

Designer
Scene

**GREG
ELLIOTT**



*Party Pro at the start of the
1987 Auckland-Suva race.*

**A good cruiser
is a fast cruiser**

First design

After 8-10 years cruising around the Hauraki Gulf Greg Elliott "happened into" being a designer. The year was 1977 and Elliott was doing his time as a boatbuilding apprentice at Chas Bailey's Westhaven yard. As part of his training at the Auckland Technical Institute, Elliott had studied rudimentary design under tutor Alan Wright. This, and the fact the two brothers had similar ideas, led Bruce Elliott to "commission" his brother to design a 25 footer called Outsider. The boat, built by the brothers, was a radical departure from the other yachts being launched at that time. Very fair, with wholesome lines, Outsider bore little resemblance to her heavily-influenced-by-IOR contemporaries. Even at this early age, Elliott had already decided he wanted nothing to do with the cumbersome International Offshore Rule, partly due to his past experience and partly because he realised that the rule meant people with more money could simply build faster boats.

The Elliott brothers sailed Outsider to the Marlborough Sounds (via North Cape), spend about a month cruising the Sounds and then returned to Auckland via the east coast, calling in at Napier and Gisborne on the way. Back in Auckland, Outsider took 15 guns out of 15 starts in the 25 foot division and people suddenly started asking Elliott to design them a boat.

One of these was a "big bloke" called Dave Carlisle who owned and raced a Hartley 16, almost always finishing last



Outsider was Elliott's first design and in it he and brother Bruce sailed around the North Island and took 15 guns out of 15 races in the 25 foot division.

enough to admit that modern construction techniques mean that she would already be out of date.

Elliott's latest creation is the 13.1 metre Simply the Best, a cruising yacht that two-sail reaches at 8-9 knots with just two people on board and is able to motor at the same speed. Again the emphasis has been on reducing drag (with efficient hull and foil shapes) rather than increasing sail to get more speed.

not that enthusiastic. He believes that "unfortunately," multis are the future, believing that "conceptually, they are the way to go.

"The problem is they take up too much space. What a lot of people don't realise is that if Westhaven was full of multis there'd be only half the number of berths that there are now. And manoeuvrability is also a problem."

On the plus side, Elliott says that multis can cross oceans quickly and describes the sailing as "fantastic".

Not a man to mince words, Elliott is quick to admit that he finds big launches "boring." However, he still appears keen to design one, especially in light of their huge growth worldwide.

Displacement boats, on the other

hand, do interest him, especially in the area of drag reduction. With little heeling or pitching to take into consideration, reducing drag should, he believes, be far easier than is the case with yachts.

Despite his outstanding success in racing yacht designs, the "pinnacles" of Whitbread and America's Cup commissions have yet to eventuate. Elliott believes he has the ability to design such craft and his pedigree to date certainly seems to support that contention. However, despite initially being approached by Team New Zealand, Elliott has recently been told "they didn't require our services". He can, perhaps, take some comfort from the fact Bruce Farr received the same dismissal. ■

So, it turned out, did a number of others and Elliott lofted and drew full size plans for a new trailer yacht. Five were built at Dave Jackson's yard at Northcote Point and so was born the Elliott 5.9, arguably New Zealand's most successful trailer yacht of all time. At the 1983 Trailer Yacht Nationals the 5.9 metre Elliotts won the under 6 metre class and the under 7 metre class and finished a more-than-creditable fifth in the under 8 metre class. Soon orders were flooding in (The Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron ordered 10 for their youth training programme) and Elliott's reputation as a designer of "different" yet fast yachts was established.

Elliott's move into keeler design followed a meeting with keen yacht racer Mickey Neale in Fiji after an Auckland-Suva race. While racing around Gannet Rock (off Waiheke Island in the Hauraki Gulf) in his 28 footer, Neale had been somewhat less than happy to be passed by the 1 metre shorter Outsider and wanted to talk to the young designer about getting a faster boat. Elliott was sure he could design a successful 40 footer along the same lines as the 25 foot Outsider and so Neale's ocean-travelling Transformer was born.

However, it was probably Elliott's own yacht, the ill-fated Party Pro, that really put the young designer "on the map". The strikingly different Party Pro won 12 out of 13 starts and, not since Ranger had one boat so dominated the Auckland racing scene. Unfortunately Party Pro met her untimely end on the ragged reaches of Astrolabe Reef as she approached Fiji at the head of the 1987 Auckland-Suva race fleet.

Yet, while sad that his most prized yacht is no more, Elliott is realistic

especially customised one-off designs — but is dependent upon his clients' specifications. He has never designed a "spec" boat.

"Owners dictate what gets designed — all we can do is try not to encourage them to go for "trendy", expensive ideas.

"We try to keep costs down and explain that cost effective can be as much fun as fast.

No mystery

Despite his reputation for leading edge "go fast" designs, Elliott dismisses the notion that there is any mystery about designing fast yachts.

"The earliest New Zealand designs were fast and John Spencer always designed quick boats; so did Laurie Davidson, especially with some of his M Class designs, and Des Townson's Twilight was fast, too.

"The trick is to stay away from those extreme 'lemon pip' IOR hull shapes — they tend to take charge in heavy weather for one thing — and stick to well balanced, easily driven hull shapes."

Modern construction techniques are also having a profound effect on modern yachts, allowing strong, ocean going craft to be built much lighter.

"What we now consider a medium displacement yacht would, a decade ago, be considered light or even ultra light displacement."

Elliott's design business seems to be booming. 18 months ago he hired naval architect Julian Smith and the two often work together on up to 15 projects at a time.

Elliott says that when he's finished "playing around with monos" he'd like to have a go with multies. However, he's