

BREEZE

Official Publication of the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron





Hot 50ft fleet shaping up for a big summer of head to head action

New Zealand's keelboat racing scene is set for a significant boost this summer with a number of canting keel 50-footers coming on stream. The competition in this size range is going to be hot with added spice coming from the rivalry of three designers – Farr Yacht Design, Elliot Marine and Bakewell-White Yacht Design.

The Farr yachts, pioneered and conceptualized by Mick Cookson of Cookson Boatbuilders, are probably the best established in this genre and certainly so far are the form boats to beat.

Mick Cookson's own yacht, *Wingz* (the first departure for a long time from the name High Five he has given to a series of

Story by Ivor Wilkins

his own yachts) has been dominating the harbour racing scene, while a sister ship, *Pussy Galore* has scored impressive wins on two significant passage races, one from Auckland to Tauranga, on New Zealand's east coast, and the other from Auckland to Fiji.

In both of those races, *Pussy Galore* beat the Greg Elliott-designed *Sportivo* – in the first by about 90 seconds and in the second by 20 minutes, close results by any definition after long passage races.

The Cookson yachts have been described in *Breeze* before, but basically were designed as seriously quick but affordable production 50-footers with a canting keel and trim-tab, as opposed to canard – and an interior amenable to offshore passage racing and occasional summer cruising.

The formula has proven popular with the ninth yacht currently under construction at the yard. Initially, the idea was to constrain

the boats to a one-design format, but this has gone by the board. "All the boats have been semi-customised so far," said Cookson, who is philosophical about the departure from one-design. The boats have been scattered to various locations around the world and are racing successfully under IRC.

This latest version is the first, however, to be turbo-charged, with a rig 750mm taller and 220mm more draft. He said the original designs were over-engineered, so the increased power and righting moment are still well within the limits.

Cookson's concept from the outset was to simplify the boat as much as possible to contain costs, so the canting limit is 35 degrees and the trim-tab was chosen over the more complex and costly forward canard arrangement. While this is very practical and has achieved its objectives, the IRC rule penalizes trim-tabs.

Cookson is frustrated that if he produced a more complicated yacht with a canard, the new turbo version would rate better than the original yachts with smaller rigs,





Opposite page: the Cookson 50s High Five and Wingz. This page: the new Elliott 50 Rantan II (above) and Outsider being built at Salthouse Boatbuilders for Tilmar Hansen

shallower draft and trim tab. Apparently the trim-tab penalty is an anomaly. It was aimed at discouraging owners of fixed keel yachts from heading down the trim-tab track, but it has ended up working against the canting keel yachts and driving them towards the three-foil configuration. Cookson is hopeful that the IRC rule-makers may address this situation at their next round of deliberations.

The new turbo-version will be raced locally in New Zealand at the Bay of Islands Regatta in the summer, before being shipped to its owner in the US. It will be interesting to compare performance with the two local standard versions, plus a possible third campaigner from Australia.

The Elliott designs are more complex. *Sportivo* boasts a deep-draft canting keel that also lifts to allow the owner to tie up at his jetty on the Tamaki River in Auckland. For the same reason, it has an externally hung lifting rudder. This yacht has a forward canard and a rotating wing mast and a slippery hull-form, with minimal accommodations below.

Since *Sportivo*, two similar yachts have been commissioned, both built at Salthouse Boatbuilders in Auckland. One, for a Wellington owner, is already sailing and features a powerful flat-top AC-style mainsail. The keel still lifts, but with an hydraulic system as opposed to *Sportivo*'s mechanical system. The rudder is in-board and the rig is a two-spreader non-rotating arrangement. "We have made some

concessions to the IRC rule," said Elliott. "The rotating rig was very heavily penalized and we have included a forward berth, which gives us some credits as well."

A third version is now under construction at Salthouse Boatbuilders for German owner Tilmar Hansen, who has had a number of yachts called Outsider. Hansen bought a previous Elliott fixed-keel 50 called *Maverick* for racing on the Baltic





The Bakewell-White Yacht Design 52-footer currently under construction for Rob Bassett and partner

where it has done well, but he wanted a new boat for next year's race from Newport R.I. to Hamburg.

Elliott says the attraction of these yachts is their astonishing performance at a fraction of the cost of competing in the TP52 league. "Regardless of the cost, not everybody wants to run a professional crew the size of a football team with all the organization that is required," said Elliott.

Hansen will race *Outsider* with a crew of eight, occasionally 10. This version will not have a retracting keel (consequently the draft is somewhat reduced), but the keel has been designed to be removed, so that the yacht can be easily transported to various events around Europe.

Hansen intends bringing a core crew to New Zealand this summer to compete locally, including the demanding RNZYS Round North Island Race. He will use the southern summer to work the boat up for the Transatlantic race, after which it will probably go on to race at Cowes and in the Fastnet Race.

Bakewell-White's contribution to the equation is a 52-footer built for a long-standing client, Rob Bassett, who this time has a minority partner, Brett Russell, involved as well. This yacht features a very powerful sail-plan (206 sq m of upwind sail area) and a keel that cant to 55 degrees. "The clients wanted a yacht fully powered up in 6-8 knots of breeze," noted Brett Bakewell-White.

Currently under construction by Lloyd Stevenson, this yacht is intended for local racing, as well as passage races to Fiji and campaigning in Australia at events like Hamilton Island Race Week. Bakewell-White said the interior accommodations would be similar to the Cookson 50s, in line with a 'racer-cruiser' definition.

It features a forward canard and trim tab, which – if Mick Cookson's grumble is correct – suggests some resistance from the IRC. "This has not been oriented towards IRC," conceded Bakewell-White, "although it will be rated under that rule."

The sail-plan is fractional, although the hounds are so far up the rig it is almost a masthead configuration. Sails are being developed by Richard Bouzaid from the local Doyle loft. Bouzaid is bringing his experience from Alinghi and, perhaps more particularly, the Ericsson Volvo Ocean Race campaign to bear on this project.

"The boat has a powerful hull shape,"

"Outside of the TP52 scene, we will have one of the hottest 50ft fleets in the world right now."

– Brett Bakewell-White

said Bakewell-White. "Although it is not overly beamy, it is quite slab sided. We expect it will be sailed in a very similar way to the Volvo 70s."

Add to this mix, yachts like the converted TP52 V5, which now sports a canting keel plus canard, and some well-campaigned fixed keel 50s and this summer looks set to provide some fascinating battles. "Outside of the TP52 scene, we will have one of the hottest 50ft fleets in the world right now," said Bakewell-White, echoing a similar remark from Mick Cookson.

While the 50s are gearing up for their local battles, eyes will be on a bigger contest offshore when the Rolex Maxi Worlds seem set for an anticipated showdown between two Kiwi campaigns, one led by Neville Crichton with his new Reichel-Pugh *Alfa Romeo* and the Elliott-designed *Maximus*, owned by Charles St Clair Brown and Bill Buckley.

Maximus, it will be recalled, had its 2005 season truncated when it lost its mast during last year's maxi worlds and has yet to line up against the new-generation maxis.

Now with a new rig, waterfront observers from afar will be intrigued by how well *Maximus* shapes up in that battle, although Crichton probably has his sights more focused on the Australian *Wild Oats* campaign, with scores to settle from their hard-fought Sydney-Hobart clash.