

Elliott 7.8

By JAMES HILL

Since the impressive debut of 'Fly'n By' at Hamilton Island Race Week in 1991, the Elliott 7.8 has firmly established itself as serious competition in the small yacht market.

With the attractive, young Irish born Niki Schofield at the helm the small trailer yacht shows its stuff by pacing the best of the 40 footers in open water races. Not surprisingly, the next year saw race officials push the upstart trailer yachts into their own division.

Following that memorable start at Hamilton the Elliott 7.8 has subsequently proved to be the fastest of the TYA production boats over a range of conditions. In fact, about the only boat which can give this Kiwi TY a run for its money is the Mk II Young Rocket 7.8m.

The Young Rocket was top gun of the trailables for a number of years so it's only fitting that it should be deposed by a fellow kiwi speedster. Both boats are the products of the same hotbed of Auckland racing which encourages design development and innovative designs like Jim Young, Bruce Farr and Greg Elliott.

Four of the Elliott 7.8s are now sailing in Australia, are all built by Niki's husband Darren and sailed by good skippers. While 'Fly'n By' has been sold to a Lake Macquarie skipper, the Schofields have campaigned their own boat 'The Edge' to great success in Sydney, usually taking division line honours. Darren also builds the fast Elliott 7m.

Meanwhile, down on Port Phillip, Geelong sailmaker Dave Eickmeyer has the super fast 'Hot to Trot' which often beats the local trailer fleet by big margins. Dave's favourite party trick is to plane away from the opposition on the reaches whilst they fight for second place.

Eickmeyer is trailing north for the Nationals at Easter and undoubtedly started as one of the linehonours favourites. This is because his boat is the "sports model" with the shorter cabintop taken from the Elliott 7m and a lighter interior.

A good showing at the Lake Macquarie Nationals will no doubt encourage a few more people to buy this boat. Based on the interest there is around at present, Darren Schofield expects up to six to be sailing by next summer. He says he's got interest not only from the trailer yacht brigade, but also yacht club types who want a fast boat for twilighting and day regattas.

So, what's so good about this latest Elliott creation? Recently, I took a ride with the crew on 'The Edge' to find out for myself. The surprising, first impression was just how big the boat looked on its trailer. Compared to the lean Rockets this boat definitely has got a bigger volume hull and more freeboard. The reason for this is partly the Elliott approach to design, but also the fact that the boat is designed to offer reasonable accommodation with near full headroom below.

'The Edge' has the standard cabintop which gives quite good interior room, even if its owners at present keep the creature comforts ashore to save weight. Fully fitted there are five berths, a galley and enclosed WC. Darren added the WC because he is looking at getting the boat IMS rated.



The super fast 'Hot to Trot'.

This boat represents a second generation development of the design by having a flatter deckline, a wider, shallower cockpit and no coamings. The rig has also been made a bit taller to give improved light air performance.

The key to the design is the use of semi-exotic fibreglass/foam construction, as well as carbon fibre reinforcing.

The use of carbon fibre helps to raise the construction price, but at the same time has the benefit of keeping the boat's all up weight to a very low 900kg. This is the dry sailing weight and 400kg of it is taken up by the lead torpedo bulb hanging low on the deep retractable keel.

The boat is built over a male plug using triaxial E glass and SP resins in the construction to insure strong, but very light construction with enough strength to take on short distance offshore racing.

The other aspect of this design which makes it a winner is the skiff-like hull and generous sail-to-weight ratio that is way above small keelers like J24s. The wetted area of the hull is actually quite low, but the fullness of the hull above waterline level gives it a lot of reserved buoyancy for upwind power.

The ability to break out and plane offwind is one of the spin offs of the ultra light displacement and gives the boat a real performance edge in winds of 12 knots or

A sporty trailer yacht

more. Lightness plays a big part of this equation, but so does the hull shape which has dinghylike sections with shallow mid sections and a quite flat, wide forefoot for lifting the hull onto the plane.

However, like Elliott's other designs, the 7.8 is probably a better performer upwind than down. This is because the hull is not over wide and has full ends to keep the helm nicely balanced when the boat is heeled. There is also a moderate amount of vee in the bottom sections to help the boat track well upwind and not stick in light winds.

Its obvious that the boat is very fast upwind and no more tender than most trailer yachts.

The 7.8 has a big, roomy cockpit area without coamings, or raised mainsheet traveller to get in the way. Room to move is the theme in this boat so even the Ronstan mainsheet traveller track is mounted on the cockpit floor.

Placement of deck gear is something which the owner will generally play a big part in. The boat is being strongly marketed as a semi complete shell for owner DIY fit out.

The set-up on 'The Edge', however, seems to work well enough. The Ronstan headsail tracks are mounted on the front edge of the blister cabinet and there are just two winches on the cabin.

These two winches also look after the headsail and spinnaker sheets as a bank of rope jammers take care of the halyards when they are not in use.

The clean theme is also carried through to the rig which has a simple swept-back shroud system which does away with the need for either backstay or runners. The mast gets good support because the shroud base is right out near the gunwales and sports two sets of spreaders with wrap-around mast collars.

The only question with this set-up is what you do with the headsails, but the answer is simply to keep the number one headsail overlap nice and short so it sheets ahead of the spreaders.

Another interesting feature of the test boat is an experimental, retractable bow spinnaker pole rigged to fly asymmetrical cut spinnakers.

Unlike the set-up on the Boatspeed 23, which telescopes within the hull, this one has the pole on deck and attached to a sliding track so it can be pulled into position when needed.

Made from carbon fibre the two metre long pole is held in position by Kevlar lines and rope block and tackles. The system was still being refined when I sailed the boat, but in a subsequent regatta proved its worth by allowing the crew to gybe the spinnaker in 25 to 30 knot winds.

While this system has yet to get the nod from yachting authorities, I have to say that it is streets ahead of a conventional pole set-up. For starters, you can set the pole up without anyone going forward and the kite can be set and dropped from the main companionway hatch.

The asymmetric kite is not only quicker and easier to set than a normal spinnaker, it is easy to gybe because you can do the whole procedure from back in the cockpit. What is more, with the luff being held securely to the bow at all times, the sail is always under control and less likely to pull you over in a strong gust.

While the asymmetric kite does have a drawback in that you can't set it really square, we found we could fly it wing and wing style if



Dave Eickmeyer's Elliot 7.8m.



Side decks are curved to provide comfortable seating for the crew.



Elliott features simple but highly functional swept-spreader rig with short-footed headsails.

A sporty trailer yacht

the winds are light and the water flat.

Putting the asymmetric question aside there is no question that this is still a very fast boat in any company. Our test sail revealed not only how quick this boat was in downwind sailing, but also how close winded and fast it was upwind. Even sailing against boats like a super Rocket 7.8 with wings the Elliott 7.8 could achieve more speed and better height to windward.

The builder wouldn't want it any other way because he really set out to make this boat the top dog of trailerables. The boat is really built to a much more sophisticated level than previous TYs with vacuum-bagging and hi-tech resins used throughout construction.

Carbon fibre is used for key reinforcing such as around the centrebase base and tabernacle as well as shrouds chainplates and the whole rudder box assembly. The builder in fact has really gone to a lot of trouble to save weight in the ends of the boat, particularly the stern which has to carry an outboard.

The theme of light and fast is carried through to the interior of the boat with a spacious and airy cabin which has foam-cored bunks and galley units. The interior is essentially open-planned with the only enclosed part being the WC compartment which is the port hand side of companionway.

This is actually a different layout to the standard plan which shows a port quarter berth and the WC for'ard under the fore double berth.

All up, there are five berths if you count a double in the bow, a settee to starboard and a double berth under the shallow cockpit floor. All this is finished in white float coated fibreglass and ready for DIY fit-out, unless you want the factory to do the job for you. However, whatever you do, you would want to add weight carefully if you didn't want to destroy the boat's racing edge.

While its hard to get too excited about a bare bones interior, one feature which did impress me was the centrebase design. As I've seen in a few other kiwi boats, the dagger case has the sides removed above table height so it can be used as a saloon table. Its a great idea because it not only saves weight, but opens the boat up inside and allows people to converse to one another without a wall in the way. The water can't escape because the keel simply seals the slot.

Another great idea which makes a lot of sense is the use of a two-speed trailer winch within the cabin to raise and lower the keel. Not only is it a lot cheaper than having an expensive sheet winch on the cabintop, but it requires less effort.

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 7.8m

LWL: 6.9m

Beam: 2.46m

Draught: 0.45m to 2.1m

Displacement: 900kg

Ballast: 400kg

Sail areas:

Main: 27.9sq m

Jib: 13sq m

Spinnaker: 45sq m

Berths: 5

Designer: Elliott Boat Designs NZ

Manufacturer: Modern Concept Yachts,
Sydney.



General arrangement of the Elliott 7.8m.



Skiff like lines are very evident in the Elliott 7.8m.