

Charter

Scene



**FREEWIND
SPIRIT
spacious
luxury
and fun
galore**

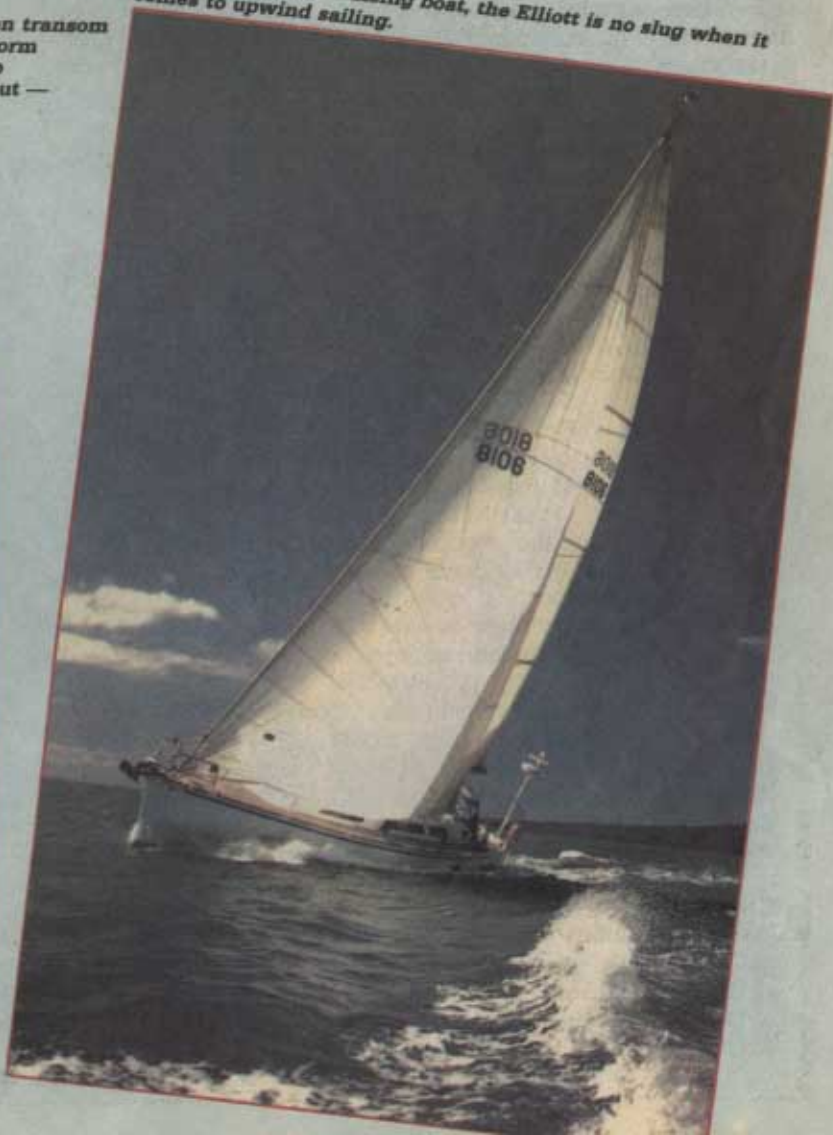
by Mike Rose

Blasting along under spinnaker, Freewind Spirit makes an impressive sight.

Freewind's open transom and large platform make it easy to get in — and out — of the water.

Dinner time. The food's superb and there's no need to dress.

Although a luxury cruising boat, the Elliott is no slug when it comes to upwind sailing.



First noticed was the huge saloon space that awaits at the bottom of the companionway. John laughingly calls this his "ballroom" and he's only half joking.

When intending charter yacht operators, John and Jill Grant decided to enter the corporate charter market, they looked and long and hard for the right sort of boat. They searched both here and overseas — largely in vain. A frustrated John — “we looked at over 600 boats, but couldn’t find what we wanted” — decided the only way to get what he wanted was to get commission a boat, at least partly to his own design, that would incorporate the features he wanted.

Wanting a big volume yacht that moved along at a decent clip he chose noted “fast yacht designer” Greg Elliott but provided the interior layout himself.

Wanting a top class boat, suitable for entertaining corporate clients, he chose boatbuilder Terry Bailey on Auckland’s North Shore.

Aware that his intended clients did not want to feel cramped and, being a tallish chap who shared the same feeling, he insisted that the interior had plenty of space — and plenty of headroom. In fact, it was one of John’s “design criteria” that he was able to take off his jumper without banging his hands on the deck head.

It is this dedication to space that is the first thing I noticed when I, and a few fellow staff and friends, arrived at the Westhaven marina berth of John and Jill’s magnificent Freewind Spirit. Along for the afternoon were **Marine Scene** sales manager, Shelley Taylor (taking a rare but well deserved break from the office), Colin Ferguson and his

sister Ngaire. Also along, at least for the first hour or so, was Hood Sailmakers Robbie Salthouse.

As mentioned, it was the huge saloon space that awaits at the bottom of the companionway that first gained my attention. John laughingly calls this his “ballroom” and he’s only half joking. This boat’s been designed to party — and most of the partying is likely to take place here. Freewind Spirit is based on an Elliott 13.7m and boasts a beam of 4.4m and a maximum interior height of 2.08m. Most of that huge internal volume is occupied by John’s “ballroom”. There is a double berth forward with en suite but, due to Freewind Spirit’s large beam, little of the yacht’s length is needed to make this of more than adequate size.

The same goes for the two double cabins aft — everything on this boat is big, it’s just that the ballroom is so much bigger.

Freewind Spirit’s galley is worthy of note, too. Designed for extended offshore cruising as well as the more sedate coastal waters variety, the galley needs to be one in which the cook can prepare food almost regardless of conditions. This requires a “tight” environment so the cook is not thrown about and this is a galley when the cook is almost locked away. On Freewind Spirit, however, the galley design meets the rough water requirements yet is large enough for two to work if required and, just as importantly, is open plan enough for the cook to feel part of the activities in the saloon.

Keen to get away, John and Jill insis-



Freewind's distinctive kite attracts attention whenever it's flown.



It's hard work this but someone's got to do it.

And some hospitality it was, too. These guys are in just the right job — like all really good charter skippers, they have no need to pretend — they really like to spend time with people. Once they figured the bulk of our “work” was over (i.e. the camera crew was back on board and we were heading for our anchorage), it was all on. Jill produced a neat selection of hors d'ouvres, more drinks were distributed, the music turned on and everyone encouraged to take a turn steering the boat.

The foldaway table in the cockpit is a permanent fixture, providing seating for up to eight people.

Another of John's design criteria was that those on deck should feel “in touch with the water”. He, therefore, had no desire for a centre cockpit and Free-wind's traditional cockpit also features an open transom and large boarding platform.

Wandering about the deck while others took their turn at steering, I was impressed by the amount of space — especially the amount of space between deck fittings. This came as a welcome relief to one used to stubbing his toes on a regular basis (the reasons are not important here, suffice to say a fear of dehydration has something to do with it).

Luckily, with the Grants on duty,

ted that the notepads and cameras were tucked away ("there's plenty of time for that, later"), cold drinks were distributed and the lines cast off.

As we motored quietly away from the marina I could not help but be impressed by Freewind's diesel which turned out to be a 60hp Yanmar. John, who was determined that everything on board be "the best of everything" said he chose the motor because he had always owned Yanmars and always found them reliable.

Hoisting the sails proves a no-nonsense affair thanks to the Furler roller furling genoa and the Hood Stowaway boom. The sails, both from the

Hoods loft, have been designed for shorthanded sailing in any conditions — a real bonus for a charter boat. Setting the sails is just as easy — and an activity the Grants encourage their clients to take part in — thanks to the well positioned and easy to use self-tailing Nordic winches and the Rutgerson rope clutches. No wildly flailing lines here to scare the punters.

With the photographer's "box brownie" out of its box and ready for action Robbie Salthouse made some last minute adjustments and proudly proclaimed his sails ready for the camera. On board the camera boat the view was of a large, yet relatively sleek looking

yacht, powering along at a surprisingly fast clip.

However, the best was yet to come. Turning off the wind Freewind hoisted her spinnaker, another no-nonsense affair thanks to a custom designed snuffer and a real eye-turner. Instead of the usual flares of bright, not-always-compatible, colours, there was a large dolphin, leaping majestically from a white background.

Once this beauty had been captured by the camera, it was time for Robbie to leave us (pressure of work apparently rather than any keenness to leave the party) while the rest of us got to experience the Grant's hospitality.

Luckily, with the Grants on duty, there is little danger of dehydration...

After a little gem of sail down the Motuihe Channel we dropped anchor in Home Bay, on the shores of a very dry-looking Motutapu Island. This was another of those sometimes difficult tasks made easy thanks to modern technology — this time an anchor computer.

When I comment to John about the speed with which his yacht covers the ground he explains that Greg Elliott has designed him a masthead cutter rig maximising Freewind's potential for speed.

Once at anchor, the relaxation really began. The stress of business, the discomfort caused by the high humidity and the post-holiday blues were all quickly washed away with a swim in the incredibly clear waters. A strange honking noise preceded the arrival of some saltwater-going geese which had come out from shore in the hope of a feed. Some wag's comments about "these guys can be ferocious" saw an exodus that would have put to shame the crowd scene in Jaws. Still Freewind's boarding platform easily accommodates two at a time, although competition for the

These transom showers (providing both hot and cold water) are a great idea, leaving the body refreshed and clean of salt after a swim. When combined with an early morning swim, they are also (or so I am led to believe) an excellent hangover cure.

After our swim some serious relaxation was called for and sunbathing seemed high high on the list of preferred tasks. John and Jill were again the consummate hosts, checking we had everything we desired, answering our questions and disappearing to prepare dinner when we started to "blob out".

John also erected his cockpit bimini, a practical device that shades the entire cockpit, proving a cool area out of the sun.

Auckland had delivered yet another magical day and anything other than a barbecue, we all agreed, would be sacrilege. However, the Grants explained, with their corporate clients a wide range of menus are available, from the popular barbecue up to and including full silver service.

After dinner, which was eaten al fresco (in the cockpit) and washed down with some excellent New Zealand wines, Colin took to the tender — a 2.4 metre Aquapro — and attempted to catch one of the bait fish that were hanging around. Armed with a set of Sabiki lures he jigged enthusiastically as the rest of the crew egged him on and warned about the dangers of dehydration. (It is difficult to drink and jig at the same time).

Undeterred he carried on and bagged a couple of yellowtail for his trouble.

With stereo, lights, desalinator, weatherfax, GPS, radar and three hot water showers, and several other electrical appliances (this amazing craft even has central heating) all going we wondered

John allayed our fears. A 4hp generator, again a Yanmar is available if needed — ensuring there is enough power for even the most persistent of late night revellers.

A quick sojourn to the galley to wash the dinner dishes showed us just what a well designed craft this is. With four of us all moving around the saloon, the lack of sharp corners and clever use of space was truly superb.

With everything stowed we upped anchor and headed back to Auckland, having to motor as the afternoon's sea breezes had all but disappeared. Again the Yanmar 60hp diesel did a top job, pushing us along at 8.5 knots at a volume that did not interfere with conversation at all.

After an afternoon aboard Freewind Spirit it was easy to see why John and Jill's charter operation is proving so successful. In their 18 months of operation they have attracted corporate clients who want a private business meeting in an unusual, yet conducive environment; those with their own boats who want to conduct business without having to be the skipper as well; and those who have decided that regular chartering makes better financial sense for them than owning their own boat. As well as day trips of the sort we experienced, the Grants also conduct a number of longer charters, both fully crewed and just skippered.

Dining under the stars in the generous cockpit while anchored in one of the Hauraki Gulf's secluded bays it's easy to forget that one is within striking distance of New Zealand's largest city. Partying down in the ballroom with mood lighting created by halogen spots and strip lighting, it is easy to forget one that one is even afloat.

As well as being a magnificent char-



Swimming in the clear waters of Home Bay is hard to believe that Auckland City is just "around the corner".

ter yacht, Freewind Spirit is also a strong advertisement for the New Zealand marine industry. From Greg Elliott, whose design blended so well with John's ideas; through builder Terry Bailey, whose artistry saw those ideas brought to fruition in such a superb fashion; to Quay Marine Electronics, who installed and interfaced the complicated array of electronics; to all the

suppliers who, respecting John's demand that "only the best" be fitted, ensured that everything supplied was the very best and that it was properly installed. The fact that John and Jill are very happy with their yacht — and in fact would not change a thing — shows what a good job was done. It also shows what a good job the Grants have done in bringing their dream to fruition. ■

Spec sheet

LOA	13.8m
LWL	12.3m
Beam	4.4m
Cabin height	2.08m
Draft	2.36m
Construction	Cedar core GRP
Displacement	11,000 kg