



*Bright sunny day, moderate winds, the cry of "think heavy guys", and the ultimate harbour racer is away. . .*

**BORT TEST**

# **MAKE WAY FOR THE**

When a group of friends decided that they wanted the ultimate harbour racer they went to Greg F



**T**his story begins at a campfire setting – a few mates sitting around having a few beers and discussing yachts. This group of mates had been sailing regularly on a Marauder owned by Craig Partridge, but it had occurred to them that although the Marauder was a cruiser/racer, they'd never actually done much cruising on it. So, they reasoned, why not build a real racer? A no-compromise boat built for only one purpose – racing. Craig and his partner in the boat, John Harness, figured that Auckland designer Greg Elliott was the right person for the job and approached him about it. His initial reaction, they reckon, was somewhat disbelieving. Elliott told them that there were two ways they could go about it and started leafing through some plans. When he got to a 9.5 metre craft resembling a huge 18 footer Craig and John saw just the boat they wanted.

Elliott was, they say, somewhat incredulous that someone seriously wanted to build the radical design and that he still didn't believe they were serious until the boat was framed up.

The result of all this was *Gorilla Biscuits*, a boat which takes the harbour racer concept to the extreme and which, say Craig and John, has upset the establishment something terrible. "We've had a lot of ridicule; everybody is trying to put us down," says Partridge. Nevertheless, the owners are happy with the boat and more than happy with the performance, which has been so good they are planning to go up a couple of divisions in order to get some closer competition. Their first race didn't tell them much when it was a lottery due to a lack of wind; the second, a Wednesday night race, they won by four minutes and ended up sailing amongst the A division fleet.

The name *Gorilla Biscuits* comes from a joke which, although not necessarily rude, is certainly too offensive to print in a family magazine.

*Gorilla Biscuits* is the latest of a breed of boats in this country which takes the light displacement theme to the extreme, a harbour racer bent on performance alone. It is owned by Craig Partridge, who operates Partridge Boats, and John Harness who works for E-Type yachts; the crew are a bunch of the owner's friends who think *Gorilla Biscuits* is the best thing since the winged keel.

The design was originally for a 31 footer, which was changed to 28' (8.53m) for the reasons that the gear is lighter and cheaper. The boat is a light displacement keelboat with a plumb bow, little accommodation and a huge cockpit. And, of course there are hinged wings so the crew weight is right out to keep the boat sailing as flat as possible.

The boat was built at Craig Partridge Yachts during spare time over Christmas, at nights and during weekends.

In building the hull, the idea was to provide a watertight capsule which could remain dry inside and therefore buoyant even under the water. The hull is built of strip-planked cedar core, utilising 11mm cedar with 12oz double bias cloth on the outside. On the inside, E-glass cloth is used ranging from 6oz in the ends, increasing in weight to 10oz and finally, 12oz in the centre of the boat.

The decks are "only as strong as they need to be to keep water out" and are quite spongy to walk on. They are 6mm Lauan marine ply covered with a 2oz layer of cloth, intended only as a skinning cloth.

# FLYING GORILLA

Elliott for the design. Gorilla Biscuits is the result.



Interior isn't exactly luxurious, but the sound system is good!

The interior structure is light and strong. There is no keelson; at the suggestion of the designer it was left out in the interest of light weight. It doesn't seem to be a problem when sailing but they have to be careful when slipping the boat.

There are a series of 75 x 40mm keel floors with triaxial cloth over them. The forward part of the hull is strengthened by what John Harness calls the egg crate system, utilising a series of girders made of plywood. There is a longitudinal fore and aft girder of 6mm ply running aft to the T of the cockpit and aft of this are three girders. In the greatest stress area, around the mast and keel, the stress is distributed by a series of girders out into the structure and the hull. Foam/glass ribs complete the structure in the hull.

Although there are a couple of "berths" each side, there are no concessions made to cruising and therefore comfort is at a minimum, the exception being a 50 watt Pioneer stereo system! Headroom is most definitely limited, and the conveniences necessary for racing under category four are of the plastic bucket variety.

The deck beams are, again, I-beams of Luaun and Kauri at 600mm centres under the deck and 400mm centres under the cockpit.

These are checked into the gunwhale and the hull/deck join is epoxied and glassed over. All epoxies and glues came from East, and the paint is Epiglass Reaction grey, Lion silver and 121 clear lacquer over the top. The boat was painted by Ian Stewart. The keel is a steel frame with plywood fabricated over the top. The keel is 6ft (1.82m) deep with an Elliott-style lead wing on the bottom weighing 750lb (340kg).

On deck, a minimum of equipment is fitted, in keeping with the "lightweight at all costs"

theme. A few things have looked like breaking and have been replaced and the short bowsprit has been beefed up with a secondary dolphin striker. The wings needed some beefing up but otherwise *Gorilla Biscuits* is close to being sorted and the tuning is going on full speed – as is befitting this machine.

All controls are led aft, the genoa sheets through blocks mounted either side of the mast, while the controls from the rig go to a bank of cleats abaft the mast. Four small winches are mounted near the companionway bulkhead for trimming. Also on the bulkhead are a pair of multi-function instrument repeaters giving such functions as log etc.

Most of the deck is taken up by cockpit. The cockpit is T-shaped with a pair of girders across it to accommodate the main boom sheeting. The traveller track is aft and the boom sheets from its outboard down to this track. The mainsheet adjusting end comes off a block forward in the cockpit so one of the centre crewmen on the rack can trim the mainsail. The traveller car can also be adjusted from the rack.

The racks themselves are solid affairs, with 3.5mm wall thickness alloy tubes, strengthened by dolphin strikers, comprising the main frame and a box girder fabrication made of kauri and luaun, comprising the seating area. The wings are mounted on hinges which are in turn bolted to the bulkhead aft, and to a doubler forward which runs to the deck beams.

The tiller is a large, round, aluminium tube which isn't exactly pretty but is certainly functional and strong. An 18-footer style extension enables the helmsman to sit out on the wing.

The rig is a double spreader fractional spar with jumpers. The spar started life as a 92 x

8mm rolled tube, being built by Greg Elliott's brother, Bruce, who crews on the boat. It has wire stays, 5mm capshrouds forestay, and lowers. The bobstay and the sprit is 7mm wire on a box section alloy bowsprit.

The rig has been superbly built and is quite conservative in both construction and size, considering the original drawings called for a wing mast some 8ft taller.

The boat sets a radically-roached mainsail and small headsail. The sails on *Gorilla Biscuits* were made by Lidgards and superb they are, too. The sails at this stage are Dacron; Craig and John seeing no real need to go for exotic cloth while they are on the learning curve of sailing the boat and while the boat is performing so well.

## SAILING

Which brings us to what this boat is all about – skimming across Auckland harbour in 12 knots of breeze, perched out on the rack above the water, doing the soft-shoe balancing act necessary to keep *Biscuits* flat and moving fast.

The boat is designed to be sailed flat, so to extract the true potential the crew must be quick on their feet, move faaast on the wing and "think heavy".

As you'd expect on a boat with such performance *Gorilla Biscuits* is enormously sensitive to trim, sheeting and helm corrections.

When you get aboard – that is, after you learn to ignore the way the deck flexes as you walk on it – the boat feels light and tippy. Hoist the sails and the crew becomes part of the great *Gorilla Biscuits* balancing act, in which the right balance equals speed through the water.



Even in light winds – about 10 knots here – *Gorilla Biscuits* will plane.

*Gorilla Biscuits* is a genuine grand prix machine. With sails hoisted and crew on the wing she moves quickly through the water, the motion effortless enough to fool the inexperienced into thinking the boat is actually going slower than it is.

Upwind speed is excellent with *Gorilla Biscuits* ticking along at six to seven knots in 12 to 15 knots of breeze. The extra bit of performance depends on breeze and how "heavy" the crew can think. When one of the crew moves from the wing into the cockpit to adjust the tension on one of the jammers, the boat leans, demonstrating its sensitivity to even small changes in crew weight position.

With the crew back on the rack, the boat is powered up again, sliding through the light chop on the harbour while the mainsheet traveller is played for the small gusts and the mainsheet for the big ones. When the wind gusts, the helmsman can work the boat to weather, quite literally taking big bites out of the ocean towards the wind.

Reaching and running are the boat's strong points, and she pops onto the plane readily. Again, it's all a question of balance, with the crew weight equalling speed. Not that *Gorilla Biscuits* gives the impression of turning turtle, but when she heels, speed drops. In fact the boat seems to only want to go so far before the leverage of lead on the bottom of the keel prevails and she feels quite stiff.

The wings on which the crews sit are hinged and a rope between them serves the purpose of lifting the leeward wing out of

the water when the crew is stacked on the windward wing. During our test we didn't manage to dunk the leeward wing though the helmsman's cry of "think heavy guys" was necessary a few times.

Once the boat is balanced and up planing, she is very fast; sitting back on the powerful, flat, after sections and capable of quite astonishing performance.

As we went to print, *Gorilla Biscuits* had managed a run from Kawau Island to Rangitoto light in two hours – which ain't hangin' around.

There is still considerable development remaining in the boat. When the team feel it's necessary they could go to exotic sails to gain more speed but until then it's a case of learning to sail *Gorilla Biscuits* to her best and simply enjoying some fast sailing. □

#### SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	8.5m plus bowsprit of 750mm (30ft 6in)
LWL	8.5m (28ft)
Beam	2.68m (8ft 10in)
Draught	1.83m (6ft)
Displacement	960kg
Designer	Greg Elliott
Builder	Craig Partridge Yachts 16 Andromeda Place, East Tamaki ☎ 274-4700
Sail areas	Mainsail 30sqm, Headsails 12.96 sqm, 17.76sqm; 82sqm masthead kite



Deck is mostly cockpit, though the crew will spend most of their time on the racks.