



BOAT TEST

French testing belle bateau

*It was to have been the ultimate opportunity to boat test:
the new Greg Elliott-designed Armini 55's maiden voyage from
Tauranga to Auckland with the designer on board.*

For the first attempt, winds gusting 100km/hr across the Tauranga bar kept even the most intrepid crews at home; for the second, winds of less than five made it a test only of the Yanmar 100hp engine. Finally we opted for two sailing excursions: one on the Waitemata, and a second photo shoot on the Tauranga Harbour.

But the delay meant that by the time we step on board at Westhaven, new owner Michel Chichemanian and his sons, Rudolph and Alex, are well acquainted with their new boat and have been living on board for the last few days. As *Armini 55's* sails fill to the breeze, the New Caledonian resident is still unable to wipe the grin off his face.

"I could not have got a French designer to do this," he says, indicating the yacht from bow to stern. He starts to explain but the language barrier has him stumped. Instead, he holds his hands straight out either side of his face, forming a narrow tunnel to look through. "They think ... like this," he says.

Rather than tunnel vision, Chichemanian was looking for a designer with the innovation to meet his specification for a fast luxury cruising boat, easily sailed shorthanded, with stylish, indoor/outdoor living arrangements suited to cruising around tropical New Caledonia. "This is a very different concept," he says.

Chichemanian's choice of an Elliott design began with his first sight of *Future Shock* in his home port following an Auckland-Noumea Race. Later, he saw *Transformer* and other Elliott boats. His French eye for aesthetics appreciated the sim-

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ple, clean lines, and even though he was looking for a cruising boat, the racer who has several Sydney-Noumea and Port Vila-Noumea races under his belt also liked their performance.

He also saw another boat, *What's Up Doc*, a 46' catamaran which had come from the Hutcheson boatyard in Tauranga. He liked the craftsmanship and suggested to Elliott that Hutchesons also build *Armini*, a coup for Hutchesons, now under the partnership of Charlie Greenaway and Don Mattson. She is so far their largest boat. Construction is cedar core with e-glass and kevlar laminate. The deck is PVC foam with e-glass laminates.

However, most of the Elliott designs that had captured Chichemanian's interest were racing boats and while he envisaged a cruising boat of medium displacement – *Armini* is 11 tonne unloaded – Chichemanian was adamant he wanted speed. He told Elliott: If you can't design me a monohull that gives me 10 knots, then I'd rather have a multihull.

He was assured that one hull could do the job.

The first impression of the final result, *Armini 55*, is probably vastly different to that which first drew Chichemanian to *Future Shock*. Where a racing boat flaunts its robust deck gear and myriad lines as testaments to strength and a taunt to the opposition, *Armini's* tactics are more subtle. Her *raison d'être* is to perform well in style and the actual mechanics of sailing are kept largely from view – her decks are completely bare of lines, except sheets for the gennaker or headsail. Instead, ropes run from their source at the mast or headsail beneath the deck. They re-appear at Lewmar jammer cleats in front of each helmstation, and, having completed their tasks, are coiled in large, self-draining tail lockers aft of the cockpit. Less than 500cm of each one is visible from the cockpit. Winch power comes from electric Lewmar 62 winches either side of the winch and Lewmar 48s, all from Kiwi Yachting, for headsail sheets.

Even the mainsheet traveller, usually an unavoidable piece of cockpit clutter, is out of the way on an arch above the aft cockpit; mainsheet controls run down inside the arch to the cockpit.

That leaves the cockpit free for the type of luxury seating usually found on a larger scale on a superyacht. Wide, comfortable, padded seating in cool green and cream stripes runs from either side of the saloon entrance and along each side of the cockpit; small folding tables are to be added. Behind seats and beneath the cockpit floor, there is masses of stowage space for fenders, gas bottles and the many important pieces of equipment that are best kept outdoors. Alternatively, lockers lift to reveal easy access to steering pedestals and other working parts of the boat. It is even possible, though not necessarily desirable, to crawl from one





end of the boat to the other beneath the deck where the lines travel.

Destined for the tropics and an easy indoor/outdoor living style, *Armini 55* borrows another notable feature from her larger superyacht sisters and has the cockpit and saloon on the same level – again, ideal for relaxed tropical entertaining. It definitely adds a certain sense of class and means the saloon has continuous windows all round. *Armini* has storm shutters available for offshore voyages.

The cockpit is open aft, with the sail controls and tail lockers separating it from the helmstations on either side of the boat. There are seats behind each helmstation, with a walkway through to the open transom and spacious boarding platform. The open walkway was the subject of some debate but Chichemanian felt that care is needed at sea anyway and he preferred to leave it open.

Switching from the inflatable to the mother ship is easy: the inflatable is simply driven right up onto the stern of *Armini* while she is under way and pas-



Armini features an indoor/outdoor living theme. Visibility is good from the saloon and galley areas. The cabins all have plenty of shelving and cupboard space. The winch for the retractable keel is beneath the bunk.

sengers step from one boat to the other while both boats maintain their speeds.

One person can easily manage most of the work involved in sailing. Autohelm gauges for wind speed and wind direction, boatspeed and depth are set to port of the entrance to the saloon. All sail controls, including those for the Leisurefurl mainsail, supplied by KZ Marine, are directly in front of the helm station.

In getting in and out of the marina, *Armini* is incredibly manoeuvrable, with 100hp available for her three-bladed, self-feathering propeller. Later, on the harbour, that power will push her easily at 9 knots. The foam deck and plenty of sound-proofing keep noise to a minimum while under power.

In view of Chichemanian's request for simplicity, Elliott kept the sail plan as simple as possible.



Sail power comes from a Spectra Leisurefurl main from North Sails, two furling headsails, of which the inner sail is self tacking with a club boom on a track, and a gennaker. Kiwi Yachting supplied the spars, hatches and deckgear; KZ Marine supplied the furling gear, Searig rigging screws and carbon chainplates. Constructing the chainplates in carbon enabled them to be kept light, without compromising on strength. In around eight knots of true wind speed, *Armini* sails at between seven and eight knots. As the breeze strengthens, she picks up to the magic ten knots under main and gennaker.

The Navtec boom vang is controlled from beside the starboard jammer cleats.

But while *Armini* has borrowed concepts in comfort from her bigger sisters, she has also taken aspects of smaller yacht designs to give her owner the fast performance he asked for, combined with



A spacious uncluttered cockpit with all the fiddly bits of sailing kept aft. For loading and unloading while underway, the inflatable is simply driven up on to the transom. All lines except sheets run beneath the decks until they reappear at the jammer cleats. They are stowed in the self-draining tail lockers



a shallow draft to allow her to cruise in tropical destinations. A retractable keel with bulb was the answer and her draft can be as little as 2m. Elliott was adamant that the ability to point high means nothing if a boat makes leeway, and for higher pointing and stability, *Armini 55s* bulb keel drops to 3.7m.

"The difference in efficiency with the keel down is just dramatic," he says. "A lot of cruising boats may be sailing 27 degrees off the wind, but with 4-5 degrees of leeway the real angle is more than 30 degrees. With this boat, when we start at 27 degrees, we'll be sailing close to that."

Putting a retractable keel on boats of *Armini's* size has, in the past, given problems with movement in the keel. Elliott designed the keel casing with a wedge shape so that the more weight put on it, the firmer it fits and there is no fore-and-aft movement when the keel is down. The keel is raised and lowered by a tow-truck winch from Sopac Marine Supplies set beneath the starboard cabin amidships. Although the keel casing takes up quite a lot of space within the boat, Elliott has disguised it as a division between the mid-cabin and walkway.

To achieve maximum waterline length, *Armini* also features the plumb bow characteristic of many Elliott boats, although the designer says it was definitely Chichester's decision. "The plumb bow is a debatable point," he says. "You get added waterline length and more buoyancy forward. The minus on a cruising boat is the anchoring aspect."

To avoid stem damage while anchoring, Elliott designed a retractable spareman for the bow. It has three positions: fully out, for anchoring; half out, for carrying the anchor on the bow while moving short distances between anchoring; and fully retracted for cruising.

Below decks, *Armini* is kept simple but practical, with as much as possible built in to the structure of the boat. The forward bow area is taken up by a collision bulkhead which doubles as stowage area with full headroom, accessible from the forward hatch.

The foremost part of the accommodation is a head, which acts as ensuite to the master cabin, immediately aft. A double berth is to starboard, with built-in shelves and lockers to port. Trim in Fijian kauri adds a light, tropical warmth to the off-white interior.

Further aft, there is another spacious bathroom and cabin with upper and lower bunks to port and two double, private berths to starboard.

Aft again, steps give a good definition between the living/dining area and




accommodation. The remote control for the retractable keel, and the switchboard, are beside the steps.

Being on the same level as the cockpit, the saloon area is light and spacious, with windows all round. The chart table and engine controls are to port, facing forward, and the galley aft with stove on the outer wall, and sink and servery bench running lengthwise along the boat, ideal for guests to help themselves as they enter from the cockpit. As with many boats, *Armini's* table is a centrepiece. Luxuriously padded seating curves around the starboard side of the oval Fijian kauri table adorned with *Armini 55* in gold. This is the type of understated elegance the French are known for.

That type of styling is evident too in *Armini's*

Top: The crew of Hutcheson Boatbuilders put on their best T-shirts for a second photo-shoot on Tauranga Harbour
Above: Two very real contrasts in sail boats

exterior lines, best seen in the photographs. Stern-to, *Armini's* flaring topsides are most apparent; the swept-back extension of the cabin top also echoes the look of larger luxury vessels.

But with any new boat, the name is all important. *Armini 55* borrows from the family members: Michel and Nicole, and their sons, Alex and Rudolph. The '55' is the length of the boat, and also the year of birth for Michel and Nicole. And, as Michel can trace his heritage back to Armein, there is also a touch of nostalgia in the naming of this ultra-modern design. 

SPECIFICATIONS



Boat type: Performance cruiser

Designer: Greg Elliott

Builder: Hutcheson Boatbuilders, Tauranga

Engineer: Marine Diesel Services

Construction: Composite, hull: cedar core with E-glass and kevlar laminate, utilising epoxy resin throughout

Deck: PVC foam with E-glass laminates. Interiorplywood bulkhead panels, solid timber joinery

LOA: 17m, 55'

LWL: 15.8m

Beam: 4.5m

Draft: 3.9m/2m

Displacement: 11 tonnes

Water capacity: 4 tanks, 800 litre total

Fuel capacity: 400 litre

Engine: Yanmar

Horsepower: 100

Propeller: Three bladed, self feathering