



A fun machine that can also go sailing in the dark... Now into his eighth decade Kiwi master boatbuilder Dave Wade delivered Greg Elliott's latest race-record special on time and on budget; also the first yacht that Wade had ever attempted in carbon. Elliott is best known for 'rating-free' speed bandits, several of which found their way to Europe where they then took giant-killing to new heights. Elliott's new E30 weighs just 2-tons, including an 800kg lifting keel and two 500-litre water ballast tanks; we reckon that Dave Wade's first carbon build went quite well. A European IRC 30-footer would weigh about 750-850kg more... but that's not really the point, is it?

## NEW ZEALAND

The buzz of interest around the recent launch of an all-carbon locally built Greg Elliott 30-footer highlights what is largely lost and gone from New Zealand. The rise of imported production boats and the attendant decline of Kiwi boatbuilding have made events like this all too rare. Time was when the arrival of summer brought a flurry of waterfront excitement and intrigue as new projects emerged from professional yards and suburban backyards. Radical design ideas flowed from the drawing boards of prolific local designers fast building international reputations, while their rivalries matched the intense competition of owners and builders to enrich Kiwi racing bloodlines.

At the same time long-nurtured dreams of cruising over the blue horizon met fulfilment in capable offshore yachts – almost always with a healthy dash of performance embedded in their lines. Dockside cognoscenti feasted on the new arrivals and debated their merits.

But those excitements are long gone amid the plethora of look-alike imports that now fill New Zealand's marinas. Small wonder then that boatbuilder Dave Wade – a man of few words and quiet demeanour – looked somewhat bemused at the flurry of enthusiasm over the pre-Christmas launching of his distinctive new project.

Wade has been building boats professionally for half a century but this was his first foray into carbon construction. With all the hallmarks of an excitement machine, it was conceived as an antidote to Covid confinement. 'I phoned Greg Elliott and said I was bored and needed to do something,' says Wade, who has history with Elliott designs. In 1999 he built an 18m fast schooner to an Elliott design. Then, five years ago, he was approached by an experienced

client looking to build an Elliott-designed trailer-sailer that could be launched off the beach in front of his home.

Elliott's plans were for a plywood and glass glue-and-tape 22-footer, which he reckoned could be marketed as a flatpack concept suitable for amateur homebuilders – going back to the backyard origins of New Zealand sailing.

Wade's client had a change of heart but he built the boat anyway. 'I thought it looked like a bit of fun,' he recalls. 'I had a bigger yacht at the time, but found we were having so much fun with the trailer-sailer the bigger one hardly got used.'

Eventually, however, the agility and hiking required to get the most out of the trailer-sailer became too physically demanding, so Wade began thinking about something in the 10m size range. Covid ennui provided the perfect opportunity to do something about it.

Originally the idea was to strip the carbon mast and Harken deck gear off his bigger yacht and build a new, more performance-oriented hull. But an analysis of cost and practicality ruled out that idea and he and Elliott settled on a 9m plan. 'I was actually working on a 10m design with somebody else,' says Elliott. 'In terms of budget there is a significant difference across the board between a 10m and 9m.'

Wade's frustration with his larger yacht, which he bought as a part-completed hull and finished to a high spec, was that the hull did not stand up to the carbon rig. 'The hull flexed and it drove me nuts because you could not retain rig tension.

'Greg reckoned the only way to overcome that was with a carbon hull. I had never done a carbon boat before, but I agreed to go with it. My original brief was for a simple, fast, fun boat. It has ended up a little faster and more complex than I intended, but that's Greg. As soon as I agreed to carbon his eyes lit up and he was off to beat the world.'

Indeed, Elliott's enthusiasm for this project even extended to helping with the carbon lay-up and continues to keep his eyes alight after the first couple of sails. 'It is a wonderful project,' he says. 'I am so proud of what Dave has done. It definitely got more technical than when it first started out. That is probably my fault,' he admits with a decidedly unrepentant chuckle.

Design considerations included limited-draft access and a requirement for shorthanded sailing. A drop fin and 800kg bulb keel – deployed with an electric winch – is locked in the down position

IVOR WILKINS

to provide a fixed sailing draft of 2.6m; the up position allows berthing in about half that depth.

A pair of 500-litre water ballast tanks further boost righting moment. These features influenced other decisions too: twin rudders and distinctive hard chines, extending from a narrow waterline beam to push the water ballast tanks as far outboard as possible – while also providing plenty of form stability when heeled.

Each ballast tank has its own electric pump and a scoop that can be lowered and swivelled fore or aft to fill or drain respectively. The water can also be shifted rapidly side to side in tacks and gybes.

Snugged in its marina berth with barely a ripple in evidence, the boat dances and tugs at its mooring lines signalling its lightweight construction. 'With its wide beam this is not a small 30-footer,' says Elliott, 'but the displacement is only 2 tons. Even performance production boats of this size in Europe tend to be about 2.5 tons, some closer to 3 tons.'

All this translates into sparkling performance. With systems and set-ups still being sorted and a starting sail inventory limited to main, jib and gennaker, the first outing saw the boat sitting on 16kt in an 18kt breeze at an angle of 130°.

The second outing was in lighter conditions, averaging 10kt of breeze. Upwind it nudged 7kt, while downwind saw 10kt with minimal pressure lifts resulting in glimpses of 12kt. Observing from off the boat, it was striking how neutral the helm was on all points of sail and how little fuss was left in the wake.

'On both occasions we were probably a bit light with weight on the rail,' says Wade, 'and we did not use water ballast at all. Let's get the basics sorted before adding that to the mix. But with a bit more righting moment the numbers would probably have been a bit more.'

Although Wade found his first foray into carbon construction extremely labour intensive – 'it took two and a half years to build' – the result is an impeccable finish, testament to old-school craftsmanship. He is also impressed by the performance gain: the structural stiffness means no more issues retaining rig tension, which obviously makes the sails more efficient and with instant acceleration.

Wade believes a crew of five to seven would be about right for most racing – and that is how he intends to campaign the boat, primarily in passage events. However, all its features – including a removable camping galley – also make it an ideal candidate for our steadily growing two-handed racing scene, with events like New Zealand's hotly contested Round North Island Race, or even the Sydney-Hobart.

'The idea was for this to be a two-handed boat,' he agrees, 'but I am getting too old for shorthanded racing – that is a younger person's game. But I might let somebody else use the boat for those types of races.' (Using Wade's mould, a second version, with a canting keel,

is already under construction specifically for two-handed racing.) Wade is more interested in events like New Zealand's premier passage race, the 120nm Coastal Classic from Auckland to the Bay of Islands. Greg Elliott's designs are writ large in the records for that race. His 35SS design, *Crusader*, holds the 10-hour-plus-change record not only for its own size category (sub-10.66m) but also for the next size up (sub-12.91m).

Elliott acknowledges this new boat has a strong resemblance to his 35SS design, but with the benefit of more than a decade's development. It is, however, strikingly dissimilar to another Elliott 9m design, a narrow canting keeler called *Overload*, which set a 2009 Coastal Classic record of 10h 23m in its size band. Elliott was onboard for that race and is clearly itching to topple his own record with this new project. Not usually given to hyperbole, he is clearly smitten with this project: 'It's bloody awesome,' he declares.

'It is very user-friendly too. Good materials, careful design and very clever build work have kept the weight down and achieved healthy stability. There is no secret in yacht design: it is about the lightest boat with the most stability. It is as simple as that. That is the game we are playing.'

Ivor Wilkins