



BOATING
Test

Eclipse throws light on

Elliott Success

While the great trailer yacht debate of 1987 (over which design is faster) will doubtless continue for many seasons yet our test yacht this month is aimed at a market where speed is but one of the desired features.



TOP: On the burst, the Elliott 7.4 proved exhilarating yet easily-controlled.

LEFT: Eclipse's experimental fibreglass mast stood up to all we could throw at it.

BOTTOM LEFT: Our speed was slowed by the sharp chop of wind on tide.

BELOW: Upwind, Eclipse was stiff and dry, making it difficult to wet the side decks.



The Elliott 7.4, now in full production, is a family trailer yacht intended, above all, to provide safe and easy sailing for both inexperienced and hot shot seafarers.

With healthy cynicism we listened as designer Greg Elliott would have us believe the 7.4 to be as solid and reliable as the family Labrador (hopefully with a bit more oomph) and entrusted him with the standard response: "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

"Try for yourselves, you mongrels," intoned our equally-articulate designer.

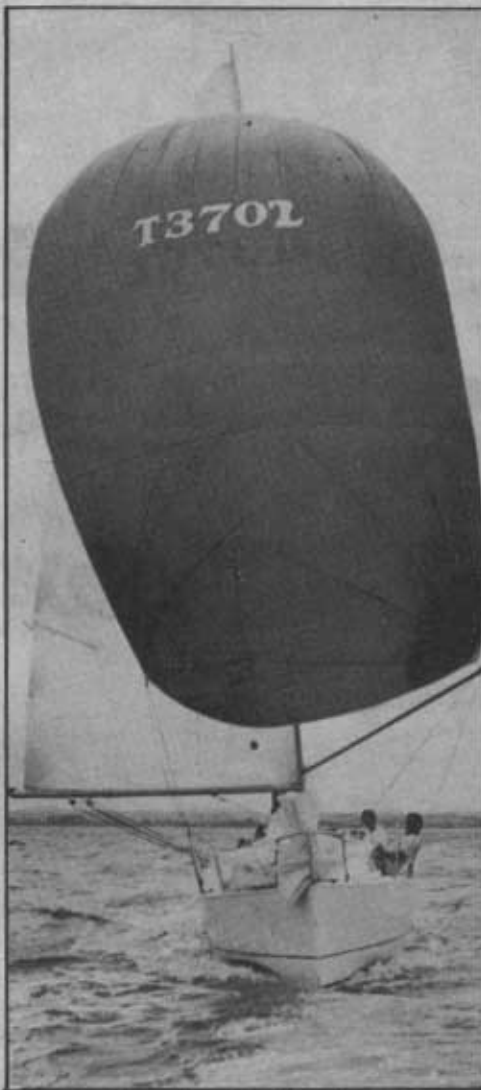
Taking Elliott up on his offer, we head for Auckland's Westhaven Marina, all the canine references already creating some unflattering images of what lies ahead.

It is difficult not to sympathise with designers who have produced one or two line honours machines. They frequently face the marketing hurdle of convincing average buyers their yachts can perform and still be "user-friendly" family cruisers.

Awaiting us in the launching ramp car park is Eclipse, the 7.4 we hope will not keep us in the dark for too long on the abilities of the new Elliott trailer yacht.

As the 7.4 is simply despatched into the Waitemata we watch with dismay as our grey, overcast test day commits the cardinal indiscretion of dispensing with what little wind had been present.

A dismayed Elliott is consoled with the suggestion that this be a practice run for a later sail in "real wind." This contingency plan is later proved unnecessary by a welcome return of the breeze.



Spinnaker handling was a breeze — even gybing three-handed in 18 knots of wind.

The stern-mounted Tohatsu 8hp outboard is fired into action and we head from the shelter of the boat harbour to the equally-calm harbour. As Eclipse's Suntek log has not yet been connected all our boat speeds for the day are based on TG (team guess). Under TG we clock an easy 5 knots without the Tohatsu raising a sweat.

The motor installation is very neat with the separate tank residing in a bin beneath the cockpit floor. This setup worked beautifully — except for the fuel hose which, instead of making its way to the engine beneath the cockpit, emerged to run aft along the cockpit floor. When trodden on by a large seaboot the hose, as discovered, refuses the motor's demand for fuel.

Accommodation

With the wind AWOL, we leave Eclipse to describe random 360-degree turns under sail while we concentrate on exploring the 7.4's accommodation.

The interior is larger than expected — even with the luxury of full headroom from companionway to focsle.

Being a production yacht available at almost any stage of construction, the 7.4 has a range of interior options. Eclipse's layout features a double cabin for'ard of the mast bulkhead with a long single-piece moulding each side running aft to the quarter berths.

The for'ard cabin has space for a surprisingly generous double berth. Light and ventilation are supplied by the perspex Weaver hatch on the sloping for'ard end of the cabin-top. Frontrunner synthetic carpet lines the hull while a patterned finish has been applied to the glass in the cabin-top.

Eclipse has been fitted with a chemical toilet beneath the for'ard berth although the mould allows for a flush toilet if desired. Privacy for'ard is accomplished by a folding door at the

bull bottom in the saloon. As there is no bilge, any water spilt or splashed below sits in this carpet.

The one-piece moulding to starboard is essentially one long bunk, incorporating saloon settee berth and quarter berth. All bunktops have cut-outs for stowage while the backrests pull away from their velcro attachments to reveal further stowage space. Smaller items needed more frequently can be kept in the small shelves fitted above the settee berths.

While Eclipse is without one, a drop-leaf saloon table is an option which can be extracted from beneath the companionway stairs as required.

All interior timber trim aboard Eclipse is kauri, the light hue of the wood taking much of the sting out of an otherwise largely-plastic environment.

While Eclipse has sleeping room for five, fewer than that number would be ideal for comfortable cruising. The accommodation has been well thought out, stowage space in particular being more abundant than we would have expected on a yacht this size.

Construction is of GRP, coremat in the hull laminate and foam/coremat in the deck.

Sailing

The manhandling by two tugs of an apparently-dead warship down Auckland Harbour toward the Devonport base proves to be the omen we desire. The wind returns.

This breeze, from the southwest, quickly climbs to 10 knots, then 15 and eventually settles between 15 and 18. Sailing up under the Auckland Harbour Bridge toward Kauri Point, Eclipse is pointing very well and tracking easily. A moderate weather helm produces some helm weight, but certainly not enough to worry even the

breeze.

breeze — even gybing three-handed in 18 knots of wind.



In the "Factor 360" test, a meaningless diversion from serious boat testing where the yacht is circled from hard-on to hard-on without easing sheets, Eclipse sets a new time record of 19.4 seconds.

The prime impression is that of the 7.4's stability. Even with two heavyweights lounging to leeward, Eclipse is unfazed. In fact the only problem we encounter on the upwind section of the test is a slipping jib halyard which is eventually tied off at the jammer.

The mainsheet system is nicely positioned to allow the helmsperson to look after the main while the yacht is being sailed short-handed. However the jib camcleat seems oddly positioned — the sheet having to run over the top of mast control lines on its way to the camcleat on the sloping aft end of the cabin.

Keen to get the little Elliott trucking, we ease off to evaluate her two-sail reaching. As with most other lightweight fractional yachts she instantly transmits extra weight to the helm. Compensating for this is the more comfortable ride and increase of speed — with bursts to more than 7 knots.

Bearing away for the run back down to the harbour bridge and Westhaven, the test squad quickly have the kite set and the little Elliott trucking.

With only three on deck, Eclipse is spinnaker gybed without drama and continues her downharbour burst — whitewater bursting from the rudder as we clock more than 9 knots. The 7.4 is now heavy on the helm, possibly due to loading of the rudder gudgeons as a

result of definite twist being forced into the rubber blade.

Our test crew feel a rudder blade frame stronger than the alloy one fitted would be needed to resist the twist developing in the blade when the yacht hits speed.

Elliott challenges the crew to force the 7.4 back toward the breeze under pinnaker — a manoeuvre which will further test the rudder, the experimental fibreglass mast being used — and the yacht's stability.

Eclipse tracks up, her angle of heel steadily increasing, with no apparent intention of rounding up. Only when driven up into the wind heavily does the yacht finally oblige. But it's a friendly affair and, after helm adjustment, we are once more flat running for home.

Although initially disconcerting, the great gurgling and a'churning emanating from the centrecase is quickly forgotten in the exhilaration of a quick kite ride.

The Dave Marks-developed fibreglass mast performs faultlessly throughout the test. Although not offered as an option with the 7.4, Elliott says it is being tested with the main intention of fitting glass masts to larger yachts.

Elliott sees the main advantages of the masts being the extra stiffness and weight reduction over aluminium extrusions available.

"As yet the main advantage is with large yachts as there is no real gain on small boats unless exotics are used."

Marks' experimental mast appears to produce a more progressive bend than its alloy counterparts which in rigs of the type used generally bend off in the top part of their taper.

applied to the glass in the cabin-top.

Eclipse has been fitted with a chemical toilet beneath the for'ard berth although the mould allows for a flush toilet if desired. Privacy for'ard is accomplished by a folding door at the mast bulkhead. Attractive patterned squabs, largely blue and red, are featured throughout the yacht.

The case for the drop keel divides the saloon, with the galley to port. The one-piece moulding to port includes a hanging locker aft of the mast, the bench, sink, self-draining stowage bin (possible ice box), small utensil drawer, space for yet-unfitted two-burner/griller stove, plate and cup locker — as well as settee berth running into the port quarter.

A grey synthetic carpet covers the

Sailing up under the Auckland Harbour Bridge toward Kauri Point, Eclipse is pointing very well and tracking easily. A moderate weather helm produces some helm weight, but certainly not enough to worry even the young or slightly-built.

Speed, again by TG, is around 5.5 knots until we are slowed a little by a characteristically steep tidal chop. Through the slop, Eclipse is well-balanced and remarkably dry — her full hull form and stability making it quite a task to wet the side decks.

We are impressed by the 7.4's silent progress through the seas. The rounded topside shape all but eliminates slamming off the waves we encounter. Tacking is a simple and nimble operation. ★



A combination of wind and sea — and Eclipse was quickly onto the plane.

The Vitals

LOA	7.4m (24ft)
LWL	6.8m (22ft 4ins)
Beam	2.45m (8ft)
Draft (keel up)	400mm (1ft 4ins)
Draft (keel down)	1.7m (5ft 6ins)
Displacement	2200 kgs (4840 lbs)
Ballast	450 kgs (990 lbs)
Sails	Sobstad
Engine	Tohatsu 8hp
Winches	Barlow
Rig	Marks (fibreglass)
Manufacturer	Elliott-type Yachts Ltd
Factor 360	19.4
Sailaway	\$31,906



A neat little galley — complete with stove, lockers, sink and ice box bin.

The mast certainly shrugged off all that we threw at it — including the self-inflicted, spinnaker-powered roundup.

The only modification we could suggest for Eclipse's rig is the addition of a windex. That would have been greatly appreciated — especially when gybing the spinnaker.

Eclipse's deck has already won our approval for its thoughtful layout and ample work space. The moulded non-skid system also works well so long as the crew does not step on border regions which are bald of grip.

The 7.4 has no toerails which means less secure footing for'ard but more comfortable seating on the wide clear side decks.

A small anchor locker is fitted at the bow with cleats either side for tying up. A small fairlead fitting is positioned at the stemhead.

The Marks fibreglass mast is supported by wire rigging and Graham rigging screws. Spars other than the mast are by Mast & Spar Services.

The rig setup is typically Elliott — single swept spreader with check spreader above — and no backstays.

All mast controls lead aft to the cockpit where Barlow 16 winches and three-piece Easylock jammers make the adjustments needed.

A Plastimo compass is fitted to port of the companionway with the Suntek log (unwired) to starboard. Both instruments are clearly visible from the helm position on all points of sailing.

The neat cockpit floor bin for the outboard tank has already been discussed — with the strong recommendation that the fuel line stay below the cockpit floor to avoid large rampaging seaboots.

The cockpit lockers positioned at each quarter are nothing less than impressive. Their volume, certainly not out of place aboard much larger yachts, will be more appreciated when away cruising.

Neatly built into the cockpit coaming to starboard is the manual hydraulic pump for lifting the drop keel. With about 150 pumps to raise the keel, the skipper or crew will certainly have earned a cool beer by the time the yacht is back on the trailer.

Summary

The Elliott 7.4 slots into the trailer yacht market as an ideal harbour/lake racer or coastal cruiser.

Our test yacht Eclipse, complete with experimental fibreglass mast, proved safe and easy to handle on all points of sail — and exhilarating on some.

Even when we were deliberately provocative — sitting to leeward and forcing the bow to wind under spinnaker, the 7.4 was unfazed and forgiving.

There is no question that the yacht has been well thought out for racing, cruising or living aboard. It was gratifying to discover that, unlike some drop keel yachts, the 7.4's keel cannot drop out through the bottom of the boat — the hydraulic ram and wire support strop combining to make this unachievable.

Launching and retrieving the 7.4 was a no-drama operation. While a 2-litre car would be adequate for this more power would be needed for long hauls.

Of the problems we encountered during the test, the rudder setup was the main one — and, we feel, the culprit in developing a heavy helm downwind. A simple beefing up of the frame in which the rudder blade sits should eliminate the blade twist and consequently the loading on gudgeons — and on the helm.

Of lesser nuisance was the fact that the 7.4 has no bilge — which means any water taken aboard will splash around in the saloon carpet.

Despite these problems it was difficult not to develop considerable regard for the Elliott 7.4. The yacht is a good looking, well-built production boat. It only took us a few hours at sea with the 7.4 to be convinced that this trailer yacht is definitely "user friendly."