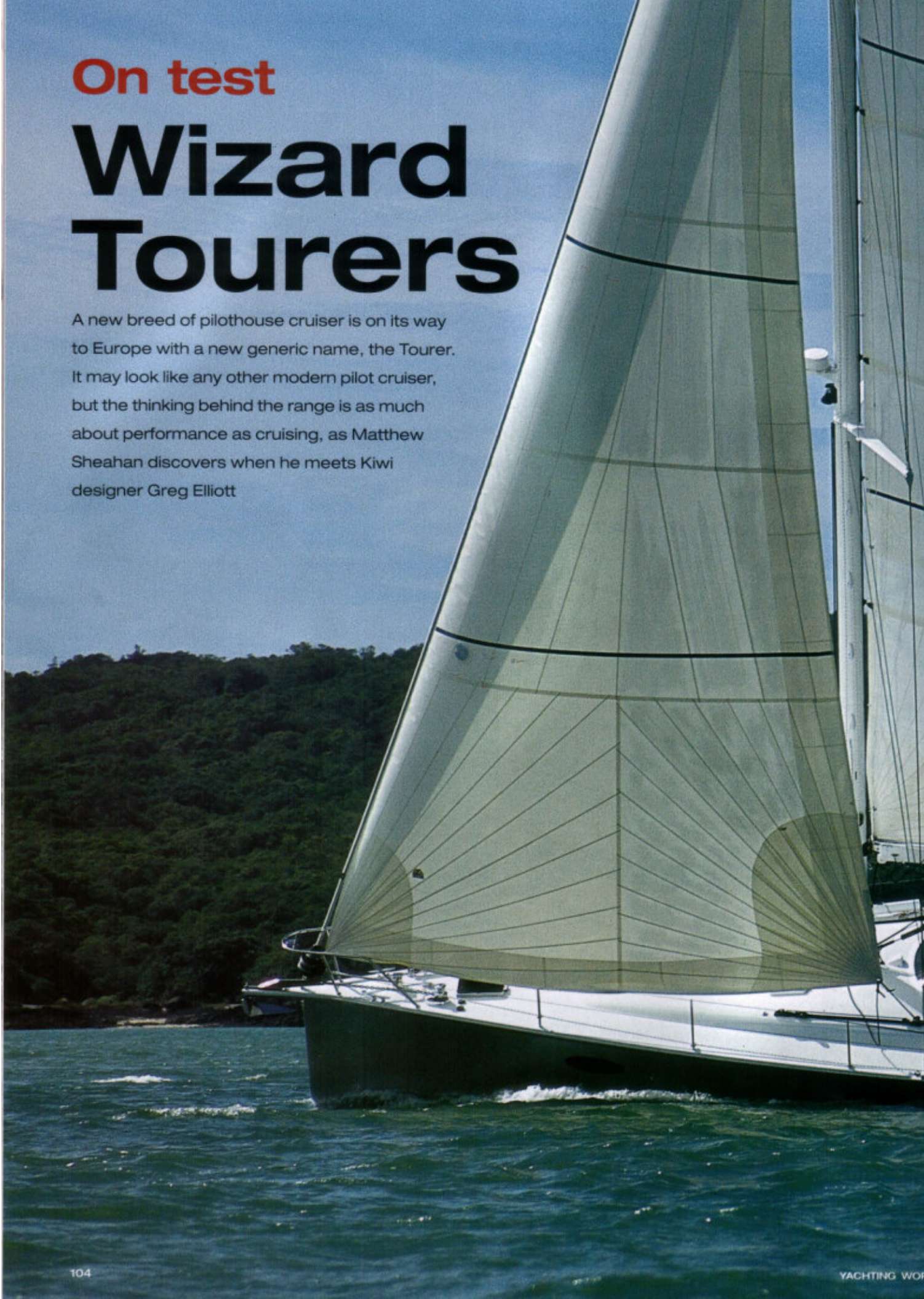


On test

Wizard Tourers

A new breed of pilothouse cruiser is on its way to Europe with a new generic name, the Tourer. It may look like any other modern pilot cruiser, but the thinking behind the range is as much about performance as cruising, as Matthew Sheahan discovers when he meets Kiwi designer Greg Elliott





A hands-on approach, Greg Elliott has used the lessons learnt on the race course to create an impressive range of performance cruisers

Shake his plate-sized, battle-scarred hand and you're left in no doubt that Kiwi designer Greg Elliott has learned by experience. His iron grip, weather-beaten face and salt-stained sailing cap suggest he's been there, won it and worn the T-shirt. Elliott has been one of New Zealand's most prolific and successful cruising yacht designers, but he is a no-nonsense character, for whom mixing hands-on experience with technical theory seems perfectly natural.

At first sight his pilothouse cruisers look like just another range of cruisers riding on the bandwagon, their sleek hulls, high topsides and dark wraparound windows characterising modern style. But far from cashing in, Elliott's Tourers set new standards for future cruisers with designs that have pedigree. One of his first, *Kotick* (*Yachting World* April 1998), quickly became a landmark design and inspired the current range.

But to get to this position has meant tens of thousands of wet, adrenalin-pumping miles. Fortunately, there is little Elliott enjoys more than this kind of research. His website features a long list detailing results in just about every major regatta in the Southern Hemisphere and in which the lowest position on the list is 3rd. Even more impressive is that, as he talks about his racing experiences, it becomes clear that he has featured in many of these regattas and doubtless scored more than the odd result.

But among the list of victories, a few boats stand out as representing defining moments ▷

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in design for Elliott. Launched in 1988, the 55ft and aptly named *Future Shock* proved Elliott's first major success as she ripped into the results and record books. In 2002, 14 years after being launched, she took line honours in the Sydney to Newcastle race, setting a new record in the process. Her record from Auckland to Fiji set in 1998 remains unbeaten.

The 50ft ketch *Elliott Marine* (later called *Primo*) followed in 1994 and left a trail of disillusioned competitors in her wake as she, too, demolished existing offshore records. A year later and a more conventional-looking race yacht, *Hydroflow*, achieved similar distinctions. Elliott's latest master-blaster to bring home the bacon is the wing-masted 45ft monohull *Maverick*, launched in 2000 (previously *Coyote*), which recently won the two-handed 5,000-mile haul from Melbourne to Osaka.

Despite the obvious parallels with motor sport, where developments on the race track have tangible benefits for the masses on the motorways, the yachting industry is wary of bragging about its family cruisers' connections to performance sailing; popular theory has it that

if your perfect cruiser gains a reputation for being a bit of a performer on the water, it's only a short step before she becomes known as a family frightener. Little surprise then that many of today's builders and designers offer qualified comments about their racing successes.

But Elliott comes straight out with it. Performance matters, he believes, whatever type of sailor you are – it means ease of handling and security as much as it does big numbers on the log and long lines between chart plots. So it seems the growing family of Elliott boats have plenty to offer the modern-minded cruising sailor.

Common threads

By the time the first examples of this Antipodean fleet make it to Europe they will have changed their collective title to Wizard Tourers. Everything else will remain the same, more or less. So what makes these boats different?

Interior designs for modern cruisers Down Under have a cleaner, fresher, almost wipe-clean feel than that of most European counterparts. Lavishly fitted-out wood veneer interiors are not common in New Zealand or Australia,

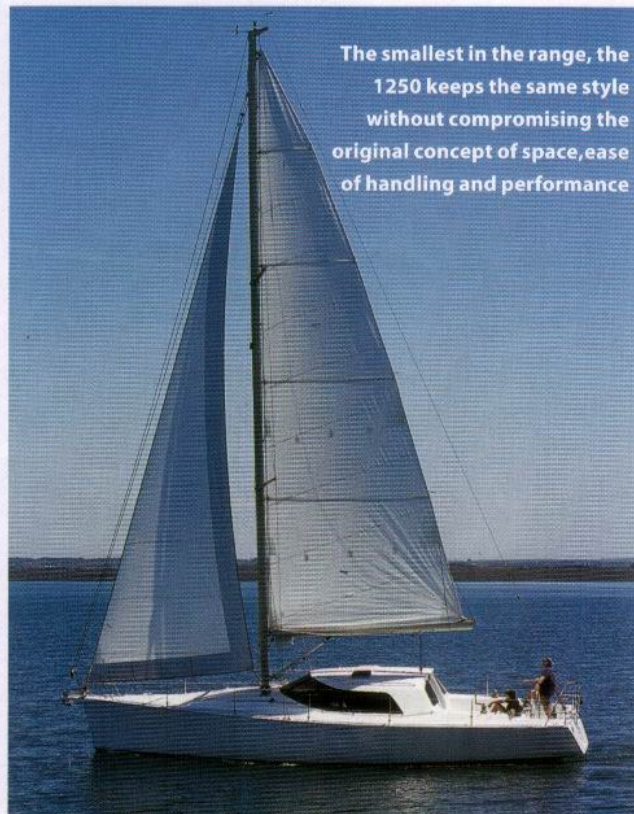
the locals preferring to reserve the use of timber for trims, fiddles and other smaller details. Bulkheads and other large surface areas tend to be left white, yet beautifully faired and finished. Aboard semi-custom boats such as these, you rarely come across headliner mouldings. Instead, the interiors are painstakingly filled, faired and painted. Such simple style grows on you quickly to the point that walking back into a conventional teak interior feels sufficiently gloomy to risk triggering the first symptoms of seasonal affective disorder.

Space and visibility is another feature common to all Elliott's Tourers. From the main saloon you are afforded a panoramic view of almost 360° whether you are sitting at the chart table, standing by the companionway or dining at the saloon table. Elsewhere the interiors are designed around a split-level sole, with the forward and aft cabins sited lower in the boat.

The walk-through from the cockpit to the accommodation is just that, a walk-through. There are no steps or ladders to negotiate. When the boat is under way there is no reason to hang about in the companionway as there are plenty



Since the early days with *Kotick*, Elliott has refined the design but maintained the look and concept



The smallest in the range, the 1250 keeps the same style without compromising the original concept of space, ease of handling and performance

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more comfortable and satisfying areas in which to stay put securely. Indeed, it has always struck me as an indictment of poor design that the companionway is often the most comfortable part of the boat when she's under way. This would be fine were it not that obstructing this arterial passage can have such a disabling effect on handling for the rest of the crew.

All the boats have a cockpit so deep, spacious and clutter-free it feels as if you're standing in the moulding of a garden pond. In fact, at least one of the cockpits was so deep I almost felt claustrophobic – I can't remember ever having come across that before.

All controls are led back to the cockpit to positions where they are a doddle for either helmsman or crew to operate and in most cases crew need not put a foot outside the cockpit to brace themselves. Tidy bins close to the winches make sure rope tails don't form a snake pit – so often the starting point for cumulative crises.

On the three boats I sailed, the fixed end of the mainsheet was never fastened in the cockpit; it was out of harm's way but the sheeting position on the boom was always in a sensible

position towards the outboard end. As such, the mainsheet was always easy to operate and had a good mechanical purchase while leaving the cockpit clear. And to hide the big toys and tackle, there are large lockers in practical locations.

The sail plans all look modest in size, with easy-to-sheet, minimal overlapping headsails flown from a rig supported by full-width, aft-swept spreaders. The small sail plans are a direct result of the boats' light displacements, which in turn have been made possible by the use of sandwich construction hulls and decks; not rocket science perhaps, but significant in the contribution to the overall performance and handling.

Elsewhere on deck the boats are so clean and simple you wonder whether they've actually been finished or are awaiting their final fit-out. Grabrails and tracks for the genoa cars are all that decorate most of the decks.

Of course, there are a few downsides to such simplicity. My pet concern is the tendency to route controls beneath the cabin sole in order to get them back to the cockpit – this may be a popular method in New Zealand, but there will be plenty of eyebrow-raising in Europe as the floor

boards are lifted to reveal the control line trunking. Apart from ease of accessibility (it could be argued that the system is quicker to get at than a conventional under-deck system), the main concern of this is likely to be whether the arrangement causes undue additional friction.

There's also the question of beauty. From some angles these boats are stunners and there are others where it's best to look away now. But that's for you to decide.

Wizard Tourer 1250

The baby of the fleet, the 1250 is currently built in Australia at New Yachts in Melbourne, where the first example was launched in 2002. It may seem incongruous to describe a 40ft boat as a compact cruiser but that's exactly how she feels.

Ideally suited to short-handed, even single-handed sailing, she has all controls close to hand and manageable. At first sight her fractional rig looks as if it could do with a few more metres of sail area, but she slipped along with ease even in light conditions. Indeed, the blend of her light displacement (just 6,500kg) and modest sail plan makes her easy but rewarding to sail. ▷



Left: halyards and other main controls are led from the mast under the cabin sole to emerge in front of each wheel – close to hand for helmsman and crew



Right: sweeping windows in the main saloon provide a panoramic view and are the central feature of the Tourer's style below decks



Left: all the Wizard Tourer layouts have deep secure cockpits that are easy to work in. The latest model, 1550 (pictured) is the best so far



Right: recessing furling gear under the deck gives a clean appearance and maximises headsail area. This boat (1250) could do with some deck protection from the chain

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As with her sisterships, the 1250 has twin-wheel steering and a single rudder but she's light and responsive on the helm. Even in just 6-10 knots of breeze, it's easy to get her into the groove and keep her there. While the instruments were not calibrated and the tide rendered GPS readings meaningless, it was clear she was no slouch. Under power she was quite noisy, but she was light and nimble to handle and had a good turning circle, especially with her keel down.

While a fixed keel is an option, owners of Elliott's boats often go for the lifting keel version, which in this case raises the draught from 2.75m to 1.65m. The system uses a straightforward daggerboard, which is raised and lowered using a hydraulic ram operated by an electric pump, making draught adjustment a push-button affair. While on the subject, it is amazing how unobtrusive the daggerboard case is in the layout below decks.

Moving about either above or below decks on this boat fits in with Elliott's ethos for family-friendly cruisers. From the moment you step on to the stern you can walk straight through to the saloon without encountering any stairs. The

cockpit is deep and secure and she has washboards to seal off the transom opening.

Below decks she's a two or three-cabin boat, with a double cabin forward and a smaller double cabin aft and to starboard. But what I particularly liked was the pilotberth amidships and to port which would make an excellent sea berth, or two if you chose to go for bunk-beds. Aft and to port a second after-cabin can be fitted at the expense of some cockpit locker space.

The only niggles I have are that the anchor chain run over the deck needs more protection and a robust washboard in the transom opening would be welcome for big following seas. And clever though they are, the robust companionway hatch doors could be beefed up for the same poop protection. These are easily tackled.

Other than this she's a well-built and well-finished boat throughout with good performance for minimum effort.

Wizard Tourer 1500

After the success of *Kotick*, six 16m (52ft 5in) Tourers were built. The gradual development and confidence in the concept led to the creation

of a slightly smaller version, the first of which was *Moshio*, a 15.7m (51ft 5in) boat built by Blue Marine, launched three years ago and still one of Elliott's best-known cruisers in Australia.

Although she has now been superseded by the 1550 range, *Moshio* is a good example of an alternative, perhaps more conservative, approach as well as being a testimony to how rugged and well-built these boats are. Over three years she's been cruised and raced by an enthusiastic owner yet remains in excellent condition.

Moshio differs from many of her stablemates in that she has a fixed keel. She also has water ballast, with a pair of tanks each capable of carrying 1,000kg, the equivalent of around ten crew on the rail. Her interior layout differs, too, in that she has her galley on the forward lower level rather than the longitudinal style positioned in the raised saloon area.

Other than this she is broadly similar in layout to the 1250 – there is simply more space to move about in. Like the 1250, she has a large double cabin forward and opposite the galley is a pair of excellent sea berths. In the raised area a spacious navigation station is to port, with the



Who says that lifting keels are an intrusion? Down below aboard the 1550, the latest take on a common theme, *Kiwi Coyote* has a fresh, clean and spacious appearance without feeling stark. The layout is practical, too

1550



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saloon seating area to starboard, and aft and to port is a day heads then a double cabin.

Once again everything is convenient on deck for a short-handed crew. Twin wheels dominate the after end of the cockpit, with two peninsula-type pods providing the pedestals and mounting for a pair of primary winches and rope clutches. Rope tidy bins are a handy feature of the cockpit.

Moshio has an arch system to carry the main-sheet and traveller system, which again keeps the sheet clear of the cockpit without compromising the mechanical purchase.

Under way she was not as light on the helm as the 1250 and even felt a little numb. Having said that there was still only 8-10 knots of breeze and her upwind speed of 6 knots-plus even in patches of lighter wind was still respectable.

The biggest downside for me was her cockpit which, although fine for the helmsman who could see around the pilothouse structure, felt very deep indeed if you were sitting further forward in the area. That's great for families with small children, but not so good if you're one of those who likes or needs to see the horizon.

Under power she was quiet, swift and nimble and no problem in the confines of a marina.

Wizard Tourer 1550

One of the latest launches in the Tourer range is *Kiwi Coyote*, a 15.5m (50ft 8in) development of *Moshio* built by Lloyd Stevenson in Auckland. A modern, silver-tinted paint job and elliptical portholes are the most striking differences to her forerunner, but Elliott says the 1550 incorporates some fundamental changes.

"The hull and deck are both completely new designs. This time around I've biased her shape towards better upwind performance and she's narrower and finer forward. Her overall concept is also aimed more towards a liveaboard boat, whereas many of her predecessors were conceived more as standard family cruisers."

The more you move about this boat, the easier it is to see what Elliott is referring to. The cockpit levels have been altered slightly to improve visibility forward and the cockpit sole has been raised slightly towards the after end. As a result as you pass from stern to the saloon the cockpit floor steps down slightly. This in turn

helps to keep the profile of the deck saloon down while improving headroom.

Elliott makes no excuses for creating a spacious feel throughout, even though it does mean this 50-footer has the same number of berths as her sistership which is 10ft shorter—the 1550 has cavernous lockers and spacious cabins.

Once inside, the generous use of beech makes her look far more European than Elliott's other boats. Whether you like this or not, she certainly feels a classier act below decks and has been built to a high standard throughout.

Once again the forward cabin is the owner's cabin and this one benefits from a large en suite heads and shower. Common to all three boats is the pilotberth area, which, as I discovered, was as useful for securely stowing gear or bags in a hurry for day sailing as it would be on a long passage. I know I've already mentioned this twice but I like this feature—a lot.

In the raised saloon the navigation station is set to port, has the usual exceptional view and is easily the most comfortable of the three configurations, with a large armchair-style seat.

The longitudinal galley is on the port ▷



Left: the 1550's nav station is a good example of a practical, workable area while underway. Swivel seat with arm rests and curved chart table edge makes it easy to work at even when heeled

Right: this might not be the most practical of basins offshore, but it and indeed the entire heads looks great



Left: looking aft from the owner's cabin in the forepeak. Heads to the left, passageway to the right. The interior is beautifully finished

Right: my kind of owner's cabin, out of the way during sailing and the quietest part of the boat at rest. Excellent sea berths amidships mean you wouldn't use this cabin at sea



side and incorporates a peninsula-type arrangement running fore and aft near the centreline which acts as a brace. Further aft and to starboard the second double cabin with access to a second heads finishes off what is a near-perfect arrangement, whatever your style of cruising.

Once again this boat has handy stowage areas for everything from wet weather gear to EPIRBs in places that are not only easy to get to, but logically positioned. The 1550 also has cavernous stowage for dinghies, fenders, warps, spinnakers and, of course, barbecues.

This being the third Elliott Tourer I had tested, I wasn't surprised to find she sailed well, felt great and was a doddle to handle. Like the rest of her range, she has twin wheels, with control lines led back to the steering pedestal area, and is the kind of boat in which you will send others on board below so you can sail her alone.

Her balance and feel on the helm sat in between the 1250 and *Moshio* and she slipped into the groove with ease. She has a lifting keel, reducing draught from 3.2m to 1.8m, and this, along with her refined hull lines, provides the difference in performance Elliott had sought.

Electric winches made hoisting the mainsail an easy button-pressing affair and her minimal overlapping headsail was simplicity in itself to furl and unfurl.

Put simply, it really doesn't come much easier than this for a 50-footer.

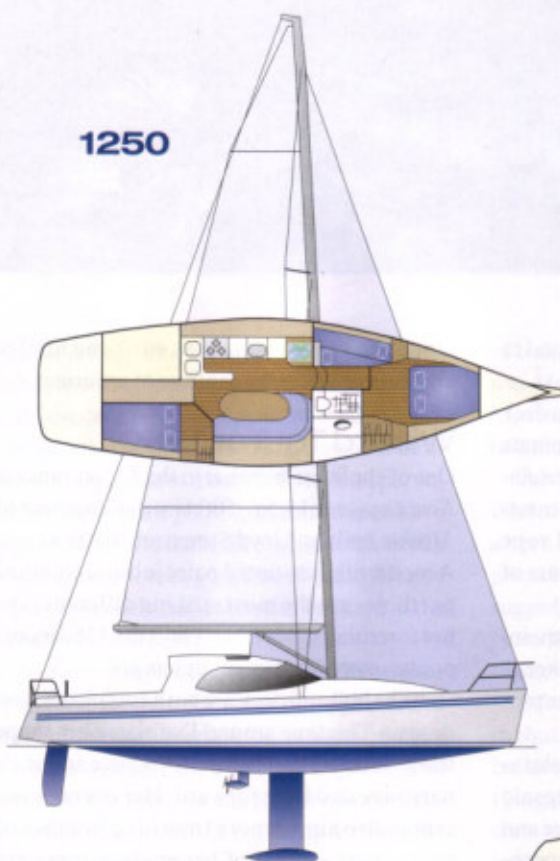
Conclusion

Elliott Tourers, or Wizard Tourers as they'll be known in Europe, are the product of many years' hard graft afloat and ashore. The boats may look familiar, but few designers and builders have created such attractive and practical aft cockpit boats for such a broad range of uses.

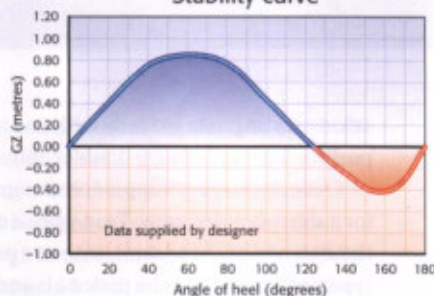
A look at their price tags proves these are not bargain boats. Each was built by a different builder and all were finished to a very high standard; in this case at least, antipodean builders clearly 'do' quality and provide good value for money. On top of this, each boat sails well, is easy to handle and is family-friendly.

Elliott's Tourers present an interesting proposition for offshore sailing. If you're one of those who can't wait to see the land slip down below the horizon, these self-assured, easily handled cruisers will bring the very best out of offshore sailing. If on the other hand, a night under sail is a night too long, these boats are also a good choice, if only because their pedigree will ensure it's over quickly.

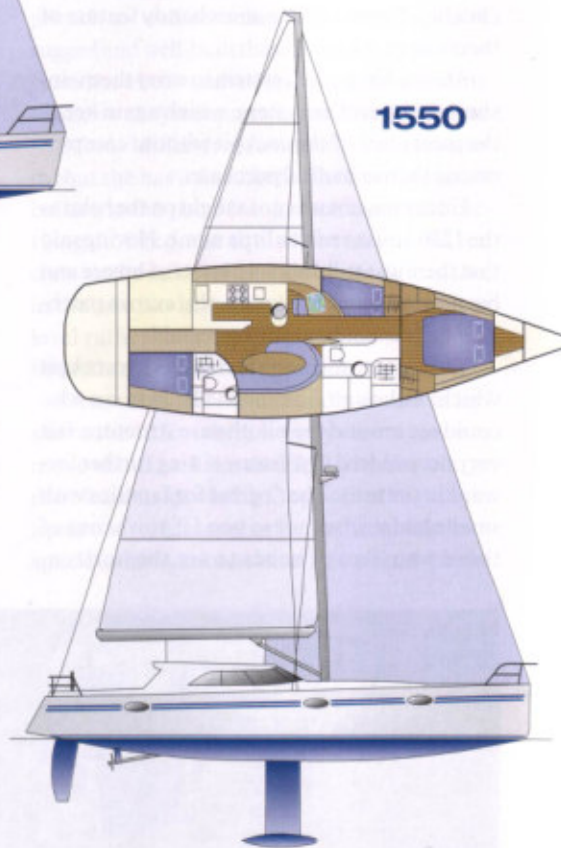
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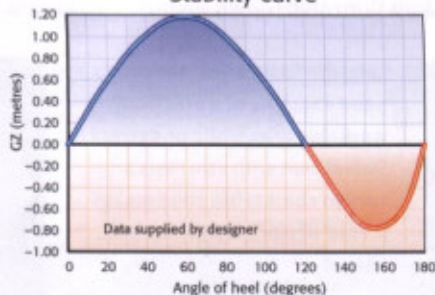
Stability curve






1550



Stability curve



						
SPECIFICATION	WIZARD 1250		WIZARD 1550		WAUQUIEZ 48PH	
LOA	12.44m	40ft 10in	15.29m	50ft 2in	14.91m	48ft 11in
LWL	10.92m	35ft 10in	13.79m	45ft 3in	12.50m	41ft 0in
Beam (max)	4.06m	13ft 4in	4.80m	15ft 9in	4.50m	14ft 9in
Draught	2.28m	7ft 6in	2.69m	8ft 10in	2.13m	7ft 0in
Disp (lightship)	6,500kg	14,330lb	12,500kg	27,557lb	17,000kg	37,478lb
Ballast	2,100kg	4,630lb	3,750kg	8,267lb	5,000kg	11,023lb
Sail area (100% foretriangle)	74m ²	793ft ²	113.16m ²	1,218ft ²	99.96m ²	1,076ft ²
Berths	6		6		6	
Engine	Yanmar 3JH		Yanmar 4JH3		Volvo Perkins TMD31	
Power	29kW	39hp	75kW	100hp	75kW	100hp
Water	390lt	86gal	400lt	88gal	800lt	176gal
Fuel	240lt	53gal	600lt	132gal	600lt	132gal
Sail area: disp	21.6		21.4		15.4	
Disp: LWL	139		133		243	
Price (ex VAT)	£222,000		£550,000		£338,500	