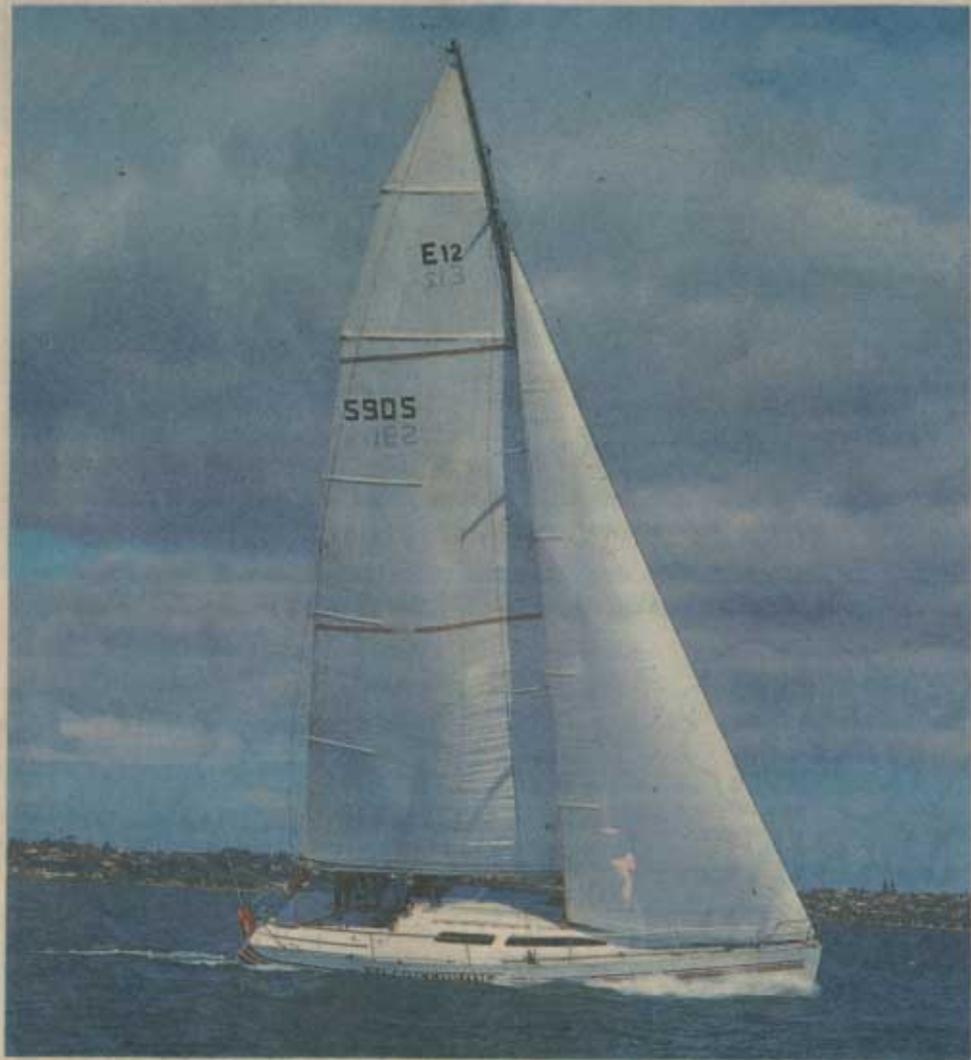




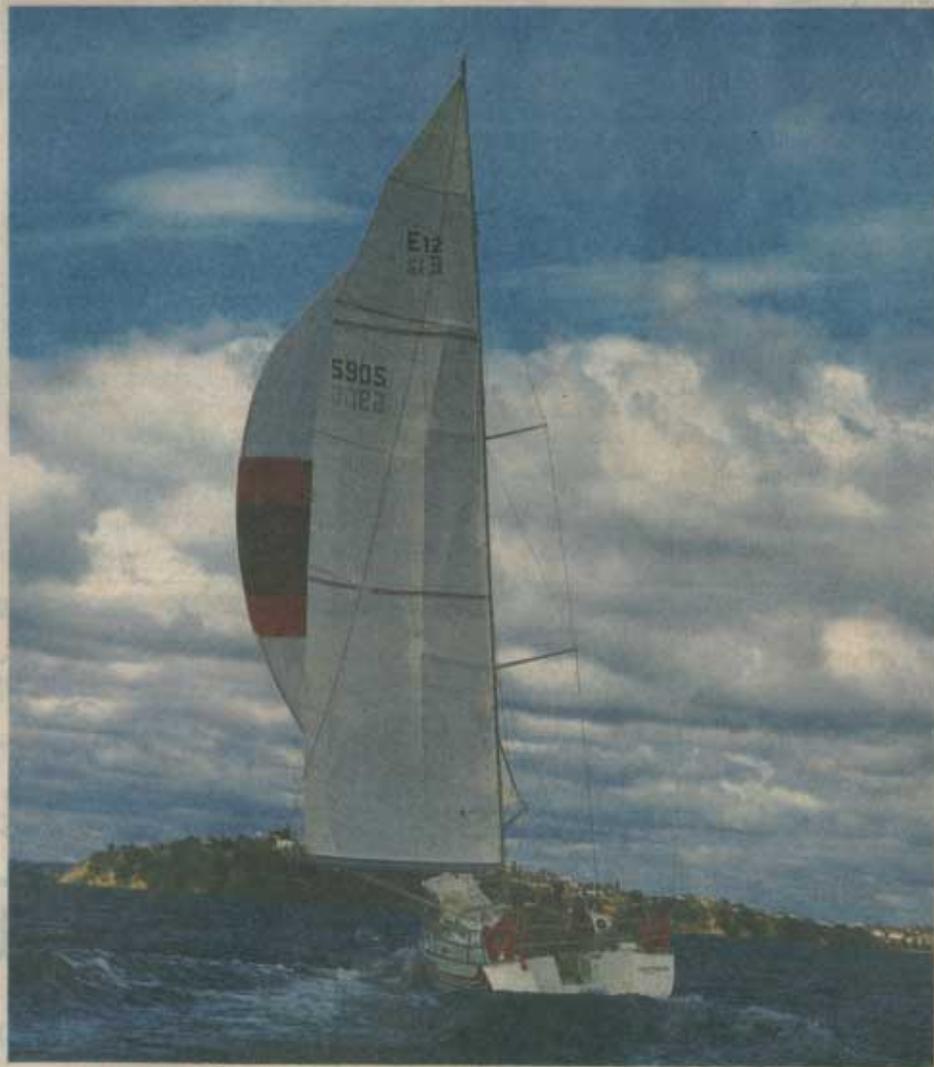
**BOATING
Test**

Transformer — an electrifying performer

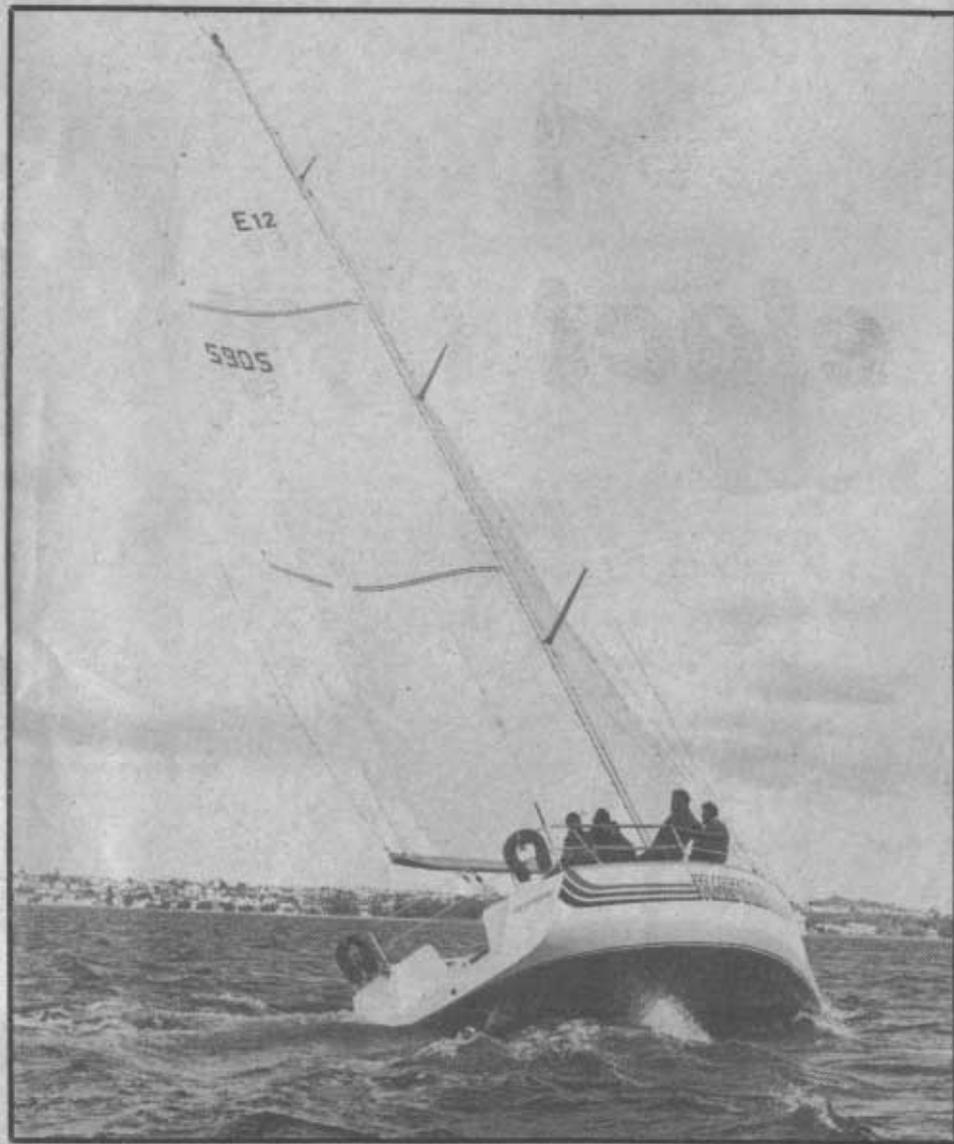
We sailed the Elliott 5.9 and were impressed, observed the 14 Metre Elliott, Party Pro, and were speechless. So when the opportunity presented itself to test the Elliott 12.5, Transformer, we were more than a little interested.



Upwind power — 7.5 knots with ease.



Scurrying along at better than 10 knots.



Look mum — no backstays.

Greg Elliott, 29, is an innovator, his designs testifying to the man's lateral thinking. Free of the restrictions of convention, Elliott has produced some interesting yachts — some are even quick, too.

We knew *Transformer* was a performer. She had taken line honours in the inaugural 1,400 nautical mile Tauranga-Brisbane race against some bigger yachts and was doing well in Auckland harbour racing. In harbour racing her strength was upwind in a breeze, her achilles tendon — light airs.

With this knowledge we were disappointed that early attempts to test *Transformer* were beset by zero to light airs. Eventually, however, we managed to scratch up a good southwesterly and set out onto Auckland's Waitemata.

Heading out to a rendezvous with Elliott and crew aboard *Transformer*, the *Boating New Zealand* photography runabout was dipping and plunging through the short southwesterly chop, white water flying over the cabin top.

The transformation in stepping aboard *Transformer* was immediate — the conditions suddenly appearing quite placid as the big, beamy yacht strode through the chop. Any thoughts that the weather has eased are dispelled as we watch the photography runabout continue its confrontation with the southwesterly — a conflict that proved a headache all day for the photographer as he attempted to catch and capture on film the Elliott 12.5.

Performance

It is time to get sailing. Up into the breeze and *Transformer's* huge, large-roached main is cranked skyward. Next we run downwind and centreboard is lowered fully. Elliott explains that the centreboard was fitted to *Transformer* for cruising, not racing. With the board up, the yacht draws

1.54m (5 ft) and has little trouble negotiating Auckland's tidal Tamaki River when departing or approaching the Half Moon Bay Marina. Dropped, the board increases the yacht's draft to 2.46m (8 ft).

Back onto the wind, and we are immediately impressed by *Transformer's* performance under main alone — a good 6 knots. The No 1 heavy is added and the Elliott really begins to truck upstream, the log crossing 7.4 knots so long as the helmsman concentrates.

We are delighted with *Transformer's* helm — so light, responsive and very sensitive. This is no gorilla stick — even a family lightweight could manage to keep things under control in a breeze. But it certainly is sensitive and, as Elliott stresses, "a half-inch either way makes a lot of difference". But once *Transformer* is dropped into the "slot" upwind, the helmsperson quickly receives the good vibrations and the log begins to show its appreciation.

Away cruising, the last tenth of a knot isn't quite as vital so the same demanding level of concentration is not required. Also from a cruising point of view the Elliott 12.5 is far easier on the helm than a number of much smaller production yachts we have sailed.

Tacking is simplicity. The non-overlapping jib (and the fact that the Elliott carried her so well) means the yacht can come about very quickly and be back in business on the new board without any significant loss of momentum. Forget those shoulder aching grinding of huge overlapping genoas with the skipper's demands for speed thundering in your ears.

We tack a number of times up the Rangitoto channel, all the time appreciating why *Transformer* does so well on this point of sailing during club races.

By now the breeze is a constant 20 knots

and looking pretty damn fine for a spinnaker ride. There's no real surfing size sea arounds so it will be interesting to see if these Elliott's can hum along on relatively flat water (the photographer disagrees with the flat water description).

One thing to appreciate when sailing with Greg Elliott — never get too settled on the helm. This fellow's rarin' to go and when there's excitement offering he'll commandeer the tiller with the finesse of a rampaging lock forward. If you run into a sailor with cauliflower ears, broken collar bone or dislocated shoulder you'll understand what has occurred.

Upwind, Transformer moves cleverly through the chop. There is no drama at the bow, the seas parting meekly to depart without fuss from the leeward quarter. Being beamy through to the stern, the Elliott 12.5 does dig her quarter in a little but not enough to produce one of those great washing machine stern gurgles the old, heavy rating yachts were famous for.

Elliott dives below for a spinnaker and eventually drags one on deck. Asked how he selected the correct kite for the conditions, he admits he doesn't know which kite he has but it must be the correct one as it is the only once bagged.

As the spinnaker gear is prepared we reach off for a better kite angle back toward the Tamaki river. Two sail reaching is the only point of sail where a little weight begins to transmit through the tiller — still not overpowering, even for a lightweight, though. The eased sheets bring their reward in the log — the speed lifting immediately and dramatically from just above 7 knots to well above 8 knots.

We bear off for the kite ride and after a few small gear muck ups the spinnaker is hoisted. Transformer is keen. Immediately we feel the yacht begin to wind up. We're just beginning to enjoy this downwind stuff when, thump, that great barefooted prop forward lands in the cockpit — still he did most of the work setting up the kite gear, and he did design the damn thing.

Pumping the tiller like a doomed sailor on



A powerful performer upwind.

most of the work setting up the kite gear, and he did design the damn thing.

Pumping the tiller like a doomed sailor on a bilge pump handle, Elliott, projects Transformer onto the plane. We better 10 knots easily in the flattening harbour waters and harden up to make the most of the breeze. Our accompanying ball of spray (and oaths) testifies to the photographer's woes as he grapples with chop and camera in a bid to catch up with the action.

The lensman finally hits on a solution — put up with the discomfort and charge ahead of Transformer to prepare an ambush. A great theory we all agree as we bear down on the now stationary runabout at night on 11 knots. Theories are there to be tested and this one is thoroughly tested as a gust trips us up into a broach. Not a great broach, as broaches go, but enough to put up on a collision course with the photography runabout. Whatever the world record is for leaping out from behind a camera to the throttle of a fizz boat — it has been broken.

The main is dumped, the kite flogs for a few seconds, and we are on our way again. The greatest impression of the whole affair being how stable the yacht is. She did not fall on her ear or even threaten to refuse to come back on course.

As we near the end of an enjoyable kite ride, we again examine Transformer's path through the water. No bow fuss and a lovely clean, flat (and wide) wake astern. During the bursts to nearly 11 knots, the wake began to rise in the centre — the beginnings of a rooster tail that shouldn't be difficult to raise with this yacht in any sort of surfing sea.

The spinnaker is doused, the sailing part of the test complete — time for a little reflection.

Our first impressions are of a big, roomy yacht with heaps of deck room and an easy layout. Transformer is very stable, certainly suitable for summer cruising without the

A powerful performer upwind.

need to hire a footie team to sit on the rail.

We loved the rig configuration. Like the Elliott 5.9, the 12.5 has no backstay, relying instead on heavily aft raked spreaders and very wide staying. Elliott is adamant that backstay (or runners) have no place on the yacht — even when gybing in heavy conditions. Great news for racing and cruising crews alike.

The tradeoff for this simplicity is some light airs, windward performance. Because of the wide staying, the Elliott cannot carry big overlapping genoas upwind. But then the non-overlapping jibs can be close sheeted onto cabin top tracks ahead of the mast.

Deck inspection

At dockside, it is time for a closer examination of the yacht. In the marina she does not immediately appear unorthodox — only modern racer-cruiser styling. Transformer is certainly not a radical looker like Elliott's own Party Pro.

A deck wander reveals a good sized foredeck for for'ard crew and cruising anchorman. Transformer is fitted with a good sized anchor locker and electric capstan. The yacht's owner's, Mick and Raewyn Neale, have built a "spare man" for Transformer. This is a little bowsprit which clips onto the bow and provides a fairlead far enough ahead of the yacht to keep the anchor from slamming into the yacht's fairly straight bow.

Crew security is provided by the standard pushpit-pulpit arrangement with stanchions and lifelines between. Transformer was equipped with an alloy toerail which gave adequate footing when the yacht was heeled.

Transformer was fitted with three Weaver hatches — one large model on the loading

edge of the cabin top for sail changing and crew access and two smaller hatches for ventilation — one over the toilet and the other over the saloon (also useful as a skylight).

Transformer's mast is a Yachtspars die 20 with a die 19 boom. As described earlier, the mast has no backstays but is supported by heavily aft-raked spreaders. The headsail tracks are mounted on the cabin-top (allowing close sheeting angles) deck tracks being only for reaching as the yacht can only use overlapping sails when off the wind due to the gunwale staying of the mast.

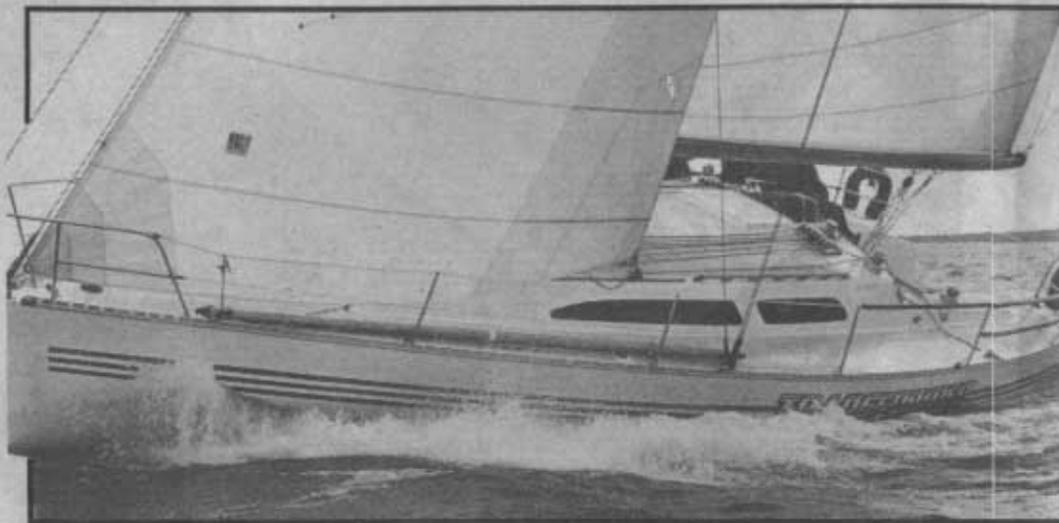
In a further departure from the norm, the headsails are sheeted onto the aft end of the cabin top rather than in the cockpit — there being no strings on the side deck other than the spinnaker controls.

The cabin top sheeting worked extraor-

dinarily well during our sail — the Barlow 44 also serving as a backup winch to the smaller 34 positioned each side to work the mast control strings, via 12 (six aside) RE Forespar rope clutches.

Another two Barlow 44s reside in the cockpit coamings — either as spinnaker winders or for working the mainsheet. If both spinnaker and mainsheet require attention, the kite strings can be taken for'ard onto the cabin top 44s. Sound complicated? It's not.

Transformer has a huge cockpit — making crew work uncluttered and clean as well as providing a generous area for after-match or after-cruise functions. The cockpit is T-shaped with two huge self-draining lockers positioned in each quarter. The engine controls are recessed into the starboard side of



Full main and No 1 heavy in a 20 knot southwesterly.

lack of topside flare and deep draft taking care of that.

After encountering a number of heavy helms lately, it was a delight to steer the Elliott 12.5. Only on a two-sail reach was any helm weight generated, control on all other occasions being a two-finger affair.

With at least two new production yachts of this size about to enter the New Zealand market this summer, it will be interesting to see how the Elliott 12.5 fares.

As well as being fun to sail, Transforme has loads of room for cruising. However the accommodation is probably the one area where some improvement would have to be achieved to compete against the production 40 footers, the finish on the Elliott not really being to the same standard.

But if pure sailing pleasure comes ahead of below-decks luxuries then this could be the yacht to transform your summer.



Principal dimensions

LOA.....	12.5m (41 ft)
LWL.....	11.4m (37 ft)
Beam.....	4.2m (14ft 4in)
Draft (board up).....	1.54m (5 ft)
Draft (board down).....	2.46m (8ft 6in)
Displacement.....	6,400 kgs (14,000 lbs)
Price as tested:.....	\$220,000