially important to Banks because of his bad hip and Elliott has also designed the launch with wide decks and sloping coamings to give extra shoulder width and carrying ability when moving outside. To stop these wide decks acting as miniature rivers there are scuppers midway and also spring cleats on the bulwarks. The bulwarks are 600mm (2ft) high and these too slope gently outward to give even more room for those using the side decks. The foredeck is reached by way of two small steps just for'ard of the lower station. The lower of these is a small locker housing mooring lines and short ropes — again meaning a single person can very effectively and quickly operate when docking.

The foredeck has a windlass served by two lockers both set as low as possible to keep the weight down. There is an anchor wash in the starboard locker and the spare man folds aft to ensure the launch is exactly the right length for marina berths.

As we move aft Elliott says that because of the height of the factory door where Huszar was built the whole flybridge is detachable. Off hand we can't think of any great advantage of this except perhaps allowing the boat to "air" during a particularly thorough spring cleaning.

All the glass is armour plate and there are domes around the outside of the windows for covers to protect the varnish work inside. An Epithane gloss paint has been used on the exterior and Elliott says that this should have a life of around seven years.

Curved flybridge

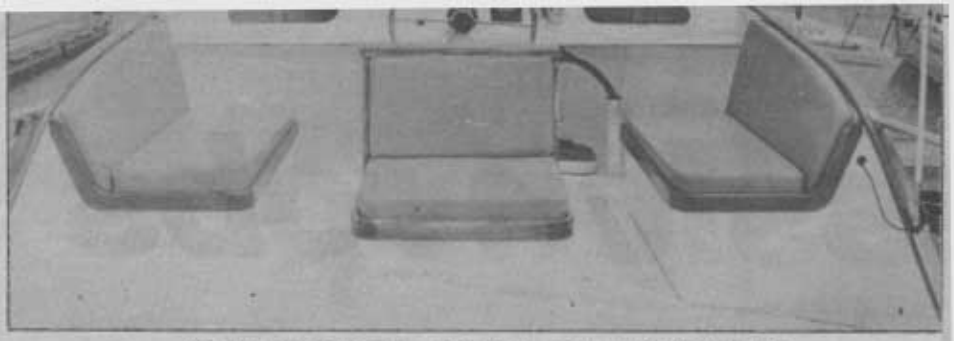
The first thing one notices about the flybridge is that it is not flat. The second thing that strikes one is the simplicity. In these days of "put everything up top" Huszar II's flybridge is a stark, spartan affair. Aft there is a chock for the access hatch to rest on and some guard rails and that's the lot.

For'ard is a fore and aft seat (the for'ard part being the skipper's seat) and two side seats. There is some stowage under the seats and there are two open lockers in the dash. The dash itself carries only a Manta steering wheel, a Morse throttle and a repeater for the Navico depth sounder although it is easy to see the instruments down below through the hatch.

The sloping deck has what Elliott describes as a "reasonable amount of camber". This he says has removed the need for supports down below, provided plenty of headroom in the saloon and eliminated unsightly posts and the like. The deck's camber appears greater than it actually is because the anti-skid has been laid in patches rather than solidly over the whole surface. The bare strip down the middle considerably accentuates the effect of the camber according to Elliott.

Although he says that "not a lot of thought has gone into this area" he then belies that by describing how he has ensured that all water from this area is channelled harmlessly onto the side decks rather than dripping into the cockpit. The spartan nature of the flybridge is understandable when one considers that Huszar II's owner has a sore hip and is unlikely to be leaping up and down ladders.

The galley, compact and spacious at the same time with two sinks, loads of working space and a large freezer.



The spartan flybridge — simple, practical and probably not often used.

Although impressed by the interior and the thought that has gone into the interior and design of the launch we are aware that the proof is definitely in the eating and we are impatient to get underway.

The Hino fires comfortably into life and we depart on our camera boat to look at the launch's performance from the water.

Once clear of the marina, Huszar II comes up to hull speed and moves down harbour — throwing up an impressive wake. Moving at what looks like about nine knots the boat appears very stable and not at all shaken by some of the large inner-harbour wakes.

At the measured mile we are surprised to find that Huszar II is faster upwind than down — a result Elliott attributes to straighter path able to be followed into the seas.

For our runs the Hino was running at 2900 revs and downwind we pulled 11.5 knots averaged over the two trips while into the wind we averaged a shade over 12.5 knots.

After running the mile we tried the Elliott 12m in a variety of different sea conditions and it proved impossible to upset. Even just in gear and lying beam on to the sea it answered the helm immediately and came around into the wind as requested. Downwind the full for'ard section had the launch riding high and it did not track off course down the face of the waves. Upwind the ride was soft.

The boat, in general, proved relatively dry the only exception being when he headed across the seas at about 30 degrees to the wind, when we needed to use the windscreen wipers.

All round, the performance and handling were excellent and exactly what we would expect of a well found displacement launch — with one exception. The boat was originally described as a displacement launch. The speed, handling and wake characteristics appear more like a semi-displacement launch.

Well, yes, Elliott admits that that is the way it appears but says that is due to the hull being so efficient, not because he set out to design a semi-displacement vessel.

There would, we expect, be those that disagree. They will probably say that Greg Elliott just can't design a slow boat. We would probably find it hard to disagree.

The tidy lower steering station. The seats hinges down and a step to the right and one is on the side decks.

The vitals

LOA	*12m (39ft 4in)*
Beam	*4m (13ft)*
Draftr	*1m (3ft 3in)*
Fuel	*900 litres (200 gals)*
Water	*900 litres (200gals)*
Construction	*Kauri, kauri ply*
Engine	*Hino 165hp marinised diesel*
Price as tested	*$290,000*