

TEST: AUSTRAL 8 CLUBMAN

Eight Is ENOUGH

**New-generation TS boasts the speed,
space and special touches to win
Australia's premier award.
Mark Rothfield tells**

FOUR trailer sailers, three IMS-ers, two motorsailers, two open dayboats, one One-Design racer, and a classic cruising yacht too ... if it came from a true love at Christmas you'd gleefully accept any. Problem was that Modern Boating's test team had to separate them for the sake of judging the 1993 Australian Sailboat of the Year.

To carry the title, it was felt the recipient should have those extra touches which make it stand up and be counted as a world class craft. Ultimately, when the judging criteria was applied, it went not to the more fancied names — Cavalier 395, Northshore NSX, Farr 38, Beneteau Evasion, Catalina 25, Elliott 7 or 11-Metre One Design. The one that scored on all counts was the Austral 8 Clubman TS.

"Austral who?" denounced the critics, until seeing for themselves the Clubman's performance, space, handling ease and brilliant finishing touches. Then they were silenced. Capping the announcement, the boat went on to win the 1994 National Trailable championships held on Victoria's Western Port Bay.

Here is truly an inspirational 26-foot trailable yacht, one that doesn't just aspire to be the best built, but also the best appointed. And it should succeed, unlike other aspirants which have suffered from over-



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capitalisation, because it has been developed at a steady pace, in between other paying jobs; and was refined by Scott Jutson. Say no more.

What sets it apart? Well, it's little touches of class, such as a moulded cabin canopy — a la Beneteau — to conceal aft-led halyards, an outboard

well in the starboard seat, a moulded one-piece tiller/rudder case, cockpit drainage channels, custom-fabricated mast base, recesses for fittings, etc. And it's the big things too, like a hull that performs well on all points of sail, while also swallowing a six-berth accommodation plan.

All are examples of design excellence that we normally only associate with imported products. The real surprise, perhaps, is that it comes from Austral. Certainly the build quality has always been there — down to using chromed brass frames for cabin windows — but the South Australian-based manufacturer is better known for its stout, displacement trailer sailers (Austral 20 & 24) and seagoing cruising yacht (Austral 30). Simply, proprietor Adrian Keough and sons Michael and Scott decided some time ago that the market could also sustain a new-generation performance boat.

Michael roughed up a hull model and sent it to Jutson, a renowned

ABOVE: Pointing ability is excellent thanks to Jutson keel and rudder profiles.

OPPOSITE: Well-planned cockpit for three to handle sail controls, with room for human ballast.

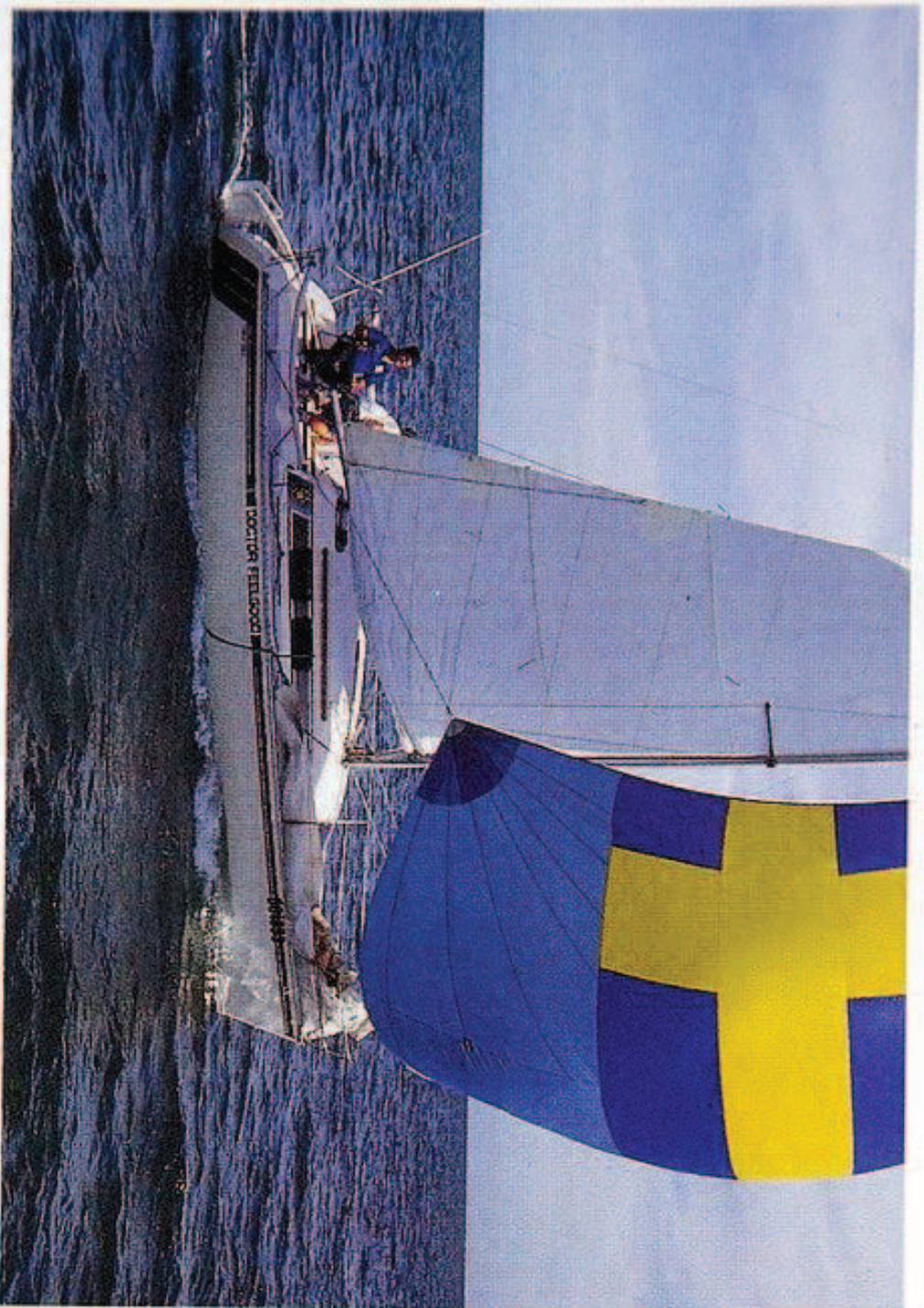
Handy cockpit engine well; dinette on centreboard case.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Down-wind the bow lifts to promote planing.



TRAILER
S





optimiser, to run through a Velocity Prediction Program. The computer spat out the co-ordinates of a hull with minimal rocker, flattish underbody, firm bilges and square topsides — translated, it spells planing performance, shallow draft

(just 22cm with keel raised) and maximum internal volume; perfect ingredients for a trailable cruiser/tracer.

Credit for the deck and interior layout, meanwhile, goes to the Austral team. The overall effect is

sleek, from the open transom, along the sweeping coamings and curved coachroof, to plumbish bow. From any angle it's clean and smart, even when nestled on trailer.

Construction is mid-tech, employing triaxial 'glass, Divinycell foam and vacuum-bagged vinylester resin, backed up by kevlar and balsa in high load areas. A one-piece chassis, incorporating the furniture mouldings, drops into the hull to act as a further stiffener, plus there's a full headliner in the saloon.

The rudder system is superbly executed — the dagger case is open ended, with the trailing edge sealed by a rounded stopper; this pops out if the foil strikes the bottom or a submerged object, thus negating the risk of severe damage.

The moulded outboard well holds a short-shaft auxiliary that lifts right out of the water, replaced by an infill. The test boat's was an Evinrude 8, which proved quite manageable to

lower and raise. It was pull-start, though electric is optional, and there's a kill switch and Morse throttle mounted outside the seat within easy reach of the helmsman. The 25l fuel tank also gets its own locker nearby, so there's no external sign of a motor.

Teak strips line the cockpit floor and seats to provide excellent non-skid and drainage. The seats have a cut-out along the outer edge with a teak panel over the top, creating a foot brace or a useful spot for tying off ropes. More recesses are to be found for the backstay control line, traveller, cleats, pushpit, companionway hatch, cabin handrails and anchor locker. It makes the boat so clean and user-friendly that it's well worth the initial effort.

Down below, there's a fairly conventional layout and fitout, with the usual white surfaces, grey frontrunner carpet and teak trim. Somehow, perhaps because of the dimensions, it escapes from looking bland. Headroom is adequate for moving about, but not full, and no provision is made for a poptop — certainly the weak link in terms of sales appeal.

Aft, to port, is a quarter berth that classifies as a double though, as with similar set-ups, the person under the cockpit gets a raw deal. Opposite is a compact galley, with a two burner metho stove, single sink and limited storage for cooking ware beneath — the stove slides over the top when in use, leaving some preparation space and allowing steam and odours to escape through the companionway.

Full-length settees run either side of the saloon, with the padded

OPPOSITE: One-piece moulded tiller and rudder case, and a big dagger blade, combine to produce precise feel and control off the breeze. What's more, in the event of hitting a submerged object, the rudder pops out of its case. All up, a brilliant helm.

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA:	8.15m
Beam:	2.45m
Draft:	0.22m/2.05m
Displacement:	1200kg
Ballast:	450kg
Sail area (working):	32sq m
Auxiliary:	Evinrude 8
Prices:	
Hull & Deck:	\$22,500
Stage 2 (lock-up):	\$28,000
Deck & Rig hardware:	\$10,900
Stage 3 (sailaway):	\$44,000
Stage 4 Deluxe:	\$49,500
As tested:	\$60,000
Designer:	Scott Jutson
Builder:	Austral Yachts, 20-22 Cottage Lane, Hackham SA 5163 Ph (08) 384 5487 Fax (08) 326 1537

When all is said and done, the Austral 8 is close to being the perfect TS cruiser/racer

backrests being detachable (via velcro tabs) to create more width for sleeping. Above them are a series of soft storage pockets, secured by elastic, for storing personal items such as keys, wallets, sunglasses and sunscreen. On the test boat, they were individually labelled with the crews' names.

The vertical centre case is used as a pillar for a folding dinette table — it drops down, then the leaves fold out towards the settees. Squeezed in to port is a navigation table and a shelf for plates, cups and radios, making the most use of an otherwise wasted area. On the other side of the main bulkhead, the forecabin features a small loo and good-sized vee berth.

Despite this comfortable interior, displacement is relatively light at 1300kg, or around 1200kg in race

trim. Any of the V6-powered 4WDs could handle that, while two people can manage the rigging and launching procedure. Also, the two traditionally heavy tasks, lifting the mast and keel, are made easy with the use of winches — trailer winch in the mast's case, and halyard winch for the drop keel.

The mast, pinned at the base, rose without incident. It's a Baverstock section, not too heavy, not too light, with single swept-back spreaders and running backstay. Forestay tension is applied by cranking it down with the trailer winch before shackling on.

We were soon motoring out towards Adelaide's Spencer Gulf at around six knots. The fully-battened main slid up easily, followed by the hanked-on headsail, and finally we settled down to a blissfully quiet reach. A 5-10 knot breeze ruffled the otherwise calm water we began working into. The hull revelled in the conditions, gradually building up a good head of steam, and the helm remained balanced and assured, if a touch heavy. Stability was good too, and when heeling, the angled coamings and foot holds came into their own.

Pointing ability was excellent, a trademark of Jutson's efficient keel and rudder profiles. The hull's forefoot rides just clear of the water, so for upwind tracking it's better to get weight forward. Downwind, of course, it promotes planing — that we proved once the fractional chute was popped. The gear worked perfectly and she ran true, a clean wake exiting beneath the open transom.

How fast? Well, in linchons terms the Austral slots in a notch below the hot rod Youngs and Elliotts, but on par with Ross 780s and Spider 28s. Of course, no other sailboat of this size offers the same features. When all's said and done, the Austral 8 is close to being the perfect TS cruiser/racer — big enough to offer speed and space, light enough to be manageable, and built to world standards.

