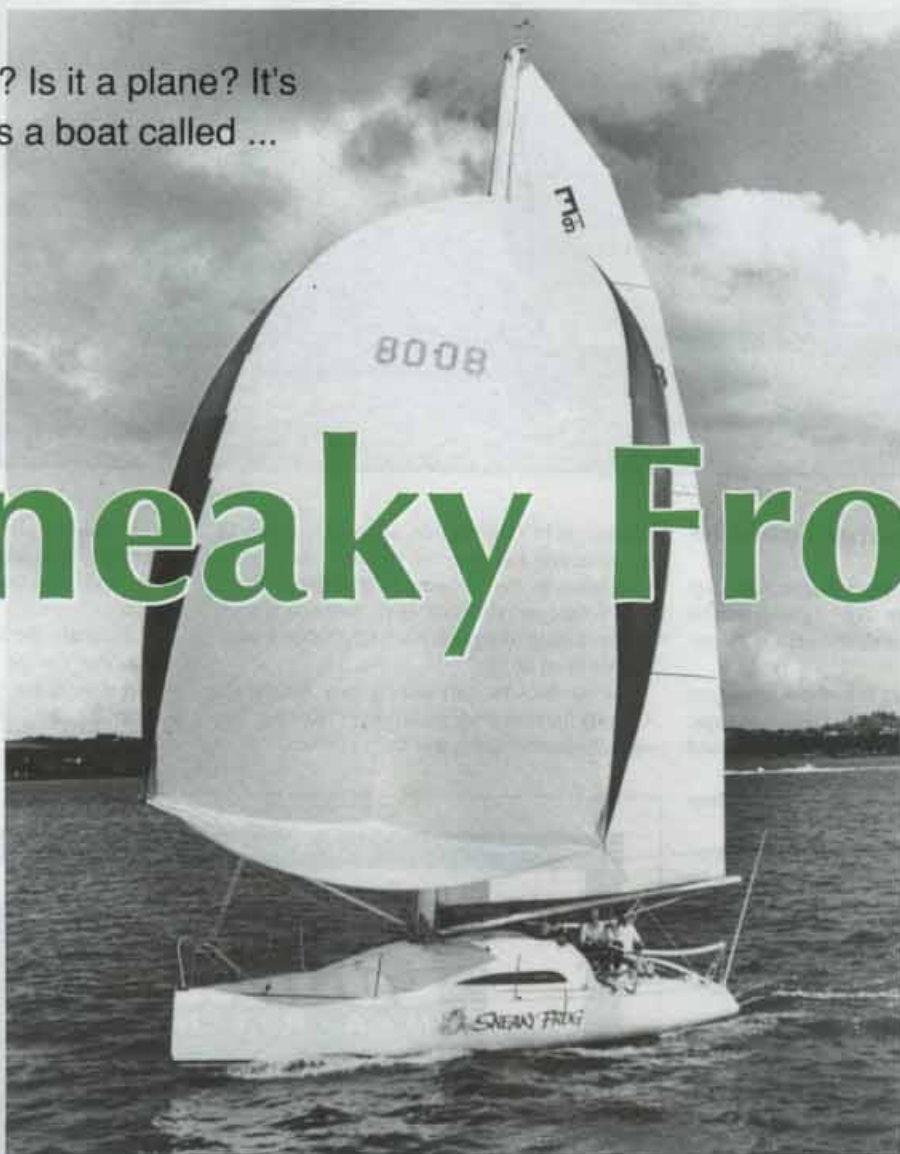


Is it a bird? Is it a plane? It's neither. It's a boat called ...

Sneaky Frog



I have been a confirmed small-boat man all my sailing life.

I never thought I'd find myself writing this, but I've just stepped off a 9m (30ft) ballasted keelboat that — upwind — handles like a 470. Honest!

The slap of the rounded bow sections in the chop; the way you can steer up, over, around waves that you'd think were too close together; that positive touch to the helm, and the familiar surge of speed as you crack off on to a fetch ... with a start I caught myself wondering what had happened to my trapeze hand and why he'd transformed into five people sitting

backwards on the gunwale. Coming out of my little dreamtime, I heard Greg Elliott: "It's a concept boat, really. And it's more different than it looks."

The boat is Sneaky Frog, the latest from Elliott's fertile drawing board and his first independent commission launched since he left the company that bears his name. (Elliott has parted ways with Elliott Yachts Ltd and hung up his shingle as an independent designer).

Sneaky Frog is vintage Elliott, a 30-footer that reflects all his devilish joy in rocking conventions and sailing fast at the same time

— a smaller reincarnation of Party Pro.

Like its predecessor, Sneaky Frog will have its detractors, but mostly the critics will wonder why their 30-footers are so slow in comparison.

"It's a concept boat," says Elliott again. "It's not run of the mill. I suppose that's why I'm not really surprised we've had no more takers for the design so far. But wouldn't it be great to have another of these on the water, so we could pace together and properly get up to speed.

"Sure this thing's fast, but how will we ever know we're sailing it to full potential?"

By ALEX STONE

I agree. Definitely not normal. Sneaky Frog is not — pardon the expression — the wife-and-kids model of the 30ft sailboat.

Where did the concept originate? Again the response is quintessential Elliott: "Sneaky and Kermit (the boat's owners and old friends of Elliott) came round to my place one night and, over a few beers, we had a yarn about what would be a fun boat to sail — small enough to sneak in the under 30ft class, not slow and dead right for two-handed racing. Cheap, too."

It certainly was a productive brainstorming session. Maybe the brew unshackled their minds, because between them, Elliott, Kermit and Sneaky have come up with a design that delivers on all counts. Their oddball names aside, the owners have a wealth of sailing experience.

Kermit, christened Dennis Conway, is a sailmaker with Dave Giddens and, judging from the sails he built for the boat, he knows which colour is green.

Sneaky — or as his parents knew him, Craig Sterling — is a boatbuilder who works for Don Senior. He built Sneaky Frog in his spare time in rented space at another yard.

Both Sneaky and Kermit have many offshore racing miles to their credit and both have sailed with Elliott for years. Sneaky previously owned one of the first Elliott 7.9s called Sneak Preview.

With Sneaky Frog, it appears he's about to launch another sneak attack on the Auckland yachting establishment.

We took Sneaky Frog out on the Waitemata on a perfect afternoon for sailing. A 15-knot north-easterly made for lively sailing, without overpressing the boat at any time.

It has always amazed me how quickly the crews of racing yachts down the sails and crank up the donk after crossing the finishing line. Sometimes it seems they don't

Elliott, Kermit and Sneaky have come up with a design that delivers on all counts.



The rotating mast angled for a close reach ... the loose-footed main allows spinnakers to be retrieved over the boom, preventing them from going in the water.



Sneaky Frog's smooth airfoils and slippery hull ... getting from A to B at the double.

really enjoy sailing the boats at all and motor-ing back to the pub becomes top priority.

Once, a crew cancelled a pre-arranged boat-review sail with me because they couldn't face going out again after a race. Not so the guys on Sneaky Frog.

I could make it down to the marina only in mid-afternoon and the crew had already spent most of the day racing (their second race outing and they took line honours in Class 3). But it was no worries to take the Frog out for

another spin on the harbour.

From their reaction, I didn't need Elliott to remind me he had drawn a boat for "a coupla guys to really enjoy their sailing ..." So what exactly is so different, exciting and new about Sneaky Frog?

Different: An over-rotating mast of wing-like section built out of plywood; a powerful rig with some unusual sail-handling sequences; a boom spreader; and auxiliary

power — get this — from a water-cooled 250cc Kawasaki motor-bike motor.

"Cheap and light," grins Sneaky as he guns up a few more revs.

Exciting: Simply the fact that a boat of this obvious potential can be built cheaply with a minimum of exotic materials. Sneaky Frog's hull and mast are constructed from Gaboon-veneer plywood, the hull stiffened with Oregon stringers and incorporating a box-girder bracing system made from a foam-filled plywood sandwich.

The hull is made from two layers of 3.7mm plywood from Israel, diagonally opposed and sheathed on the outside with 6oz glassfibre cloth.

The mast is made from 6mm ply. There are a couple of strands of carbon-fibre glued on to the mast about the hounds to stiffen it and the beam across the cabin that supports the mast step is strengthened with kevlar.

Exciting, too, the way Sneaky Frog wants to get up and plane off the wind. I can't stretch my 470 analogy here, because Sneaky Frog has none of the



The interior has netting pipe cots supported by the internal box girder bracing system built of foam-ply sandwich.

former's offwind quirks which are imparted by the dinghy's inadequate rudder section.

The Frog's rudder, by contrast, is beautifully balanced, with a section and profile designed to keep control.

New: Not that much really. Rotating masts, fully battened sails, full-width curved mainsheet travellers, wooden construction — they've all been around for some time. But this is the first time I've seen all these elements come together in a monohull of this size in New Zealand.

The motorbike engine — that's definitely new to me, but I can't see it setting a trend, except towards earmuffs for the crew.

We set out to windward under full main and No.2 jib. I noticed the rope halyards are external: "Didn't want to complicate the construction of the mast by putting them inside," explains Sneaky.

"Besides, this way the mast is watertight." The jib halyard has a 2:1 purchase to reduce compression on the mast.

Stretch is minimal in the Spectraline kevlar-core halyards, but additional luff tension for the mainsail is achieved by a block and tackle downhaul system at the tack of the sail.

Elliott mentions that the moments surrounding the mast were complex to figure out. "I wouldn't want to try this on a boat much bigger, but I'm confident this rig will stand up.

The mast is certainly much stronger than the average aluminium section for a boat of this size."

A wide shroud base is called for with such a rig and Sneaky Frog's chainplates are bolted on to the outside of the hull. The 150 per cent No.1 genoa is sheeted inside the shrouds, with the slot being the restriction of the span of the diamonds that rotate with the mast. As we settled into the groove upwind, there was

only three knots to windward." They know they're going to have trouble with the handicappers in the future.

So, no empirical proof of Sneaky Frog's upwind speed I'm afraid, but from seat-of-the-pants judgement, I'd say the boat was doing at least double that. It appears Sneaky Frog will have an unusual sail reduction sequence. As the breeze freshens, power from the rig will first be dumped by twisting off the mainsail.

Then the headsails will go down in size to a minute high-clew No.3 without reefing the main. Come more wind and the Frog will foot it under main alone; the headsails will only reappear after the second reef has been tucked into the mainsail.

Sneaky Frog's anticipated ability to sail cat-rigged will be the result of slightly fuller bow sections than normal and a couple of other secrets to the hull shape on which Elliott wouldn't elaborate. Turning for home, Sneaky

Frog showed the kind of speed you'd expect under spinnaker. But still, it was pleasurable to get up and plane like that. I envy the crew. They are in for some exciting rides.



The full-width traveller system allows a large amount of control. The mainsheet is played from the leeward end of the continuous system, which attaches directly to the boom spreader.

much hilarity over the log, which was drastically under-reading.

"Write it down," yell Sneaky and Kermit. "We'd love everyone to know this boat does



No faking this shot
... Sneaky Frog
leaps on to a
genuine plane.

In the stiffer breezes, the spinnaker pole must be clipped to the base of the mast, so some projection is lost. Sneaky Frog also carries a longer-luffed gennaker for shy reaches and, for that, the pole will be lowered to pulpit level.

As the boat heels under the press of spinnaker, the leeward end of the traveller scoops up water in a dramatic spray, a good early warning system for the helmsman.

In early outings, the boat has seemed most comfortable with a crew of six. Five could work the boat adequately, but the weight of the sixth is appreciated on the weather rail.

Sneaky and Kermit are gearing up for two-handed racing, however, and in particular, the Round North Island Race next February.

As we tidied up back at the marina berth, Sneaky says: "Well, that was more fun than granny's funeral."

It may be hard to take the whole thing seriously, this zany boat and its owners named Kermit and Sneaky.

But I'll predict many skippers of Waitemata harbour racers will soon tire of the joke — and of the constant view of Sneaky Frog's elegant transom.

Driving home, I know this owner of a 30ft sloop was busy scheming ways of selling up and commissioning Sneaky to build the Frog a sister. ●

SNEAKY FROG

LOA:	9.1m
LWL:	8.7m
Beam:	3.1m
Draft:	2.1m
Displacement:	2000kg
Ballast:	900kg
Designer:	Greg Elliott
Builder:	Craig Sterling
Owners:	Kermit and Sneaky