

100-POINT BOAT TEST

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NEW BOATS TRIED & TESTED

Elan 310



We'd heard that Elan's new entry-level yacht was a bit special. She looks it but does she live up to the hype? Chris Beeson finds out

The Elan 31 was always going to be a tough act to follow – quick, pretty good value, easy on the eye and with adequate storage for a couple on a week's cruise. So when we heard she was to be replaced, we expected Elan's favourite designer, Rob Humphreys, to come up with something similar. How wrong we were.

The first drawings of the 310 showed Humphreys' head was still full of the work he'd done on the Volvo 70 *Kosatka* and the Class 40 *Orca*, both beamy, powerful, planing hulls with knife-edge chines. At Southampton Boat Show the new 310 looked like a rocketship, far too hairy for cruising. Intrigued, we arranged a test there and then.

It very nearly didn't happen. At Premier Yacht Sales' base in Swanwick, a couple of miles up the Hamble River, the 310 was heeling with each gust, her fenders gasping against the dock. Out in the Solent, the Bramble weather beacon (Bramblemet.co.uk) was showing a 20-knot average and gusts of 28. Blustery showers raking the marina promised to hamper photographer Graham's efforts behind the lens and anyway, exactly how wise would it be to test a twitchy-looking 31 ft yacht in a near-gale?

Performance

After lunch, the rain cleared and we bit the bullet. After motoring out into Southampton Water, we raised the main with one reef, rolled out 70 per cent of the jib and cranked on the backstay before fetching down past Calshot at 5.8-7.6 knots. Already the helm felt exquisite: quite tender, but the twin rudders responded with alacrity. It was clear that a great day lay ahead.

Close-hauled at 25-30° to the apparent wind, with 20-28 knots whipping over the gunwales, she shot off at 5.8-6.7 knots, elevating her crew as she cranked over, tracking sweetly on her chines, with the merest whiff of weather helm. I feathered in occasional gusts and bore away to overpress her but there was never a question of losing control, despite some dramatic heel. She spun enthusiastically through tacks and the loads on sheets and traveller were easily manageable. There were no shuddering slams because the underwater section is fairly rounded forward of the keel.

Bearing away onto a beam →

So much fun! The Elan 310's performance is a revelation, fast and sure-footed. Ten knots has never seemed so easy



PHOTOS: GRAHAM SHOOK © YACHTING MONTHLY



The saloon is full-beam and fairly bright, but there's only one opening hatch. There is no stowage space below or behind the saloon seating and very little in the removable lockers (INSET) outboard



There's no dedicated galley light or ventilation – and no bin!



Roomy heads with decent stowage and a wet locker with a drain



Keelbolts and backing plates are easily accessible



The forward cabin is bright and has huge stowage beneath the berth



A big double berth in the aft cabin. An extra portlight would be useful

Elan 310

Key features

Moulded lips on the cockpit seats make good footbraces for the crew. The helm has a folding bar, but it could be longer

The halyard winches prevent the helmsman getting a clear view of the instruments

There is a wheel option, which 'tacks' from side to side, but the tiller feels glorious

Handrails are too short and jib tracks could be extended forward, too, for better leech tension

Tiller, mainsheet, fine tuning, traveller and backstay controls are close to hand, as is the primary winch – great for short-handed sailing

Netting across the open transom would stop lines and gear disappearing in the wake



She tracks like a train upwind, riding her chines and making nearly 7 knots with hardly any weather helm. She handled the chop easily

reach, the heel all but disappeared despite still having 24–28 knots across the deck. She rocketed away at 7.8–10 knots with consummate ease, leaving a flat wake with some turbulence from the rudder babbling under the leeward quarter. Such was the reassuring ease of control that I was surprised when I glanced at the log and saw 10 knots.

Bearing away further onto 120–150° to the apparent wind, she gybed very easily and slipped along at 8–9.4 knots, which felt positively pedestrian. There can't be many 31ft yachts you can say that about.

Design & construction

She has only 2cm (1in) more beam than her predecessor, but it's carried right aft to the open transom so the cockpit seems huge, though it's barely longer than the 31's. The 310 has about 1m² (10sq ft) less sail area and displaces only 50kg (110lb) less unladen, but she's a whopping 0.5m (1ft 6in) longer at the waterline, improving upwind speed. Ballast, though 160kg (353lb) lighter, is both 5cm (2in) deeper and in bulb form, lowering the centre of gravity so she's stiffer despite a lower ballast ratio. She is generally pretty well

finished below, but lacks stowage. Another potential drawback for cruising is the 1.9m draught, which rules out a fair few anchorages and many of the swinging moorings in the Solent, for instance.

The hull is a glassfibre sandwich cored with lightweight closed-cell foam. The isophthalic resins are infused with epoxy molecules at 0.8 atmospheres, using the VAIL (vacuum assisted infusion laminate) system. The GRP liner that takes the

(577sq ft). Downwind, she sets a huge 75m² (807sq ft) gennaker, flown from a manually deployed carbonfibre bowsprit.

Deck layout

The cockpit is pretty much perfect for short-handed sailing. One reservation I'd have about the helm setup is that the halyard winches obstruct the helmsman's view of the instruments. Another is the helm's fold-down foot-bracing bars, which

manual bilge pump, another locker to starboard next to the throttle and bathing shower. A huge cockpit locker takes up the starboard quarter, but its small entry aperture would make retrieving your dinghy a bit tricky. The engine control panel is below the companionway.

All lines lead aft to the cockpit but you'd still need to go forward to launch the bowsprit and attach running gear to the gennaker. Non-slip is good and the sidedecks clear. The coachroof handrail is too short, starting forward of the sprayhood fastening studs and ending aft of the mast to avoid fouling the barber-hauler.

Living below

This isn't a long-distance cruiser by any stretch of the imagination. Indeed, saloon, galley and cabin lockers are a £560 option that can be unbolted and removed for a day's racing. There are water tanks, batteries and a calorifier under the 6ft 5in saloon seating, very little space behind it and none at all in the bilge, so you'd definitely find yourself bringing pretty much everything you needed, bar a few galley and safety basics, down to the boat with you. If you're

'She rocketed away at 7.8-10 knots with consummate ease'

hull and rig loads is laminated to the hull and bulkheads are also laminated into place. The balsacored deck is bonded and fastened to the hull flange.

Sailplan

She carries a mainsail and a non-overlapping, furling jib on a fractional rig with two sweptback spreaders. Chainplates are outboard, clearing the saloon of buttresses and keeping the sidedecks clear.

Upwind sail area is 53.6m²

the sort of sailor who tends to live out of a bag on board anyway, this won't be much of a drawback.

The companionway steps are steep and lipped with stainless steel grab rails either side, which you'll need because you have to lean backwards coming below to avoid the hatch. There's 6ft 1in headroom, decreasing to 5ft 7in at the forward bulkhead. Fiddles on the galley and chart table act as hand-holds and there are grabrails the length of the saloon. The majority of stowage below is in the lockers under the sink, stove and chart table but, annoyingly, there's no bin so you'd need to tie up a carrier bag, which would inevitably drip onto the sole and could tear off completely.

The windows are large and, with four lights in the moulded headlining, the space is bright but ventilation is limited to the companionway and a saloon hatch. The saloon table seats four but, because the forward bulkhead is so far forward, the keel-stepped mast runs right through the middle of it.

We like the forward-facing chart table. It's half Admiralty chart-sized with a white LED light and good stowage below the gas-strutted lid, under the seat and in the removable locker outboard. Switches and fuses are easily accessible but there's not much instrument space.

You'd have to rely on airflow through the companionway while cooking, because there's no dedicated ventilation in the galley. Nor is there a light over the stove, which gimbals only 15°. Headroom is just under 6ft but the work surfaces seem a little low at under 3ft high. There's a small freezer box in the Isotherm fridge, the lid for

which takes up most of the work space next to the 6in deep single sink, always a problem on a yacht this size. There's no splashback.

In the heads, bracing and hand-holds are good. There's a light, an opening hatch and good stowage in two mirrored lockers outboard. Below the huge sink there's good seacock access and some extra stowage. The shower head lacks a bracket, but the shower sump and its drain are well-designed.

Under the big forecabin hatch there's 5ft 7in headroom, once you've removed the infill that completes the 6ft 9in double berth. The locker at the foot of the berth provides more stowage but has a 1in gap between the shelf and the anchor locker moulding so don't put anything too small in there.

The aft cabin has one small opening hatch, a main light and two reading lights. Another opening hatch into the cockpit wouldn't go amiss. There is space for a hanging locker but it wasn't fitted on our test boat so stowage is in the fiddled shelf outboard. There's a shallow space below the outboard berth and a fuel tank below the inboard but overall it's in keeping with her minimalist approach to stowage.

Under power

The 20hp engine powers a fixed, two-blade prop on a saildrive. She cruises at 6 knots and makes more than 7 knots flat out. She turns in one-and-a-half times her own length when going ahead, and in two boatlengths when going astern, which is pretty impressive for a twin-rudder yacht. But when motoring astern at 3 knots, the tiller needs a very firm hand. ▲



A good-size chart table but not much instrument space
INSET The heads door handle is too close to my ribs

'There's no bin so you'd need to tie up a carrier bag, which would inevitably drip onto the sole'



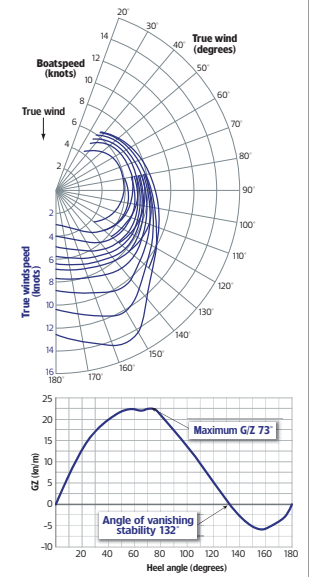
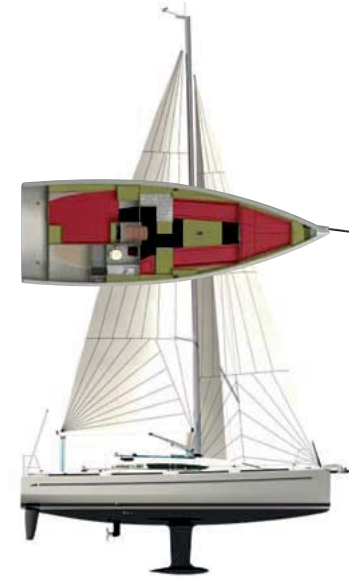
YM's 100-POINT RESULTS

UNDER SAIL	AT THE HELM	ON DECK	SAIL PLAN	BUILD	MAINTENANCE
<p>PERFORMANCE This is a sensational yacht to sail, quite the most fun I've had on a yacht of this size. She's a real wind-in-the-hair sporty boat but, despite her punchy appearance, she is exceptionally well behaved.</p> <p>This, combined with easily manageable loads, makes you feel you are sailing well within her capabilities, and yours. Remarkable.</p> <p>10_{/10}</p>	<p>AT THE HELM Directionally, she's effortlessly stable but every tweak of the tiller is instantly and faithfully reflected in her heading – regardless of heel. The tiller feels exquisite, with just enough weight to let you know what's going on, but light enough to make helming a child's play. Only the halyard winch blocking the instruments and the short footbrace bar prevented a score of 10/10.</p> <p>9_{/10}</p>	<p>DECK LAYOUT All controls are within reach of the helmsman, which makes her a genuine prospect for short-handed or solo sailing fans. I'd prefer to see a longer handrail on the coachroof and a longer jib track. With only a few rolls in the headsail, the jib car was well forward and the sheet lead was too far aft. The deck gear is Harken, including winches from the new Radial range.</p> <p>9_{/10}</p>	<p>SAIL PLAN We probably had too much canvas up, but she felt impeccably balanced and control was never an issue. Her 'white' sails are easily managed from the cockpit, with tweekers for just about everything. We didn't get to play with the gennaker, but I can see it making a double-figure difference to the log read-out in a Force 4.</p> <p>8_{/10}</p>	<p>DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION Rob Humphreys says she's a '60:60 cruiser-racer', appealing to both camps. I'm not sure about that, but as a cruiser who really enjoys sailing, I'd certainly be interested – then hooked. The interior build quality felt a little light, but Elan's construction process is checked monthly by Germanischer Lloyd to make sure standards are maintained.</p> <p>8_{/10}</p>	<p>MAINTENANCE Companionway steps have no gas strut so you bear the load yourself while inserting a pole into a sole fitting to support the steps, like a car bonnet. Engine access is good behind the steps and through panels in the aft cabin and heads but you need to remove the heads door to get at the oil filter. Access to seacocks, systems and stern gear is good.</p> <p>8_{/10}</p>

TECHNICAL

Elan 310

- Price £86,742 (sailaway, as seen)
- LOA 9.3m (30ft 4in)
- LWL 8.7m (28ft 6in)
- Beam 3.2m (10ft 6in)
- Draught 1.9m (6ft 3in)
- Displacement 3,750kg (8,267 lb)
- Ballast 1,140kg (2,513 lb)
- Sail area 53.6m² (577sq ft)
- Engine 20hp
- Diesel 50 lit (11 gal)
- Water 150 lit (33 gal)
- Displ/length 159.4 (light displ racer)
- Sail area/displ 22.58 (racer)
- Ballast ratio (%) 30
- RCD category A
- STIX 33.3
- Designer Humphreys Yacht Design
- Builder Elan Marine, Slovenia
- Tel 01489 884075
- Website premieryachtsales.co.uk



THREE ALTERNATIVE CHOICES

1 Jeanneau Sun Fast 3200 £89,500 ex-sails
Built for shorthanded racing, she could be a quick and easily handled fast cruiser but below there are few concessions to comfort

2 J/92s £85,675
Another nippy number from J-Boats, which can be sailed short-handed. She's lighter, less powerful and stiffer

3 Used Beneteau First 40.7 £85,000
For the same price you could buy this nine-year-old, 40ft cruiser-racer: better performance, more stowage, bigger bills



BELOW DECK

CHART TABLE
It's forward facing, comfortable to work at and has enough space for the knees. The table is a good size with a fair amount of stowage beneath but there's very little in the way of instrument space unless you sacrifice the removable locker space and flush-mount instruments there. A plotter should be bracket mounted on the chart table forward of the lid.

8_{/10}

GALLEY
The galley probably isn't great. Assuming the lockers are in situ, you have some stowage there and below the stove and sink but hardly any workspace – and why no bin? Cooking underway you'll need a galley strap on port tack and the stove should gimmel twice as far as it does. The lack of direct ventilation and light won't brighten your galley experience.

5_{/10}

HEADS
It's bright with good bracing on the toilet, great handrails, an excellent wet locker with drain and lots of stowage. There's an opening hatch for ventilation and a tidy-looking shower sump. Below the sink, which looks far too big, there's excellent seacock access. The main grumble is the lack of a bracket for the shower head.

9_{/10}

LIVING BELOW
The lack of stowage, even with the locker package, is likely to be an issue because we cruisers tend not to be too Spartan in the amount of gear we cart around. There's standing headroom in much of the saloon but ventilation isn't up to much and the aft cabin is a little dingy. The forecabin is brighter but unless you remove the infill, there's no standing room.

6_{/10}

TOTAL SCORE

What a performance! Humphreys has excelled himself. The ease with which high speeds were achieved is amazing on a 31-footer, loads were light and she was fabulous to helm. Graham joined us, took the tiller and we couldn't prise it out of his hands, so we sailed upriver back to Swanwick. Down below, stowage is too minimalist to cruise in comfort for more than a long weekend but, for a spritely couple who like sailing quick, grinning madly and don't mind skipping a few creature comforts, she's made to measure.

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