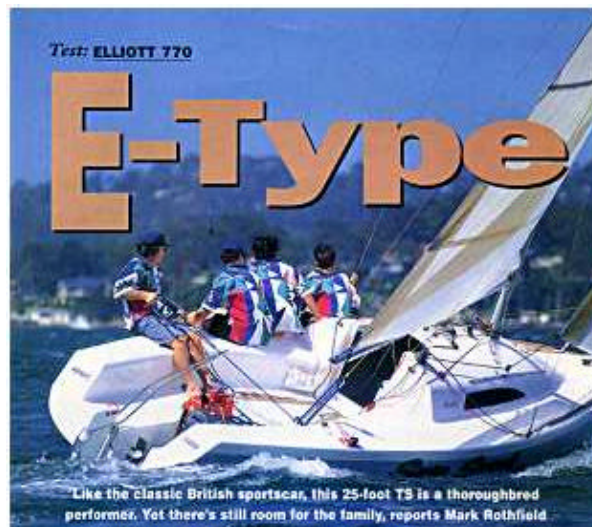
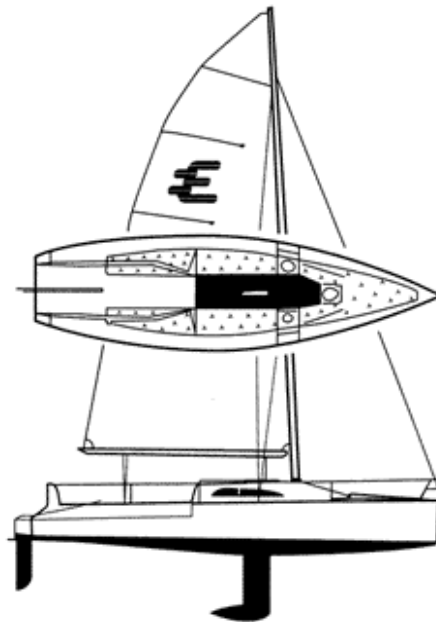


Elliott 770



By Mark Rothfield, Modern Boating

A test sail with Kerli Corlett is never dull. In conditions that would have other boat retailers reaching for the reefing lines, or their mobile phones to cancel, the Sailing Scene owner gleefully packs the spinnaker. He's a good helmsman, but not overly gung-ho - it's more a sign of his complete confidence in the spirited Greg Elliott-designed trailer sailers that he sells.



My first experience came with the Elliott 5.9 day racer back in 1991. A wild westerly was throwing 40-knot punches like Mike Tyson, and one of them caught us flush on the chin, flattening the craft in an instant.

"Seawater spewed into the cockpit and the hull convulsed madly beneath the gyrating rig, the mast tip only inches from the waves," I wrote at the time. "Clinging white-knuckled to the windward gunwale I began to think that setting the spinnaker had not been such a good idea"...

And thus it was with trepidation that I boarded Corlett's new Elliott 770 and headed onto a white-capped Pittwater. Bigger boat, bigger rig, bigger spinnaker, black nor-easter. Same result. As Corlett called "I've lost the steering", the hull careered onto its gunwale and the boom began skating across the water. De ja vu.

The hull settled briefly at 90deg, and all thoughts turned to self preservation. Every man for himself. I'd long since thrown the spinnaker sheet so I could concentrate on staying aboard. Corlett's 12-year-old son was next to me, clutching a turning block for dear life. "D-d-d-d-a-a-a-d-d?!" he stammered anxiously.

With the squall still pinning us down, the hull shuddered between the duelling forces of tall rig and heavily ballasted bulb centreboard. Nothing gave way and strangely there was no panic on board. We all knew that the Elliott would eventually pick itself up from the canvas.

This it indeed did, groggily at first as it shook saltwater from its sails, then more purposefully. At around 45deg heel the rudder regained bite and we bore away. The sails were sheeted and the 770 resumed its wild, surging gallop as though nothing had happened. It had survived this examination of structural integrity with flying colours.

Such wipeouts won't be common, nor are they the result of design fault. It was crew error, nothing more. When we were better prepared for gusts - Kerli signalling the arrival with a "3-2-1, GUST!" countdown the big TS skimmed across the waves like a skiff, with spray cascading from the bow in great solid sheets. Speed bursts in the mid-teens were unravelled with relative ease.

Upwind performance was equally impressive, if not as electrifying. After quelling the kite, we settled onto the work, Kerli managing the main and tiller while we perched on the gunwale - it loves weight out wide.

Speeds of around six knots were achieved and it seemingly pointed high. Tacking, too, was fast since the headsail is small and easily managed.

This ability was confirmed a few hours later in the Pittwater twilight race, in similar conditions and against a strong and varied fleet. Starting slightly late but at the windward end, the 770 powered through the field. We were third at the windward mark, behind the JOG champion Gingerbread Man and an Elliott 7 more importantly, from the skipper's

perspective, we had blown away the Elliott 780 Blown Away, owned by builder Darren and Nicky Schofield.

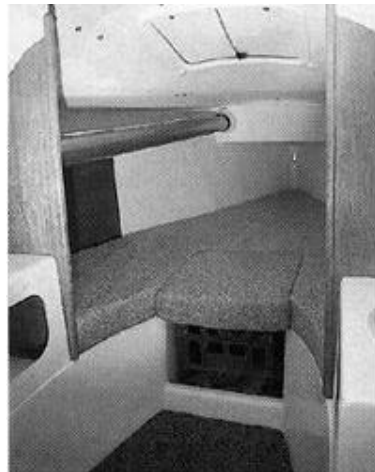
It was a temporary measure, though, for they came back at us on the reaching leg by being privy to a private gust. We rounded the final mark with horns locked, a four mile run to the finish remaining. The two boats continued their private war, leaving Gingerbread Man and the 7 in their wakes. At times we'd held a narrow lead, then they'd claw back at us - gusts were proving the deciding factor.

As fate would have it, Blown Away grabbed the last gust and thieved the gun from under our noses by a mere half-boat length. Two seconds separating us after a 50 minute drag race. Our skipper looked somewhat tormented, though over the season he's tasted success more often than not. The 770 is scratch boat.

"We didn't set out to beat the 780 when we commissioned the design from Greg Elliott," Corlett explains. "It just happens that in most airs we're as fast."

The aim of the 770, rather, is to appeal to families who enjoy one-design racing and want live-aboard facilities for occasional cruising. Corlett sees no overlap with the other Elliotts, saying that the 7 was more a daysailer (it lacks a galley) while the 780 was a development class with associated higher costs and complications.

Its visual links with the 7 are apparent in the hull shape, however, Elliott simply stretched the bow and stern then employed the same deck, adding 70cm to the cockpit. It is proportionally narrower on the waterline and slightly more rockered, while the increase in volume allowed him to bolster ballast by 110kg and sail area by around 30%.



It is remarkable what a difference the 2.3 feet increase makes. Suddenly you have a boat that behaves more like a small yacht than a big bouncy dinghy. The 770 is more powerful than the 7 but somehow doesn't confer the same seat-of-the-pants sense of speed. At the

same time it's decidedly easier to sail than the 780, a racing crew of four having been specified in the 770's design brief, as opposed to six or seven.

The rig, designed by local TS legend Steve Kiely and incorporated by Elliott, comprises a conventional single swept-back spreader setup on a spun-tapered Goldspar mast, with no backstay or runners to worry about. It lacks the flexibility and grunt of the 780 rig, but then the 770 hull is more easily driven,



A retractable pole is employed for the asymmetric spinnaker - it was adopted from the 780 system which Darren Schofield and Steve Kiely devised and is definitely the way of the future. Intrinsic to the overall success is the kite cut by sailmaker Chris Cairns, which has heavy shoulders that float over the centreline. This allows deeper downwind angles to be attained.

Any water that comes through the pole outlet will be trapped in the forward anchor locker and drained out. Really, the only drawback is that the spinnaker pole sits over the double vee berth when retracted. It could be extended when the berth is needed, but then it may foul the anchor gear.

Another penalty of performance comes with the centreboard case that runs fully from floor to ceiling in the middle of the cabin. It's obtrusive but necessary. At least the 770 benefits from a galley unit, albeit a very basic one. A single burner stove to port, amidships, and a single plastic sink directly opposite is all that's to it, though there's room for more lavish facilities if you don't mind the weight. The cooler sits under the companionway steps, the portable loo betwixt the vee berth; the remaining space is taken up by berths.

Back on deck, the 770 is simply but cleverly equipped, a blend of Ronstan and Lewmar fittings being favoured. Years of racing experience and dabbling with various boats has seen this perfected. About the only thing that didn't impress me was the outboard system,

comprising a long, deep recess cut into the cockpit floor. The long-shaft outboard swings up and stows within it, while the fuel tank straps to the floor nearby.



With the tiller extending further into the cockpit, the theory is that the helmsman won't go back there. In practice this has been disproved - in fact, we were all crammed aft on that high speed spinnaker reach and then the well and fuel tank get in the way. Furthermore, full mobility of the rudder is prevented when the engine is down.

Stressing that the test boat was the prototype, Corlett says that future boats will have a short-shaft engine, leaving room in the well for the tank along with a fibreglass cover. Also, the well will be moved further away from the rudder stock to allow full turning.

The moulds have gone to New Yachts in Melbourne, builders of the Elliott 96. Construction comprises E-glass and Klegecell foam of varying thickness. Extra glass is applied around the underbody to withstand trailer loads, and for topside stiffness there's a structural internal liner incorporating the furniture. Hull and deck are epoxy glued for an imperceptible, toerail-free join, and the chainplates tie into the topsides to create a wide rig base.

Interestingly, New Yachts will be building a fixed keel version for potential JOG and club racing. Apparently it's confident of getting an order for six boats to create a matchracing/training fleet at a Victorian yacht club.

Sailing Scene is offering the 770 at Stage I level for home completion. Given that strict one design rules apply, the package includes the standard centreboard, rudder and mast, plus most structural components are fitted. Cost is \$26,250. The sail-away stage, including a custom-built trailer with over-ride brakes, comes in at \$39,900. At Grand Prix level, as tested with asymmetric spinnaker, outboard and bunk cushions, you're talking \$46,500.

Those prices place the 770 neatly between the 7 (around \$30,000) and the 780 (around \$50,000). Savings over the 780 come in the less exotic rig and hull laminate, while the one

design racing aspect will help peg further costs.

Also in the 770's favour is the ability to be towed by a Commodore or Falcon, dry weight being 1400kg.

To summarise, a boat for relaxing cruising this ain't, but nor is it a Formula One racer that requires a family of apes to handle - it slots in between those extremes, more towards the performance spectrum. For twilight and class racing, with a touch of overnighing, the 770 would be hard to beat.

ELLIOTT 770

LOA:	770m
Beam:	2.50m
Draft:	0.55m/ 1.60m
Displacement:	820kg (2400lbs)
Ballast:	350kg
Sail areas:	
Main	27.3sq m
Genoa	14.2sq m
#2 jib	11.15sq m
Spinnaker	65sq m

