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Grand designs

Elan Yachts has teamed up with Studio F.A. Porsche in order to produce the ultimate grand tourer. **Sam Jefferson** steps aboard the new GT6 to find out just how stylish performance cruising really can be



Boat Test ~ Elan GT6

For those not familiar with Elan Yachts, allow me to give you the briefest of introductions; the company is based in Slovenia and started

out making skis. Those au fait with alpine pursuits will doubtless know this already, as their skis are of some repute. From here, the company used its expertise in laminating to branch out into building yachts. This has meant that visitors to the factory, perched high in the Slovenian Alps and many miles from the sea, are both charmed and baffled by the stunning but geographically bewildering setting of the factory until this quirk is explained.

Anyway, the company has been turning out a fine selection of cruising and racing yachts for many years now; for over 20 years they have worked exclusively with the designer Rob Humphreys to produce the Impression range of extremely practical and comfortable cruising yachts and also the 'E' range of performance cruisers. So far so good, but where to go from there? Well, somewhere in between obviously and the first step on that path was to introduce the Elan GT5, a fast cruising 'grand tourer' if you will. This was achieved by taking the hull of an Elan E5 racing yacht and putting a new deck on it, plus upgrading the interior and reducing the rig somewhat. Very good it was too. Yet, clearly, the company decided it was time to go a bit further with this concept and the result is the all new GT6 which, unlike its smaller sister, is a new design from the keel up.

This makes the GT6 a big project for Elan; developing a new boat is no laughing matter for a medium sized manufacturer and, make no mistake, Elan has invested heavily to ensure that the GT6 is a fine product. So what have we here, you ask? Well, this is a 49ft yacht designed, as always by Rob Humphreys. The design remit is clearly for a fast yacht; no question of that. The Elan features a T-shaped bulb keel, twin rudders, a chine aft that is actually designed to improve performance, not just increase volume, plus a



relatively modest displacement of 12,450kg. For all that, it's no racer – so what do they mean by grand tourer? Well, they're not the first to come up with the idea; you could argue that X Yachts pioneered the concept when they introduced the X/C range of fast cruisers that were never intended for racing. It turned out to be an ingenious strategy; after all, what cruising sailor genuinely relishes sailing slowly? So this is Elan's own take on this concept.

New look

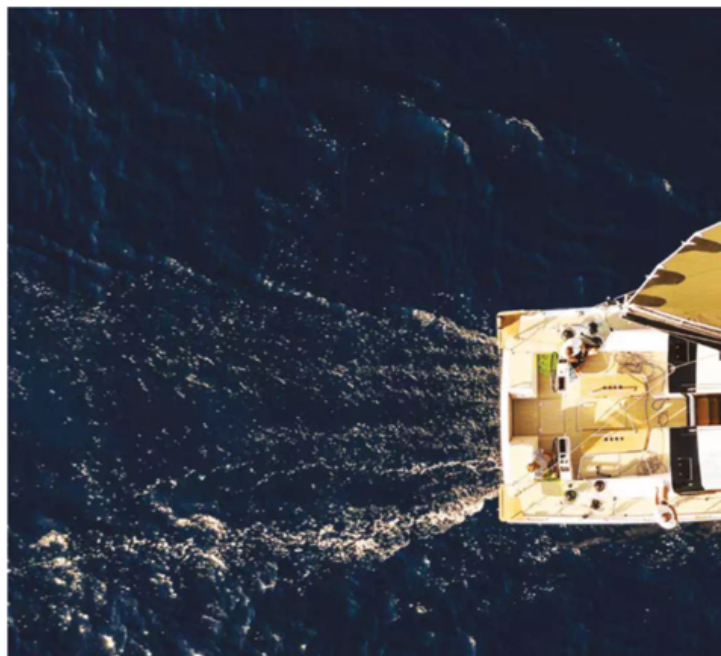
Not only do cruising sailors rarely actively like sailing slowly, few also are thrilled to be the owner of an ugly vessel. Elan were clearly aware of this and, while retaining Rob Humphreys to design the lines of the yacht, they also opted to get Porsche to design the interior, deck and styling of the yacht. If you're thinking, hang on, that name rings a bell, you'd be quite right. Studio F.A. Porsche was set up by Ferdinand Porsche whose grandfather set up the Porsche car manufacturer. Indeed, it was Ferdinand who penned the lines of the Porsche 911 so there is real pedigree here. You might be thinking, well, what does this actually mean? Well, it's far more than just a gimmick; by employing an accomplished designer who is coming into the boatbuilding world from the

ABOVE
Purposeful looks are married to polished performance

BELOW
Plenty of beam carried well aft - as we have come to expect from Rob Humphreys designs of late

outside, Elan has been able to get a fresh perspective and it shows.

This approach is evident even on first inspection of the new boat. Porsche has looked at the hull and realised that to appreciate form, you need shadows and light. And the topsides have been sculpted accordingly. The deck too is strikingly different. This is a 49ft yacht (47ft in fact, if you don't count the carbon fibre bowsprit) which has a flush deck forward of the mast. It's a feature you see frequently on the big blue water cruisers (Contest, Oyster, Discovery, for example) but rarely on sub-55ft yachts. Yet it has been elegantly achieved. The





impression is of a yacht that is a little bit different and, yes, a bit special.

On deck

Step aboard and that feeling is confirmed. This is a very different boat from, say, an X/C but there's absolutely no question that it aims to compete with that marque when it comes to a general feeling of quality and luxury. Also, no question, this feels like a very big yacht for a 49 footer thanks to generous beam carried aft. Step aboard via the bathing platform and you are immediately struck by the elegantly curved pods either side of the main walkthrough into the cockpit. These

serve both as seats for the helmsman while also featuring a barbecue in the port pod and a fridge in the starboard one. Forward of this are a pair of black carbon wheels and what is essentially the 'working' area of the yacht, where all the sail handling takes place. To achieve this, all running rigging has been run under the deck in channels and emerges by a pair of primary winches, well situated within the reach of the helmsman. The primary winches are electric and a second pair of substantial winches for the jibsheets are just forward. These can also be easily used by the helmsman. The mainsheet is the double ended German style one and does not have a traveller (although it is an option), being secured well forward on the deckhouse roof. For those who like a bit of fine tuning though, there is a Harken hydraulic backstay tensioner, which provides some opportunity to tweak the sail shape. The instrument binnacle is, if anything, rather overcrowded with a whole plethora of B&G goodies, and the instrument read-out mounted racing style at the foot of the mast also adds to the rather sporty feel here. Before moving onto the forward end of the cockpit, I should perhaps add that there is a decently proportioned lazarette in the transom which could comfortably fit a partially deflated dinghy. This lazarette can also be accessed from the cockpit sole. There are also some very pleasing seats set into the pushpit which are great for



ABOVE
An uncluttered foredeck and deck saloon coachroof

BELOW
The cockpit boasts ample room with an option for a barbecue

perching on and keeping an eye on things with the boat on autopilot.

Moving on to the lounging section of the cockpit, and here we have a comfortable and very secure feeling area featuring twin tables with a walkthrough to the companionway. It's a friendly, convivial space and the twin tables offer an extra sense of security and place to brace when the boat is heeled over. Stepping out onto the side decks, you are confronted by a sea of Flexiteek which is a tastefully light shade. There is an option for genuine teak for the purist but these days I think we are all starting to realise the benefits of the fake stuff. The front deck is a thing of uncluttered beauty. There's not much to say because there is nothing here, and that is the appeal. Up at the bow is a generously proportioned storage locker for sails etc and forward of this is the anchor locker and carbon sprit with integrated anchor roller. Overall impressions are of a boat that is just a touch different from the run of the mill yacht and that is all to the good. →





Down below

It's a theme that continues when you head down below. Again, the influence of Ferdinand Porsche is evident throughout the saloon. This, to quote Hemingway, is a clean, well-lit place with the wraparound deckhouse windows providing ample illumination while the oak finish also helped (there is also the option of an even lighter brushed oak finish). I wouldn't class this as an out and out deck saloon but it sits somewhere at the midway point of proceedings. Again, light and shape is important and Porsche has paid great attention to ambient lighting which came into its own later that evening. The basic layout features an athwartships galley set well forward with the seating area aft. There is a clever chart table to starboard which, when flipped through 180 degrees becomes a section of the sofa – a versatile solution that none of Elan's rivals to my knowledge has yet stolen from them. Aft of this chart table is a decently proportioned heads/shower compartment. To starboard is the main seating area with a table that can be raised to become the dining table, or lowered with the leaves folded in to serve as a coffee table during the day. Storage is good, quality is exceptional and the whole area is crammed full of enough little gizmos to keep any aspiring James Bond happy. Funnily enough, it's the small details that catch the eye – the light switches and instrument panel are stylish and ergonomically pleasing and – dammit – just a little bit different. Lord knows, sometimes we need that in a standardised world.

The two aft cabins are, understandably, nothing to write home about but perfectly comfortable. There is the option

of having only one double cabin aft and the second one as a workshop/storage – or as a twin cabin. Up forward is the master cabin which is comfortable and roomy with plenty of light plus a well proportioned ensuite. The quality of the fit out throughout was extremely good and the general feel down here was of high quality.

Other than that, access to the engine was good and there was space for a generator and watermaker aft of the engine under the cockpit sole if you so wished.

Under sail

The time had come to get out on the water and see what the GT6 was capable of. We sailed from the Slovenian port of Portoroz on a sparkling day without a great deal of breeze. Things started slowly with about 7-9 knots and concluded a touch more briskly with 15kn. This was not a bad spread and also an intriguing mix because these twin rudder Humphreys designs are designed to sit over on their chine

ABOVE LEFT

The athwartships galley is set forward of the main seating area in the saloon

ABOVE RIGHT

The forward cabin is the master cabin

BELOW

The aft chine is a vital key to the performance of this boat and also provides additional internal volume

and get a good deal of the hull clear of the water in order to perform.

This means on a boat of 12,000kg you need either a big rig or plenty of breeze to achieve maximum potential. In other words, this is not a design that is ever going to be at its best in very light airs – which was exactly what we had to start with.

Nevertheless, the GT6 proved to be a well mannered performer which sailed willingly in the light airs. The 105% genoa and fully battened mainsail both certainly helped and meant that up to 7kn of breeze, the GT6 wasn't far off matching windspeed and boatspeed. Sail handling was also very simple and the deep rope bins just forward of the helm kept everything very tidy. Under power, the steering felt a little heavy but, oddly, this feeling went under sail and handling was very light and responsive. As the day wore on, the breeze gradually built and the GT6 started to do what she was designed to do; namely heel over and sit on that aft chine in order to reduce wetted surface area. In 15kn the boat was starting to shine, hitting the high eights with absolutely masses of grip and control. All of this hinted to what enormous fun this boat would be in a strong blow with the twin rudders ensuring the boat feels incredibly planted, and a hull shape that just begs to be pushed hard.

Off the wind, we put up the gennaker and, again, the feeling of supreme power and control meant that the only real risk was sailing too high and losing it in a gust. This did not happen – nor did we come close to achieving it – and we were enjoying ourselves to such an extent that we almost made it across to Italy from Slovenia.





SAM'S VERDICT

I really liked this boat – partly because it's clever and the concept works and perhaps also because, by teaming up with Porsche, Elan has created a boat that feels just a little bit different. If you are trying to produce a high end product, this is really important. Quality

is also superb and the general feeling is that Elan has put a lot of thought into this boat and the rewards come when you sail it.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

LOOKS: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

Length overall: 15.2m (49'9")

Hull length: 14.3m (47')

Beam: 4.5m (14'7")

Draft (standard): 2.45m (8')

Displacement: 12.327 kg (27,176lbs)

Sail area:

Main: 62.60 m² (667sq/ft)

Jib: 51.14 m² (548sq/ft)

Contact: elan-yachts.com

Price: (base) €369,900

(as tested) €574,350



ALTERNATIVE YACHTS



X YACHTS XC 50

Arguably the originators of the grand tourer concept, X Yachts' XC 50 has been around for a while now but retains its style, elegance and superb performance.

x-yachts.com



GRAND SOLEIL 46 LC

LC stands for Long Cruise – or whatever the Italian is for that – and is a refined version of its more performance orientated sister. As you'd expect there is comfort, speed and bags of Italian style.

keyyachting.com



ARCONA 465

A slightly different take on the performance cruiser from the Swedish boatbuilders. Nevertheless, this is a splendid mix of speed and style. The quality of fit out is also superb.

seyachts.com