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DECEMBER 2020

Yachting World

ON TEST:
ELAN GT6

The yacht designed
by Porsche



ON TEST // ELAN GT 6

MINE'S THE PORSCHE

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE BADGE: WHY PORSCHE BECAME INVOLVED IN THE DESIGN OF ELAN'S NEW FLAGSHIP

Tested by
TOBY HODGES



Where we tested:

Firth of Clyde,
Scotland

Conditions: 2-10
knots, flat water

Model: three-
cabin layout with
electronics and
deck gear upgrades
and Ullman
Fiberpath sails

Photos by Richard Langdon/Ocean Images

A few decades ago having a supercar was a real status symbol, a prominent way of shouting 'look at me!'. Times and trends have changed, as has, arguably, the appetite for such ostentation. So why, I wondered, would a 70-year-old shipyard with a well-regarded product line need to turn to Porsche for the design of its new flagship?

Over the years we've seen various car manufacturers and designers get involved with yacht design, yet few stand out for their success. However, as I was to find out with this new GT6, the relationship between Elan and Porsche runs deeper than simply exploiting a name for marketing gain.

Studio F.A. Porsche is the design arm of the automotive giant. The Austrian company's role is not about adding flashy flared bodywork or eye-catching spoilers. It's all about refinement, whether working with architecture or dishwashers – or Elan skis, which is how the tie-in with Elan's GT6 came about. The objective is care in detail and it aims to add a signature of understated class.

Considering this strong emphasis on design then, it is no surprise that the GT6 hit the water looking sharp. ►

I'm referring in particular to the clean lines, black-and-white styling, the angle of the tinted windows in the hull and the contemporary decksaloon-style coachroof.

But putting the styling aside for a moment, let's concentrate on the powerful hull shape, which is all Humphreys Yacht Design. The Lymington firm was one of the first to successfully translate what it was doing with ocean racing yachts, such as Class 40s, into production cruising yachts, including those from Elan and Azuree.

Ten years ago Rob Humphreys broke new ground with the Elan 350 and 310 by incorporating race boat features, such as broad planing aft sections with hard chines and twin rudders. I have rarely enjoyed sail trials more. For this new flagship GT6, which Humphreys drew with his son, Tom, contemporary additions included powerful forward sections, a bluff stem with fixed bowsprit and wide beam carried right aft.

It all screams performance sailing... until you notice the hull design is balanced, tamed perhaps by a relatively conservative rig. This, together with the deckhouse and cockpit design, is the clue to this model's purpose – easy cruising, or Grand Touring (GT) even.

So how does it measure up on the water? And is this a sailor's yacht or a status symbol?

SLOVENIA TO SCOTLAND

I sought the answers near Glasgow, where Scottish dealer Great Harbour Yachts had recently taken delivery of a GT6. During the 24 hours we had aboard we spent a large portion hunting out the light snippets of breeze that funnelled into the surrounding lochs.

It created a lasting impression of an easily driven and controlled boat. The Firth of Clyde is a notoriously tricky place to race because of the huge wind shifts. And as we chased the catspaws that ruffled the otherwise calm, deep and dark waters, the Elan proved sporty and nimble enough to ensure the sailing was enjoyable.

The GT6 is nearly 50ft of yacht overall, so it should be capable of a certain level of pace. It gets up to speed easily and stays there, tracking true. As was to be expected with large, deep, twin rudders in light conditions, there was little to no feedback and the helms remained very neutral. However, the fact that we could keep sailing for the majority of the time shows this is a design that will suit the typically light conditions found in the Mediterranean.

Speeds were fine, easy to reach and consistent, if not electric. And despite the wide aft beam, particularly noticeable from the dock, there seemed to be negligible drag. The instruments were yet to be properly calibrated, but the GPS read 0.5-1 knot below true windspeed most of the time when slightly cracked or when reaching under A-sail (4 knots in 5, 6.7 knots in 7 and for a fleeting moment, 9 knots clocked in 11 knots on a close fetch).

Our test boat had a fine-looking suit of carbon and Vectran Ullman sails, plus upgraded deck gear, running rigging and winch packages. So, barring a composite mast and rigging, it was in high-performance spec.

But to my eye the sail plan looks a little reserved, with a high and short boom (the mainsheet is attached midway along the boom). And there is not even an option for a traveller. Instead the mainsheet is kept well out of the cockpit and led aft each side.

It is set up to be safe and very manageable. Indeed, when you consider the modest sail area to displacement



The Elan borrows the 'GT/Grand Tourer' name because its primary purpose is fun, short-handed cruising with a high level of comfort and style

ratio, it all points to a boat designed for easy sailing above high performance. "Performance is about more than just speed," maintains Tom Humphreys. "It's also about good manners: being easy to operate for a short-handed crew, family or couple." Which is why he also incorporated generous form stability and righting moment to minimise heeling or the need for weight on the rail.

The running rigging is tunnelled really neatly under deck and I particularly liked the series of inspection hatches Elan has included to check inside this aluminium cage. The winch layout also works well. The pair of winches each side is within reach of the helm, there is enough space between them to make them practical to work, and there are good-sized tail lockers which keep the lines from wrapping around the helmsman's feet.

The aft winch is set into the deck a little for optimum sheet lead. Again it's a layout that prioritises short-handed cruising, as the cockpit benches continue almost all the way to the pedestals and leave little practical space for a trimmer to sit between the winches.

‘As we chased the catspaws, the Elan proved sporty and nimble’



The design team wanted to avoid the mast piercing the coachroof. This leaves a large flush foredeck, which includes a sail locker and an anchor locker. The bowsprit neatly hides the anchor roller and all lines are led under



The boom is kept high and clear of the spacious walkthrough cockpit. Note the styling of the curved benches, pedestals and wheel designs



Clean lines and deck gear. This design targets manageable fast cruising, using a modest sailplan that's easy to trim and reef and a stable, easily-driven yet powerful hull



A primary benefit of a deckhouse-style roof is that it floods the saloon with natural light

GRAND TOURING DECK

As well as the sail and deckgear upgrades, we had a secret weapon on board to ensure we got the most from the conditions. Bill Mackay, 84, arguably knows these waters better than any. Indeed, he recalls growing up aboard the only yacht for which the Royal Navy would lower its submarine nets to let sail out of the Firth of Clyde during the war, as his father was the local doctor who needed to reach the outlying islands.

When the decorated racing sailor and motorsports driver says the GT6 is an ideal yacht for cruising these western isles, I'm inclined to take his word. But he does back up this statement by pointing out the deep coamings forward, the protection under the tall sprayhood and the ability to enjoy your surroundings from the interior.

That said, there is little point in pretending this design is not aimed primarily at warm weather Med-style cruising. That open transom and cockpit layout targets

lazy afternoons in clear water anchorages. The split tables work particularly well. These can quite often be a compromise, yet on the Elan they are sturdy, provide bracing, an unhindered walkthrough and still join together to form a dining area or can lower to form giant sunbeds.

Studio Porsche certainly waved its styling wand at the cockpit design. The smooth lines all work in harmony, from the coachroof and curved aft benches to the pedestal design with its racing car-inspired wheels.

There is the option of housing a grill and fridge instead of lockers within these aft benches. Standing on the swim platform while anchored in a calm loch, frying up black puddings and 'tattie scones' seemed slightly surreal, but proved the benefit of this alfresco option, by keeping smells and mess out of the midships galley below.

A locker beneath the aft deck provides space for an inflatable, but only in its fully deflated state. There is also a large liferaft locker below the central cockpit sole and a sail locker in the bows.

'The interior is highly inviting, modern yet warm and full of natural light'



No fixed navstation, but this convertible design works well. There is good engine access from three sides

Elan Yachts

Quadrants are mounted on each stock, which are linked by a rod. This is designed to double as emergency steering – if you lose steering on one side, you can disconnect it and use the other independently. Access to the quadrants and autopilot is from the aft cabins.

My concern with this set-up would be if you lost a rudder, as, there is no watertight bulkhead to separate the steering gear from the accommodation. Heeling the boat immediately on to the opposite tack might help prevent it flooding the interior. Otherwise, Elan tells me that as bulkheads are all laminated to hull and deck anyway, it could make this one watertight "with minor adjustments" – although that would leave the issue of how to then access the steering gear.

A primary design goal was to position the mast forward of the coachroof to prevent it spoiling the aesthetics of the superstructure. The design team's challenge was to leave a completely flush foredeck without compromising space in the forecabin. The rising sheer and forward freeboard of the Elan is sufficient to create up to 6ft headroom in this master cabin.

GROWING APPEAL

Where the exterior styling is somewhat stark in its black and white theme, the interior is highly inviting, modern yet warm and full of natural light.

The styling and the perception of quality this brings are noteworthy. The light oak trim with its horizontal matching grain, smooth inner mouldings and creatively positioned spotlights and indirect lighting produce elegant first impressions.

Studio Porsche's managing director, Roland Heiler, stresses his firm didn't want to create lots of design details, but a flowing line all the way through. The raised bank of lockers, which runs through the saloon, galley and forecabin, helps create this feeling of continuity.

It would be illogical to invest such resource into



Cockpit extension: cooking breakfast from the platform



Left: the raised lockers and generous natural light allocation continues in the forward master cabin. Above: the owner of the test boat opted for a second aft cabin and a twin set up to allow friends to share

‘Heating outlets throughout make a real difference to extending your season’

design if the product wasn’t manufactured to a certain level, so it was pleasing to find a consistently high standard of finish on the GT6. It has a hand-finished feel with plenty of solid wood trim used, and the quality of fixtures and fittings is a step-up from standard production yachts.

Poke in the nooks of lockers and bilges and you’ll find painted laminate – no bare fibre or exposed chopstrand mat. Elan was one of the first production yards to employ vacuum infusion and its experience shows.

A two-cabin layout is offered as standard. The Slovenian yard will accommodate some bespoke requests, so in the port aft cabin of the test boat, for instance, it agreed to fit a convertible (and arguably more practical) twin rather than the standard double.

BECOMING ACQUAINTED

Spending a night aboard can often unearth a few niggles that get to you in the quieter hours. But other than an unnecessarily loud water pump in the galley, this was not the case with the Elan. In fact the following day I found the interior just as appealing and the layout fit for purpose.

Despite the near-freezing temperature outside, there was also very little condensation in the morning thanks to good insulation and an efficient heating system. This and the installation of heating outlets throughout, including in the heads, makes a real difference to extending your season.

I liked the galley layout in particular. Positioned athwartships and amidships in the area of least pitching, it forms the heart of the boat. The cooking and refrigeration is arranged in the U-shaped section to

port, with extra stowage surrounding the double sink to starboard. Cabinets for drinks and glasses add a classy touch and there is the option for a microwave or coffee machine to pop smartly out of the worksurface.

The abundance of practical stowage is another plus point – in particular the continuous head-height bank of lockers, which open top-down, and the tall lockers near the companionway, which can house director’s chairs or would make an ideal place for hanging wet weather gear.

Admittedly, I found the height of the semi-raised saloon a little perplexing. Surely a benefit of having a deckhouse structure with its wraparound glazing, is to be able to enjoy the views from down below? I consider myself to be of average height at 5ft 10in, but I could not see horizontally out of the coachroof windows. Equally, the hull portlights are too low for a horizon view. The benefit these tinted windows bring, however, is natural light with a degree of privacy.

Elan has decided against a dedicated navstation, which will certainly be a big compromise for some. Yet its convertible solution, albeit compact and aft-facing, is more practical than many dual-purpose seating/chart table arrangements. By simply pulling the backrest, the whole seat hinges over to reveal the chart table, without any cushions needing to be rearranged.

Above the navstation is a SiMarine touchscreen display, which sits within a brushed aluminium switchboard and provides intuitive monitoring of all the yacht’s main systems. The look and finish smacks of quality.

There is enough beam in the forward ends to mount the headrests forward in the spacious en suite master cabin. However, the aft cabins feel more compact, with narrow doorways – although the test boat did have the

optional third cabin. These aft cabins have spacious and beamy double berths with pleasant seated headroom outboard beside the hull windows.

The heads are smartly done. Both have separate showers and good stowage, although again the aft heads is narrow and the freestanding egg shaped sinks annoyingly small.

A CLEVER NICHE?

The GT6 comes with a base price of €370,000 ex VAT (although the owner of the test boat had spend nearly half of this again on options). For €50,000–70,000 less you could get a 50ft+ French or German production yacht. Or it would cost more than this difference again for a higher performance X-Yacht/Solaris/Grand Soleil. Yet this is a larger step up in quality from the former than it is down from the latter.

The Elan has a vacuum-infused build and comes with a degree of flexibility to tailor it to your needs. In Tom Humphreys’ words it’s an ‘out-and-out cruiser’, which sits between Elan’s Impression and Performance ranges.

Most production yacht builders are now targeting this select area of the market – 45ft-55ft cruising yachts which offer a blend of luxury and speed, and that are comfortable, easy to handle and primarily suit warm weather sailing.

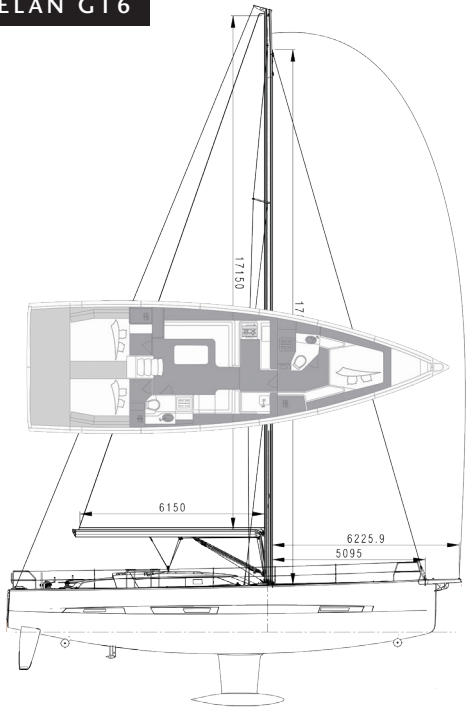
Yet Elan sits in its own pricing niche. And that is considerably less than you might expect for a product carrying the Porsche name.

Want to see more of Toby’s Elan GT6 review? Visit *Yachting World’s* YouTube channel to watch the full video [youtube/yachtingworld](https://youtube.com/yachtingworld)



A-sails or furling code sails are key to enjoying light breezes

ELAN GT6



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA 15.14m 49ft 8in • **LWL** 13.49m 44ft 3in • **Beam** (max) 4.49m 14ft 9in • **Draught** 2.45m 8ft 0in • **Disp** (lightship) 14,327kg 31,585lb • **Ballast** 4,240kg 9,348lb • **Sail Area** (100% foretriangle) 109.1m² 1,174ft² • **Berths** 4-6 • **Engine** Volvo Penta 60hp • **Water** 500lt 110gal • **Fuel** 300lt 66gal • **Sail area/disp ratio** 18.8 • **Disp/LWL ratio** 163 • **Price** (ex VAT) €369,900 (boat tested £526,160) • **Design** Humphreys Yacht Design, Studio F.A. Porsche

OUR VERDICT

This is a contemporary, sporty cruiser with all the styling bells and whistles needed to make it stand out in any waters. It is enjoyable to sail at a respectable pace and practical to cruise short-handed.

It offers the space and comfort for spending holidays aboard, which it suits more than long-distance/ocean voyaging. And it is designed to maximise the enjoyment of your chosen cruising grounds, whether on deck, below, or on the helm.

The GT6 has a level of refinement that comes with expert industrial design. The stark, contemporary styling, broad sections and high freeboard, which certainly made it conspicuous in Greenoch marina, will not appeal to all. But the attention to detail and design throughout keeps growing on you and sets this model apart.

The employment of a household name is not about saying to the marina valet ‘mine’s the Porsche’. It’s more about giving the owner an extra level of reassurance in the product. It should imbue owners year after year with that elusive quality which, I can only assume, Porsche drivers have: pride.