

P30

No. 569 JANUARY 2014 • £4.20 • www.pbo.co.uk
BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING YACHTING MAGAZINE

Practical Boat Owner®

ANTIFOULING ON TEST

One season, 14 paints:
which worked best?

3D SONAR

Raymarine v Lowrance

BUYING AN OLDER BOAT

Wood or GRP?

How to build a yacht in your garage

PLUS Make hardwood treads
Top up a steering compass

**PROJECT
BOAT**

Painting bilges
Refinishing the mast

**LONDON
BOAT SHOW**
Map and
standfinder
guide inside

WEATHER

Understanding
the jet stream

ATLANTIC SINKING

Rescue and heartbreak as a
reader loses his yacht

CRUISING

Islands of Norway
Ramsgate to Picardy





Elan ups the ante

PBO

**NEW
BOAT
TEST**

Four years after her launch, Elan's 310 has been reintroduced as the 320 with even more big-boat features. David Harding reports

You might think that creating a 30-footer in the style of a scaled-down Class 40 or Open 60, with racy styling, a broad stern, twin rudders, chines and a T-bulb keel would be enough to keep Elan ahead of the game for a while. It was, but things are changing quickly in boatbuilding and others have been playing catch-up.

One challenge for the production boatbuilder can be knowing how closely to follow the design trends set by leading-edge race boats, especially given the pace of developments in racing circles and, just as importantly, the public's appreciation of and appetite for them. There's always a danger that up-to-the-second designs will become outdated all too quickly.

Let's remember that only a decade or so ago, club sailors would glean most of their knowledge about what the latest racing yachts were up to from the

printed media. They might also see photos on websites. Today, live action from the Volvo Ocean Race or the America's Cup can be streamed straight to the computer and TV of anyone who cares to watch, bringing an immediacy never experienced before.

While foiling catamarans and wing sails might still be some way from entering the mainstream – even though foiling cats, for example, have been around for 30 years – the public's increasing awareness of design trends at the top end of the sport is almost inevitably leading to features that reflect the world of no-holds-barred yacht racing being incorporated into production boats, whether for effect or image.

It's a balancing act for the builders: not wanting to risk obsolescence or frightening away cruising and club-racing sailors and, importantly, allowing weekend potterers to feel that they're buying into a slice of the action.

To some extent it's a case of 'twas

ever thus'. In the heyday of the IOR (International Offshore Rule), cruising boats started appearing with high topsides, pinched ends, skinny mainsails and vast genoas because that was the fashion. At least the race-bred developments we're now seeing do, more often than not, make for a better boat. For that we should be grateful.

Staying in front

When the Elan 310 was launched in 2009, she attracted attention by bringing many features that had hitherto been the preserve of larger – and, predominantly, racier – yachts into a production performance cruiser. She allowed club sailors to buy a smallish (by today's standards) boat whose styling and associations bestowed instant kudos.

In the Elan's case it wasn't about image for wannabes, though: this boat worked. She was quick in a breeze, fun to sail and, crucially, not remotely hairy.

Given her designer's experience

in the worlds of both cruising and offshore racing, that's no surprise. After all, Rob Humphreys has designed everything from Ellen MacArthur's *Kingfisher* and multiple entries in Whitbread and Volvo round-the-world races to Class 40s, Ultra 30s and, on the cruising side, a host of Southerlys, Oysters, Contessas, Gib'Seas and Elans. The Humphreys office knows what makes a boat sail and Elan have a reputation for producing boats that sell, so there was little doubt that the Elan 310 was going to come up to scratch.

Quite logically, she came with tiller steering as standard. After all, tillers are used on a good many sizeable race boats, including Open 60s and the aforementioned *Kingfisher*, because they're simple, reliable, direct and practical. And if tiller steering is good enough for them, surely it would be good enough for a 30ft club cruiser/racer? You might be forgiven for thinking so.

Those who wanted a wheel could



The Elan 320 loves two-sail reaching in a breeze. Here she was regularly nudging into double-figure speeds



For all her sportiness, she would be well suited to short-handed sailing



A deep anchor locker, an under-deck furling drum, a recess in the deck for the bowsprit – and even a bungee cord to hold the lid open

have Jefa's canting-wheel system, as fitted to the Winner 9.00 tested last month (PBO December 2013). It works well – you rock the pedestal from side to side during tacks – but the Elan has a broad stern and, if your timing is slightly out, you might find yourself trying to walk the wheel a long way up a steep hill.

What the Elan 310 really needed, the builders decided after a few years, was twin wheels. Her stern is broader than that of many larger boats that fit them, so why not? No matter that she's only 30ft long. It could be a first. Twin wheels would work better than the canting system and add some extra big-boat cachet, drawing comparisons with TP52s and Volvo 70s. Make them black, add a few more styling touches, address some of the issues that were criticised on the 310, relaunch her as the 320, et voila! That should keep them ahead of the game for a bit longer.

Wheels in motion

When I sailed the 310 (see PBO December 2009), the test boat had a tiller. It suited her perfectly, giving excellent response from the twin rudders and the helmsman a

comfortable perch on the coamings immediately abaft the traveller.

You can still have a tiller on the 320 and save yourself about £3,000 into the bargain, but twin wheels are the default option. A large fixed wheel simply couldn't be big enough to get the helmsman right outboard on a 30-footer with 3m (10ft) or so between the gunwales, given the height of the sole and the depth of the cockpit, while the canting system is arguably best suited to boats with more modestly-proportioned sterns.

Twin wheels have become popular in recent years because sterns have grown progressively broader and the 'drag-and-lag' problems have been largely overcome. With early twin-wheel arrangements you could often feel the drag of the second wheel and the slop in the linkage. Now they're vastly better. The Jefa system on the Elan, for example, is crisp and responsive. Jefa have since gone even further and introduced a disengagement mechanism that can be fitted either during build or afterwards, so you're only turning the working wheel.

It's surprising just how different the Elan 320 looks compared with

the 310, especially since most of the tweaks have been relatively minor. She now sports a port in the hull each side, style stripes to accentuate the chines, a modified hull-to-deck joint without the 310's teak toerail, flush hatches, restyled coachroof windows, a hinge-down sill in the companionway, improved foot-braces at the helm and the option of an 'S' version for extra oomph. More oomph means less weight, largely thanks to the hull and deck being laid up with Elan's VAIL system (vacuum-assisted infusion lamination) using vinyl ester resins. Other weight-saving measures include a composite main bulkhead and lighter interior fit-out. The reduction in weight and wetted area should make a meaningful difference.

If you really want to maximise performance you can have a carbon mast. Deep draught comes as standard, the fin plunging to 2.15m (7ft 1in) below the waterline. That's a lot for a 30-footer. Shallower keels (1.9m/6ft 3in or a creek-crawling 1.5m/4ft 11in) are available. They're heavier to compensate for the higher centre of gravity and, accordingly, they cost more.

Borrowed from the Dutch dealer

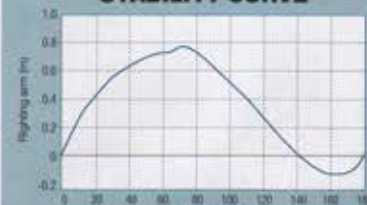


Tech spec

ELAN 320	
PRICE	From approx. £93,000 (inc. delivery & commissioning)
LOA	9.25m (30ft 4in)
LWL	8.71m (28ft 7in)
Beam	3.22m (10ft 7in)
Draught (standard fin)	2.15m (7ft 1in)
Displacement	3,750kg (8,267lb)
Ballast	1,046kg (2,306lb)
Sail area	51.9sq m (559sq ft)
Sail area/displacement ratio (standard hull)	21.5
Displacement/length ratio (standard hull)	158
Engine	Volvo D1-20 diesel saildrive
RCD category	A
Designer	Rob Humphreys
Builder	Elan, Slovenia

Distributors
 South: SD Marine, www.sdmarine.co.uk
 South West: Yachts of Dartmouth, www.yachtsofdartmouth.co.uk
 East: Woodrolfe Boat Sales, www.tollesbury-marina.co.uk

STABILITY CURVE



The GZ curve shows the maximum righting moment at 75° and an angle of vanishing stability (AVS) of 140°

for the Southampton Boat Show and post-show testing, our test boat was an S version with Seldén's tapered aluminium keel-stepped mast and the standard fin. Like the Winner 9.00 – another boat that made the trip over from Holland – she was equipped with a very nice set of laminate sails from the Hagoort loft. The S version also includes standing rigging in Dyform, together with running rigging and a backstay (complete with flicker) in Dyneema.



ABOVE The companionway fully open...
RIGHT ... and with the sill-cum-bottom washboard hinged up



Our first outing gave me little chance to learn anything. I headed out in the RIB in the hope of getting the photography in the can before the weather closed in, but it arrived ahead of schedule. With nigh-on 30 knots of south-easterly wind against the tide in Southampton Water, and horizontal rain mixing fresh water with salt, camera preservation became a priority. The guys on the Elan seemed none too keen to stay out either, so we followed them back in and agreed to try again another day.

Times two

We had more luck on the second occasion, despite our choice of days being restricted by the boat's imminent return to Holland. This time the wind was a nice 20-23 knots from the north-west, against the Solent tide and kicking up some boat-stoppingly short steep waves off the Isle of Wight shore.

Giving ourselves space for a decent beat meant first reaching from Hamble across to Gurnard.

The log read between 7.5 and 8.5 knots most of the way, the helm remaining light and the boat showing no inclination to round up provided the mainsheet trimmer stayed awake. As you would expect from a design like this, reaching in a breeze is definitely one of the Elan's strong suits.

Beating under full sail in choppy water and with 27 knots of wind over the deck on occasions was always going to be a good test. The boat coped well, though inevitably we were sailing along a pretty fine line. You can't get away with feathering too much while punching your way through and steering around vertical walls of water, or you come to a complete stop. Go too deep, on the other hand, and you fall over.

It was encouraging to see the log consistently reading between 5 and 5.5 knots in the bouncier patches.



The keel-stepped mast is set well aft for a fractionally-rigged boat. It's a functional layout, refined from that of the Elan 310

When we tacked towards the mainland shore and into less of an ebb the water flattened out and our speed increased to 6 knots. To see what would happen with the crew's weight outboard, I despatched all three of them to the rail. Even if they adopted the relaxed positions of a club-racing boat's WRDF (weather-rail discussion forum) rather than hiking in the manner of a crew whose tactician has called the layline to the weather mark a touch early, we gained an extra 0.3 of a knot. We pointed higher, too, as I was able to bring the traveller up the track.

Our pointing, in fact, was impressive: the compass consistently indicated a tighter angle than the 72° so indicated by the polar diagram, but that might

have been because it had yet to be swung. Nonetheless, there's no doubt the boat goes upwind very nicely. We paced ourselves against a sporty 45-footer on the beat back up Southampton Water. It was in cruising mode with a roller headsail and just two crew, so we thought it was a fair fight. We matched it pretty well.

The Dutch dealer's generosity didn't extend to sending an asymmetric spinnaker over with the boat, so for the downwind plug against the tide we used the substitute – which came from a J/109. Two of us on board regularly sail J/109s and are quite used to their spinnakers, but we came to the inevitable conclusion that they work best when the boat underneath them is a J/109 rather

Which way to steer: tiller, canting or twin wheels?



A tiller has many advantages. This is the Elan 310 tested in PBO December 2009



A canting wheel was the alternative on the Elan 310 – you tack it with the boat



Twin wheels – the popular choice on the Elan 320. A tiller is a money-saving alternative



than something three sizes smaller. With the kite being massively long in the hoist and designed to fly from a bowsprit about four times the length of the Elan's stubby projection, it only allowed us to sail with the wind somewhere around 160°. At least we kept going at a steady 10 knots most of the time – in flat water – and got home a lot sooner than we would have under plain sail.

Comfortable cruising

As is often the case with sporty but non-extreme boats, the Elan made life easy for the crew. She's undeniably quick in a breeze, though few 310s appear to have been campaigned seriously in the UK so we have no way of gauging her competitiveness under IRC or other developing rating systems like VPRS.

While she might not be bought principally as a cruising boat, she's remarkably undemanding to handle. The twin rudders provide enormous grip at high angles of heel and she's really quite hard to upset as well as being inclined to continue in a straight line.

Having the twin wheels set well onboard gives the helmsman a good perch on the deck. A 6:1 mainsheet is supplemented by a 2:1 fine-tune and, together with the controls for the recessed, full-width traveller and the backstay, it's within easy reach.

My only significant criticism of the

steering mechanism itself is the gearing: at over 1.5 turns from lock to lock it's too low, demanding more wheel movement than should be necessary. I would much prefer one-turn gearing.

I would like grab-rails on the pedestals, too, because when you're moving around at the stern of a boat with a wide, open cockpit like this there's nothing to grab hold of. It would be all too easy to end up hanging on to a wheel – or even both of them – by mistake.

A change from the 310 is the pair

of hinge-up foot-braces at the helm. The 310 had a stainless steel bar each side. Now it's a more elaborate arrangement, but can't be operated with one foot.

Hardware is generally well specified and in the right place. I would like to see foot-blocks added for the genoa sheets because it's a long way from the car to the winch. You only need a small amount of slack in the sheet over that sort of distance before you get a riding turn – as we did.

Moving forward on deck is made easier by the angled section at the base of the coachroof and harder by the lower shrouds cutting across, as they invariably do with double-spreader rigs on boats of this size.

In the bow is an under-deck furling drum – always a welcome feature – a deep anchor well and a recess in the deck moulding for the aforementioned stubby projection, or what one might more kindly call a 'bowspriting'. With the mast being set so far aft, it could be argued that a longer bowsprit isn't needed. Nonetheless, outside rather than inside gybes might be called for in any breeze.

Down below

Things have moved on below decks from the 310, most notably with the addition of the hull ports, strip lighting set into the moulded headliner and a welcome array of extra handholds.

An interior moulding forms the basis of the layout. Underneath it amidships is a substantial reinforcing grid to distribute the loads from the keel and rig. The hull itself is foam-cored, the core being ramped down to a single skin in

way of the skin fittings and, of course, the keel bolts, which pass through stainless steel plates between the athwartships members.

Boats like this, with plenty of beam, sizeable rigs and deep keels place substantial loads on their hulls, so they need to be engineered for a high degree of rigidity. It looks as though Humphreys and Elan between them have done the necessary.

In terms of comfort, feel and practicality, the interior works pretty well for a sporty 30, although stowage is inevitably limited. It's finished in the same light oak as the 310 with the shallow hull and the space beneath the settee berths each side taken up by the twin water tanks, fuel and the calorifier.

Headroom and berth lengths will be fine for most people, engine access is better than some (even if it's not easy to check the raw-water filter) and the companionway is easy to negotiate.

PBO's verdict

The Elan 320 is a good example of a boat that's thoroughly modern without being trendy or following fashion for fashion's sake. She's as she is because boats like this on a larger scale have proved themselves in high-level offshore racing. Whether she's cut out for the sort of predominantly upwind/downwind inshore racing we see around the coast of the UK, much of it in relatively light conditions, we will have to see.

As a spirited yet easily-managed fast cruiser and for passage-making – be it racing or cruising – she has much to offer.

■ See the Elan 320 at the London Boat Show, stand G118

Other boats to look at



Winner 9.00

PRICE: FROM £74,000

Tested in PBO December 2013, this Dutch design is fast, well mannered and full of sensible ideas. Comes with a choice of keels and add-on packages for racing or cruising.

www.winneryachts.com



Beneteau First 30

PRICE: FROM £82,000

Longer than the Elan 320 despite her name, she too has a broad stern, twin rudders and a designer with plenty of successful offshore racing yachts to his credit – Juan Kouyoumdjian.

www.beneteau.com



Dufour 310

PRICE: FROM £88,400

Due to be launched at the Paris Boat Show, she has some similarities with the Elan (chines, broad stern, twin wheels, twin rudders) but is much heavier and more cruisey.

www.dufour-yachts.com



You can buy boat tests online from www.pbo.co.uk by clicking on 'Find PBO articles' and entering the type of boat you're looking for in the search area, or by calling the Copy Service on tel: 01202 440830

