Kotick

Our Kiwi prodigy

After joining the ARC and sailing halfway round the world, James McGougan and his wife sold their Moody 419 and had a go-faster one-off 50-footer built in Auckland. He outlines the pros and cons of trading up on the other side of the world

Photos: Ivor Wilkins

All *Kotick*'s control lines lead underdeck to a single powered winch via a bank of nine jammers abaft the wheel. Main picture: *Kotick*'s double-headed rig makes for easy handling

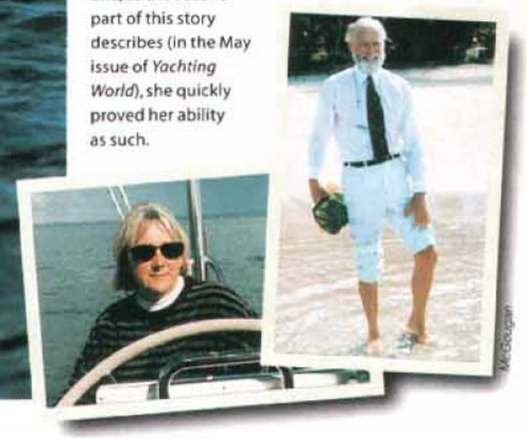
We first met James and Griselda McGougan in November 1992 at the start of the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers. They were putting the finishing touches to their Moody 419 *Tabitha of Wight* before crossing the Atlantic and cruising further afield in the Pacific.

James, retired from a career in marketing and now a writer, had sold up in the UK and with Griselda had turned their Moody into their home. They still have a flat in Malta to which they occasionally return.

Six years on we found them in New Zealand where James, now 66, and Griselda, 56, were so impressed with local design thinking and build quality that they decided to have a new 'home' built.

In stark contrast to their Moody, they went for a relatively lightweight 50-footer with a big pilothouse, a big rig and a keel with wings.

But she's designed for short-handed sailing and, as the second part of this story describes (in the May issue of *Yachting World*), she quickly proved her ability as such.



McGougan

It used to be said that only an idiot builds a new one-off cruising yacht. Production yachts – like Swan, Little Harbor, Hallberg Rassy, Wauquiez, Moody and Bénéteau perhaps – are designed to meet the practical long distance sailor's needs. Although costing plenty, each will carry you and your crew round the world and still be worth what it cost, or somewhere near it, at the end of the day.

But a one-off ... One has to be bloody mad!

Tabitha, our faithful Bill Dixon-designed Moody 419, offered plenty of volume for the money and a very serviceable performance, too. We'd sailed her some 35,000 miles and grown to love her, but ... there are always 'buts'!

Tabitha was usually grossly overloaded – decks strewn with dive gear, dinghies and spare jerrycans of fuel. Maybe, too, she was just not quite sturdy enough to range across the Pacific year after year after year. Few boats are.

Then that elusive 200-mile day never quite came up, although we once made 197 miles. Going to weather in a blow was comfortable enough, but she was hardly close-winded. These points are not criticisms, just facts of life. She was a handsome, quick lady and you couldn't fault her in terms of value for money.

All that nonsense about gentlemen never sailing to windward is a tale recounted by frustrated salts who never owned a boat that could sail to windward. Any skipper who has been embayed in a gale on a lee shore will understand what that is all about. So what do you do? How can you out-Swan the Swans without spending a million?

Sailors spend half their lives doodling notes for their mythical ideal yacht. Most are sensible enough to leave it at that. We were not. When we arrived at Gulf Harbour Marina, New Zealand, in November 1995, we padded round the mooring pontoons, looking at the yacht talent and gossiping with local Kiwi owners. Impressive.

New Zealand has long had a pool of yacht enthusiasts and builders who have proved themselves all round the world. One-offs are their metier. There are no longer any series production yards left. Local sailors are quite liable to build their own 40 or 50ft 'greyhound' in their own backyard – and produce an exemplary finish. ▷

Kotick

Above: *Kotick's* cockpit is large, but well protected from forward as well as from the sun. Right: the navigation area is in the forward port corner of the deck saloon. Below: Griselda said that one of the joys of the new yacht was being able to walk through the accommodation

Photos: Ivor Wilkins

Somehow we found ourselves typing out the 15-page brief for our perfect long distance cruising yacht. Nothing serious, mind you – just part of the game, 'What if ...?'

We had been impressed by the lines and performance of Greg Elliott's racing yachts, many of whose designs are record holders around the Pacific and in the massive trailer sailer market. We believed that many racing yachts can be converted into excellent fast cruisers, but few cruising yachts sail quite well enough to satisfy the soul of a racing sailor when he takes up cruising.

Speed is more important at times than many cruising types would have one believe. The Pacific is a big place and distances are huge; the ability to sail round dangerous weather systems can be a great asset.

Greg Elliott is a racing man through and through. However, he is shrewd enough to appreciate that there are plenty of ageing sailors who are dedicated to cruising, but want a yacht to foot along smartly and clock up that 200 miles a day when conditions are reasonable.

We commissioned initial concepts, tailored to our brief, just for the fun of it. Before many weeks were up, we were poring over 'concept plans' for a 50ft raised saloon design. The Beast had a rig like a 12-metre which looked like it needed a crew of ten along the weather rail. But sleek it was!

Surprisingly, Greg had made several serious concessions to our whims. For example, the main keel was an aerodynamic wing which enabled the yacht to draw only 6ft 3in and still point reasonably high.

For deep water windward work, a retractable daggerboard was envisaged, passing through a slot in the lead and providing a total draught of 10ft-plus to minimise leeway. After further discussions, the rig was modified to a cutter to enable an ageing crew to handle a large sail area without rupturing themselves.

The seven-eighths cutter rig featured twin furlers, led back to the cockpit, sheeted with twin cars on a single track. Halyards, topping lift and mainsail reefing lines were to be run from the mast base via the engine room, under the cockpit, to emerge through a letterbox behind the wheel. No string above decks. Slinky!

Behind the wheel lay a console table topped with a bank of nine jammers: halyards, topping

"All that nonsense about gentlemen never sailing to windward is a tale told by old salts who never owned a boat that could sail to windward"

James and Griselda's cabin is right forward

lift, tack lines and all led forward to a single powered winch. Simple in theory.

Genoa and staysail were modest in size and quite tame-looking, although high aspect ratio. The roached, fully battened main, however, looked vast and a shade daunting – over 63m² of it, enabling the boat to clip along and tack without any foresail in many conditions. This main would have only two permanent deep reef points in it and be held in lazyjacks for simplicity in dropping or reefing. Gennaker, trysail and storm jib completed the rig.

Perhaps the most startling feature of the concept design was the way the pilothouse itself had been integrated with the spacious cockpit. The pilothouse is really a raised saloon. It measures 11ft square, surrounded by streamlined, sloping, glass windows.

The galley would lie to port with the nav station forward. To starboard would be the dining table and the sofa, which, with a bench inboard, could enable six at least to eat in comfort. The saloon floor is only nine inches lower than the cockpit. Thus, with the aid of a 'stable door' between the two, one could integrate some 20ft of usable 'day living' space. Vast, light, delightful – especially in hot climates.

Walking aft, through the cockpit, one would reach a shallow sugar scoop boarding or bathing platform – wonderful for hot weather and excellent when stern-to in a marina!

In common with many long distance cruising couples, our demands were strictly for 'two plus two'. There seemed therefore no need for more than one head and certainly there was no need for more than two double cabins with appropriate stowage.

Forward, there was to be a watertight door with walk-in sail locker and fitted workshop beyond – vice and all. Aft and to port of the head, a single passage berth was housed, secure and snug. During the day it would form a computer station which could remain operational at sea.

Stowage requirements were massive. Cruising couples are squirrels of the worst order. In many instances all their worldly goods accompany them on their boats. We wanted dive gear, a compressor, a generator, a freezer, microwave, dinghy stowage, two outboards, endless fishing gear, Panama warps and fenders, two big anchor rodes, hundreds of books and tapes, cameras and shell collections – you name it, we'd stow it.

But the decks had to be pristine and clear for when we met the first Pacific rollers beyond the Hairaki Gulf. Impossible? Maybe, maybe not.

Motoring in a sailing yacht is a requirement often relegated to second place. Our needs were clear: a thousand miles motoring range at a speed around seven and a half knots in calm waters. Greg Elliott's design not only met that brief, but provided overkill in the form of a Yanmar turbo 100hp motor beneath the saloon floor.

We shook Greg's hand, left for Fiji, slightly ashamed of being so naughty. We'd never do it, not in my mid-sixties. Just pipe-dreaming.

Once *Tabitha* was safely anchored in Suva, we were somehow unable to shake off the vision of Greg's mini-megayacht. Rum flowed. Plans were again unearthed and somehow a faxed contract with Custom Yachts got signed.

Kotick, as the boat was to be called, after Kipling's white seal from *The Jungle Book*, had her first 'false frames' set up in the latter part of July 1996. Darren Schofield of Custom Yachts was the chosen builder and she was moved into their new factory.

The new boat was to be built using the WEST epoxy system, sandwiching cedar and kauri planks for the hull between E-Glass and ▷

Elliott 50 fast cruising yacht

LOA	**15.64m**	**51ft 4in**
Beam	**1.52m**	**15ft 0in**
Draught (board up)	**1.98m**	**6ft 6in**
(board down)	**3.20m**	**10ft 6in**
Net weight		**12 tonnes**
Gross tonnage		**23.54/100tonnes**
Weight of keel/ daggerboard	**4,100kg**	**9,038lb**

Rig and sails

Cutter ⅞ – three-spreader alloy mast

Sail area:

Main	63m²	678ft²
Staysail (North)	35m²	377ft²

Gennaker in snuffer – trysail – storm jib

Fully battened mainsail with lazyjacks, dropping into boom arms – two permanent reefs, plus cringles for third reef

Furlers – twin Furlex

Fredericksen batten cars

Halyards – Spectra 12mm, run under cockpit

Deck gear

Winches – Andersen. Single electric S52 (central)

Two manual 52s (genoa), two 16s (checkstays)

Windlass – Simpson Lawrence Sprint 3000

Fredericksen Genoa Track system

Propulsion

Main engine – 100hp Yanmar Turbo

Projected cruising speed – 8.75 knots

Drive – Aquadrive, 1.5in shaft – 23in Brunton self-pitching Autoprop

Charging

160amp Motorola alternator – Next smart regulator

Generator – Kohler 8kW diesel

Trace 1500 inverter/charger

Stirling 30amp emergency

Airpro wind generator – Solarex sun panel

Electrics

Batteries – House 700amp –12V (4x6V 350 amp), lead acid

120amp engine start – 75amp genset start

Tank capacities

Fuel – 750lt – twin alloy tanks

Water – 700lt – twin stainless tanks

Watermaker – 20 GPH – Challenge Yachts Bauer Junior dive compressor

Instrumentation and radios

GPS – Garmin 120 – hand-held Garmin 45

Garmin antenna for laptop electronic charting when required

Instruments – Standard/Horizon 50 Series

Apelco fish-finder

Log/speed – fluxgate compass – depth – windspeed/direction – repeaters

Autopilot – Octopus/Standard hydraulic linear

Radar – Furuno 24-mile 8in LCD

Chart plotter – Yeoman

Electronic charting facility – weatherfax – Toshiba/Kiwitech

SSB – Icon 710 – linked Globe Wireless fax and e-mail

VHF Radio – Icon 59

Holding tackle

55lb plough – 45lb fisherman – folding Fortress 35lb plough kedge – 200ft kedge line

⅜ chain rode 200ft, plus 150ft 20mm rope

Chain/rope spliced rode 300ft

18ft sea anchor with 500ft ¾in line

Tenders and safety

One 3.8m inflatable dive boat with glassfibre floor and 15hp outboard

One Avon 2.8 inflatable with 5hp outboard

Tinker Traveller with CO_2 bottles and canopy

Kotick

McGougan

Kotick's 50ft composite hull had to be canted by 20° and parts of the doorway removed to get her through the building shed doors

Kevlar, with closed cell foam sandwich for the pilothouse roof – strong and easily built, without having to make hull moulds.

Our contract was in two halves: one with Custom Yachts to build the hull, deck and built-in furniture, etc; the other with Elliott Boat Design who agreed to project manage and buy all the hardware, deck fittings and bolt-on goodies. These included engines, rig, windlass et al.

Gradually we learnt the whereabouts of every chandlery, engineering workshop and canvas worker within 20 miles of Auckland. It was illuminating, but not a task to undertake lightly.

Long before the project was complete, mental stress was matching enthusiasm, as budget constraints were breached, time and again, despite our best intentions. Visitors came and went. Some became so hooked on the concept that a second version of *Kotick* was signed up and the new boat's frames joined the hull of our *Kotick* on the floor of the factory.

Our grey hair bleached to white. Bank accounts shrank. *Kotick* grew. Her sleek topsides were painted white. Kauri was selected and cut to build the furniture for the saloon. The inlay for the dining table was designed and inset. Slowly, the boat took shape.

Kotick's rig is substantial. The mast, made from two sections of aluminium extrusion, is 73ft high, fitting into a fabricated alloy shoe in the keelson.

Three wide spreaders slanting aft support the loads amply. Discontinuous wire is used in preference to rod in spite of the slight stretch. The staysail is seven-eighths, so light checkstays made from Spectra are required for windward work when the main is reefed.

We visited the floating dock in Auckland where Bruce Elliott of Masts and Spars had created *Kotick*'s rig. Lying there in two pieces, the mast looked so vast that we almost panicked. Would we ever manage anything so huge?

At this stage, it seemed that however hard anyone worked, *Kotick* would never get out of the factory. April was meant to be her launch date. Time slipped by and we despaired, but Greg Elliott is a toughie! One day he said: "Right. She's going to be launched in three weeks. Get her watertight."

Clearly it was impossible. Darren smiled wanly. I hurled myself about laughing. Nevertheless, 23 days later a huge truck stood outside the factory, ready to carry *Kotick* to Oram's Yard where her keel and rudder were to be fitted and her rig dropped in.

Getting *Kotick* out of the factory would have made a good comedy sketch. She was too big to go through the door! Trolleys were procured, supported with a variety of jacks and props. *Kotick* was canted over 20°, but stuck fast.

Monsieur Hulot's holiday antics had nothing on the way *Kotick* emerged. Chunks of doorway were sledged out of the framework until, at last, she was in the open air – popping out like a champagne cork.

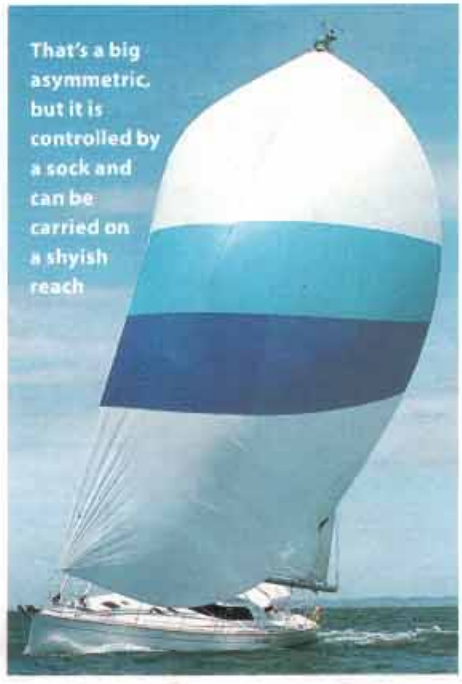
Greg had, by this time, got the bit between his teeth. No effete designer, this! "Get the ****ing keel on her!" he bawled. "Now, tonight – NOW!"

Oram's Yard is normally quiet and dark at 1930 on a winter Wednesday evening. That night it was not.

Kotick hung, like a white whale, from the slings of the travel hoist. Greg and a team from Custom Yachts balanced her over her keel as gently as a ballerina. Two hours later the keel and body were one, mated together in the light of a single portable floodlight.

Only then did Greg allow us lesser mortals to twist the tops off our best bottles and gulp a flagon or two in relief and astonishment. *Kotick* was at last a complete boat and a real looker. ❑

Next month: *Kotick*'s shakedown cruise turned out to be a little more exciting than her new owners had bargained for



Ivor Wilkins

That's a big asymmetric, but it is controlled by a sock and can be carried on a shyish reach

Buying and selling in New Zealand

Selling *Tabitha* in New Zealand was something of a balancing act. Comparatively few New Zealand 'keelers' are rated as Cat 1, mainly because their equipment is inadequate. It is the Cat1 capability which appeals to Kiwis and the fact that the boat is sea proven and ready to go. Boats in the Moody range, Rustler, Rival, Bowman, larger Westerlys and the better French-built boats are respected and recognised in NZ.

The main New Zealand market is between NZ$190,000 and 270,000 for a well found 40-footer

One has to import the boat at the time of sale. This entails paying both duty, currently at about 11 per cent, and GST. The total will amount to about 24 per cent of an agreed value. However, Customs will normally give owners an age allowance provided they have owned the boat for eight years or more and hold the original invoice or sales receipt.

Be cautious of local yacht brokers. They charge six per cent, which is fairly normal, but in our experience tend to inflate the value of your yacht beyond its market acceptability.

The main New Zealand market is between NZ$190,000 and $270,000 for a well found 40-42-footer with all necessary cruising gear. Eventually we sold privately and so paid no brokers' fees. *Tabitha* fetched a figure in the lower 200s, but we had to pay our duty and GST out of that.

Provided one is prepared to act as a super gopher or sub project manager, it is possible to have a 50ft composite yacht (strip cedar planks/E-Glass) built in basic form for about NZ$550,000.

To this you have to add plenty: generators, full instrumentation, extra sails, spinnaker gear, leather upholstery, solid wood joinery, microwaves, watermakers, etc.

Budget for around NZ$650,000 (around £230,000 ex VAT).