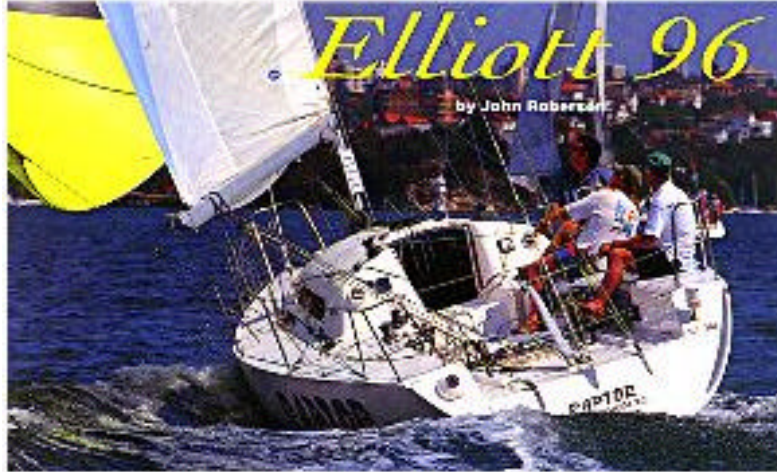


## Elliott 96



By John Roberson

As well as having a reputation for creating fast, radical boats, Kiwi designer Greg Elliott has a less well-known but equally successful side to his portfolio - conventional cruiser/racers. The latest of these to hit the Australian market is the Elliott 96, produced by Melbourne builders New Yachts.

However, in this instance conventional doesn't equate with boring, slow or uninspiring to behold. This well turned-out boat is a good performer, looks sassy, and is comfortable both above and below decks. The first boat off the production line was launched in November last year, in time to compete in and complete the Sydney-Hobart race, and is certainly everything you would expect of a boat this size.

Whilst designed with the current trend to IMS racing in mind, it is not a slave to the rule, with aesthetics, comfort and commercial success also major considerations in the package. The opportunity exists for some customising to the differing requirements of a variety of owners, particularly in the interior. One boat may be bought with little else but racing in mind, and be very spartan below decks, whereas another may need to be more cruising or family sailing orientated, in which case a saloon table can be included and the galley enhanced, among other things.

The Elliott 96 has a mildly raked bow and matching sloping transom which, with a well-rounded coach roof, produces a good looking boat that also fulfils its functional needs. It has the sort of lines that will be noticed both in a marina berth and under sail, while producing the sort of performance that people will talk about.

On boarding the boat one is immediately impressed by the large cockpit and ample deck space, with the latter being particularly uncluttered. The cockpit I-, divided by a full width traveller, and aft of this the helmsman's footrests are both functional and necessary. However, one cannot fail to be impressed by the quality of the mouldings and general standard of workmanship.

Tested In 8-10 knots winds on Sydney Harbour the boat performed very well: it was light on the helm and very easy to handle and manoeuvre. As one would expect of a boat this size, just three people were able to handle it with ease during the sail, confirming its potential for short-handed cruising or family sailing. However, it was also obvious that trimmed and sailed by a top racing crew it would be rewarding, with an efficient rig that gave a very satisfying upwind performance, with little more than traveller adjustment needed to cope with the fluctuating breeze.

The rig is a double-spreader fractional configuration, which on the test boat utilised a La Mer spar and well-cut Hood sails. A masthead backstay as well as runners control mast bend, which though possibly a little complicated for some purposes is a useful tool for racing. The mast section was more than adequate for the job, and seems likely to be very reliable.

All the sail handling systems are well geared and easy to operate, with the mainsheet having coarse and fine tune, the vang being a multi-purchase system, and the masthead backstay efficient. There are three winches down either side of the boat, with a Lewmar 40 on the coach roof, and two Lewmar 30s on the side decks. Most of the other deck hardware is Ronstan.

On the side decks there are two sets of headsail tracks and cars on either side, both tucked close into the coach roof to deck joint for a narrow sheeting angle. The forward one is for short-footed jibs, the aft one for the overlapping genoas, and both are fully adjustable under load by a pulley system.

Most control lines come back along the centre of the coach roof to a bank of stoppers just in front of the main hatch, where they are easy to operate, no matter what the angle of heel. The exceptions are the vang and the spinnaker pole kickers, which are led to swivels and cleats on either side of the cabin, where they can be easily played from the side deck.

The Elliott 96 was comfortable to steer, and most of the mainsail controls came readily to hand, which is ideal when in short-handed or family sailing mode. It also means that while racing the mainsail trimmer could sit next to the helmsman and work closely with him or her. A crew of four or five would be suitable for racing, and provide enough weight on the rail.

The spinnaker was hoisted and retrieved through the forward hatch with a minimum of fuss, and other than setting and stowing the pole, and gybing it, there was no other reason for anyone to go forward of the mast. Once the spinnaker was set, the bop-, felt really good, fast without producing a white knuckle ride, and generally easy to control.

However, one suspects in a strong wind with a well-trained and competent crew it could produce the sort of excitement that would up the pulse rate.

In the mild conditions in which the boat was tested it was obviously dry to sail, but looking at the hull shape one would expect most spray to be thrown away from the boat on a breezier day. Gybing the good size spinnaker was done dinghy style, end-for-ending the pole, and was easy even short-handed.

During the test sail we certainly found no vices in its performance both upwind and down, and it is hard to imagine that it would ever become difficult to handle. The up-to-date keel and rudder shapes are very efficient, and contribute well to the handling of the boat.



For a 9.6 metre boat it is remarkably spacious as well as being both functional and comfortable below decks. It features sleeping for six without overcrowding, small galley, enclosed head, and plenty of sail storage space forward. Much of the interior is formed by an internal mould, which contributes greatly to the cleanliness of the layout. This mould incorporates bunks, galley, head compartment and keel floors.

This system of building, with an internal mould, greatly adds to the stiffness and strength of the hull, as well as making the cabin easy to clean and maintain, so prolonging the life of the hull, and keeping that new look about the interior for longer. While a boat of this size is never going to be luxurious below decks, even in the basic version this one has accommodation in excess of IMS requirements.

The test boat was fitted with a Yanmar 10hp saildrive diesel and folding propeller. As with the customisation of the interior, the degree of electronic and navigational fit-out is very much dependent on the buyer's choice.

New Yachts are a relatively new company: they have previously built an Elliott 11, Easy Touch, which made its mark both at the Air New Zealand IMS regatta in Auckland, and at the Kenwood Cup in Hawaii. That boat was noted for the quality of its finish, and the standards have been maintained in the latest product.

It would be good to see this boat become a major part of the Australian scene: it is a size that fits into the market well, and at \$110,000 (ex sails) is competitively priced. If sufficient number are built, it would benefit from a class Organization, and probably a set of class rules. It is a boat that deserves to do well.

Specifications LOA 9.6m

LWL 8.5m

Beam 3.35m

Draft 1.8m

Displ 2,500kg