

Elliott shows his Easy Touch





The ultimate endorsement of any design would have to be a boatbuilder committing themselves to female-moulded, one-design production. This 11m IMS design now joins the growing list of production classes from the board of designer Greg Elliott.

The design is a progression of Neutrino, another 11m Elliott design, which won the Auckland to Fukuoka race in 1993. While that race was underway this new design was being developed, and it didn't take long for Melbourne marketing consultant and the principal of New Yachts, Peter Fellows, to commission a full set of female moulds for full-scale production.

Easy Touch, the prototype, just missed out on being part of the Australian team in the Southern Cross Cup when displaced from the national team by the in-form Assassin. This did come as a bit of a disappointment, but the trials were the boat's first regatta, and Elliott says the boat is only now beginning to reach a high state of tune. Easy Touch went on to represent the Victoria A team in the same event.

With all of these Australian connections it is a bit surprising to see the boat now sailing in New Zealand waters, chartered from its owners by long-time Elliott supporter Tom McCall. McCall chartered the boat for the 1994 Air New Zealand IMS Regatta and the Kenwood Cup later on this year, and if anyone knows how to

extract the most from this design, it is he.

The first attempt at getting aboard for our *Boating* test proves to be a bit of a washout, as the radio forecast of gale warnings sees the plan postponed for 24 hours. The following day the breeze has moderated to a 20 knot sou'wester, and the *Boating* test team is duly assembled, including a pair of readers keen to join the test team for the day. Lance Macintosh, a keen cruising sailor who owns a Challenge 29, is shown over the boat by Elliott as we all head out of Auckland's Westhaven Marina to get things underway.

With little time wasted, the mainsail is duly hoisted and one of the first things we notice is the size (or lack thereof) of all of the running rigging. The main halyard is Donaghys Spectrabraid, sans outer cover, leaving a very thin (about 8mm) of load-carrying braid. It is quite surprising how strong these small-diameter ropes actually are!

In anticipation of a quick blast down the harbour (and in an effort to keep the foredeck clean for the photos), the crew take the headsail off the bow and toss it into the forepeak with the rest of

the inventory.

With a crew of only six aboard there is room for everyone to work the boat downwind without the worry of getting someone else's elbow in your face. With the spinnaker up and doing its job there are only two people required to operate the boat, the spinnaker trimmer and helmsman, who has good control over the mainsail, thanks to the fine and fast trim system.

Reaching with an apparent wind angle of about 120 degrees, each gust has an immediate effect on boatspeed, going from 10.7 to over 12 knots in a matter of seconds. The helm weight varies very little throughout the gusts and the boat remains easily controlled, even while on the side deck steering with the tiller extension.

The deck layout is such that there is a minimum of movement required by the crew to get the most out of the boat. The vang is split and comes back to the aft corner of the cabintop. Being cleated on a pedestal clam cleat, it is easy to dump should things get out of hand. Fortunately this consideration to ergonomics is not needed today.

With the IMS rule comparing the actual performance against the computer predicted performance we do the very same exercise and find we are exceeding our "rated" speed by a minimum of 10 per cent (in the lulls), with this differential getting as high as 30 per cent. It is downwind rides like this that really make it hard to consider turning the boat around and heading back to the office upwind.

But as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end sooner or later, and we douse the spinnaker and hoist the 100 per cent LP kevlar/myular genoa and head back upwind. Both the running backstay and primary sheeting



Pipe berths above the quarterberths make up the required number of bunks to conform to the IMS rule.

for'ard from the traveller, located almost at the back end of the cockpit.

The two-part fine and fast mainsheet system is one of the cleanest we have used. The fast trim tackle is kept well away from the fine trim by locating it at the outboard end of the boom behind all of the crew. All that is in the centre of the cockpit is the final fall of the fast trim, which is cleated on a pedestal clam cleat. The fine trim splits and runs up to each side of the cockpit and cleats beside the topmast backstay control.

The short harbour chop which gave us a few surfs on the ride out of the harbour does little to slow our upwind progress and, despite the entire forefoot of the boat coming clear of the water, the crew on the side decks have

weigh the minor inconvenience of a rope to step over.

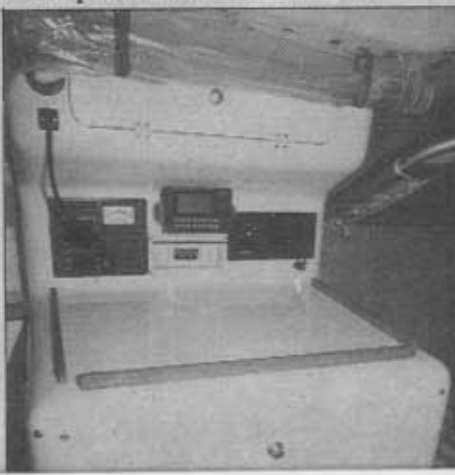
The rest of the deck layout is very simple. Two secondary self-tailing winches are on the cabintop and a bank of rope clutches are mounted above the companionway to handle all of the halyards and reefing lines. With all of the halyards, vang, checkstays and a myriad of other rope-tails all converging in the for'ard end of the cockpit, there is potential for a lot of rope snarls, but a huge tail bag below the hatch keeps them all under control.



tops, mast step, keel floors, keelson, engine beds and floor frames, making for an easily-maintained yacht. As we head down the companionway ladder, the first thing we notice is a teak and holly varnished floor. It seems a little out of place on a race yacht such as this, but it does make the overall feel of the saloon quite inviting.

Unlike a few IMS yachts we have had the pleasure of being aboard, Easy Touch does not have the nav table on top of the engine box under the cockpit floor. Instead, it is a fully moulded fibreglass unit to port, complete with clear drop curtains to screen the electronics (and navigator) from any water that comes down the companionway.

Looking aft under the cockpit we find a pair of quarterberths with a pipe berth fitted above. A Yanmar 2GM200 18hp saildrive is fitted under the cockpit floor with the fuel tank located immediately aft of this; the throttle remote is located in the back of the cockpit to starboard; the instrument panel is in the nav station.



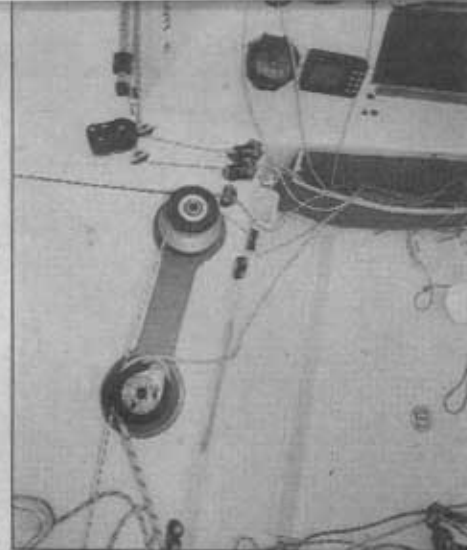
winches are located at the for'ard end of the cockpit, creating a lot of "spaghetti", but thanks to the rope manufacturers there are more colours available than jobs, and we can easily decipher all the ropes and their various functions. The headsail is sheeted to the for'ard of the two winches. For additional fine trimming of the sheeting angle, the headsail is controlled by a set of fore and aft barberhaulers right alongside the winch, allowing the trimmer to do everything without having to move anything but a hand.

Stacking the comparatively small crew on the rail, we begin our charge back upwind and we are surprised by the speeds we achieve, sitting at a little over 7 knots. The helmsman has plenty of things to brace himself against. There are decent-sized footbraces on the cockpit floor which also serve as a cover for the traveller lines that run

a dry and (relatively) comfortable ride.

A quick check of the IMS "numbers" shows our computer VPP is again a bit slower than our actual boatspeed. The certificate shows in 20 knots of breeze we are only "supposed" to do 6.8 knots.

We take some time out to have a closer look at the layout of the cockpit and see how efficient it is for the crew. In the course of our exploration we find the runner winches have been moved from the very back of the cockpit to their present for'ard position. The runner tails head directly from their chainplate on the transom centreline to the winch, taking them past the knees of the helmsman. This could catch the unwary off guard, but it is something one could easily get used to stepping over. The advantages of having the weight of the runner operator centralised would certainly out-



A very busy corner of the cockpit, with barberhaulers, spinnaker tweakers, vang, cunningham, backstays and checkstays.

On either side of the hatchway are a Brookes and Gatehouse multi-function display and a Plastimo tactical compass, supplemented by a set of jumbo displays mounted on the mast immediately below the gooseneck.

The positioning of these is good, as there is very little eye movement required by the helmsman to see the woolies on the headsail and the all-important boatspeed.

Easy Touch has been constructed with a balance of performance and economy in mind — vinylester resin, E-glass and S-glass around a PVC foam core — all finished in the usual gelcoat.

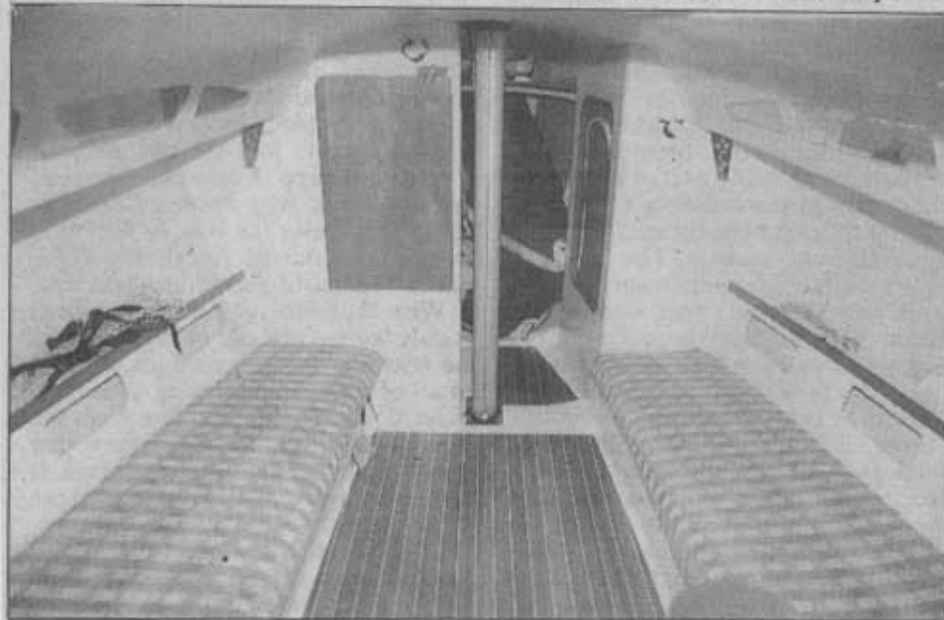
Interior inspection

The interior is fully moulded, with the liner forming the bunkfronts and



A functional nav table has clear plastic drop screens to keep the area dry.

Opposite the nav station is a small galley unit. This has a basic two-burner cooker and has a small sink with a manual water pump. Water tanks are provided in the form of two 90 litre bladder tanks fitted under the main saloon berths. The saloon berths have a comfortable backrest into which a wide shelf is incorporated. It is on this we find the ultimate in lightweight cup dispensers — a piece of PVC tube



The fully-moulded interior will stay in good condition for years.



To conform to the IMS rule there is the mandatory enclosed toilet compartment.





Despite the lack of crew on the rail, the heel is not excessive.

with a slot in one side that the cups are simply slid inside. This is light, practical and, best of all, well within anyone's budget.

Tucked away against the main bulkhead is the IMS-required table, while the mandatory IMS set of hanging lockers is in a large locker opposite the toilet compartment. The door to the hanging lockers is zipped out of the way and we find a series of 7oz sailcloth lockers, complete with solid bases and zip-closed doors. These IMS people take their weight conservation to some extreme limits.

The toilet compartment has a manual flush RM69. It has a rather solid-looking timber door sealing it from the rest of the world — but again the door is an ultra-lightweight model made to look heavy by its timber veneer.

The rest of the forepeak has been left empty except for the balance of the extensive sail wardrobe. If Easy Touch was turned into a cruiser-racer there would be enough space for a large double V-berth.

The interior finish is good, and the emphasis on light colours and lots of natural light through the abundance of hatches and long windows make the interior very livable. The fully-moulded interior liners would make this boat an easy one to keep clean and looking in good condition for quite a few years — you would just have to be happy with the colour scheme.

For those wanting to "cruise it up" a bit there is an option available aimed at the club cruiser/racer level. This one leaves out the in-line spreaders, running backstays, checkstays and the extra rope necessary to make these rigs work, and instead has the Elliott "trademark" wide-swept spreaders and is runner-free.

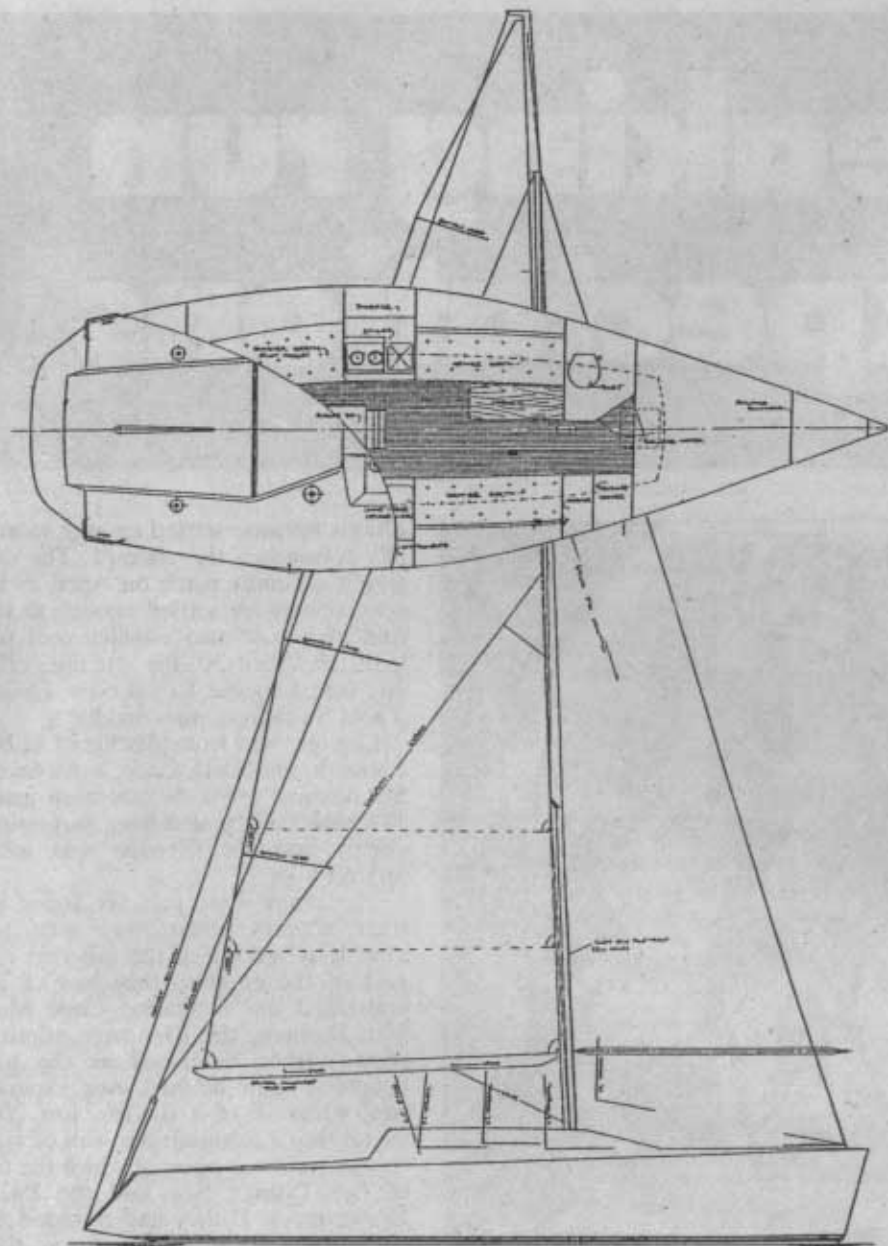
"I was surprised by the ease with which the whole boat is operated," says MacIntosh, our guest aboard for the day. "The deck layout has had some considerable thought put into it and I was impressed by how simple it is for the helmsman to have full control over the mainsail even upwind in the breeze we had.

"The interior, while only basic and aimed at the more serious racer, is still comfortable enough, the space being well used.

"Even though I was put on the rail at one part I stayed dry. One thing that



Lance Macintosh, our reader who joined us for the day, discusses the finer points of Easy Touch with designer Greg Elliott.



surprised me a bit was how central we carried the crew weight upwind — I guess we have been used to seeing these large, lightweight wide-bodied racers sail with the bulk of the crew in the cockpit.

“Upwind, we carried all of the weight centrally, with no passengers behind the helmsman, but downwind is nother story. The boat reacted very quickly to the gusts but remained stiff, reaching 25 degrees or so and stopping.”

The Elliott 11m was initially designed to be an affordable, flat-out IMS racer in the J35 and Mumm 36 size

bracket. This length of boat is a nice balance of size versus expense, producing a boat that can be sailed offshore (Easy Touch retired undamaged from the storm-ravaged Sydney-Hobart race to keep everything intact for future racing), and have relatively small and inexpensive deck gear. The result is an affordable yet competitive all-round package.

And the last word has to go to Macintosh: “Somehow, sailing my Challenge 29 is never going to be the same again!”

The vitals

LOA	10.97m
LWL	9.44m
Beam	3.58m
Displacement.....	4000kg
Ballast.....	1890kg
Draft	2.17m
Headroom	1.82m
Working sail area	81.8sq m
Designer.....	Elliott Boat Design
Builder	New Yachts, Melbourne
Engine	Yanmar 2GM 18hp Saildrive
Spars	Goldspar
Sails.....	North Sails
Instruments	Brookes and Gatehouse
Deckgear	Ronstan
Winches	Lewmar
Paint systems	Awlcraft
Price as tested	\$269,000