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EQUILIBRIUM





# FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

Sailing is all about the balance of sails and keel, of racing and cruising, of work and play. In other words: equilibrium.

**T**he most hi-tech aspect of the new *M55 Equilibrium* is hiding in plain sight – her resin-infused, carbon construction. It's the same level of construction that gives speed to the grand prix TP52 ocean racing yachts and will contribute to the new *M55* being one of the fastest cruising yachts on the Hauraki Gulf this summer.

Did I just say TP52 and cruising yachts in the same sentence? Yes I did, and it gets even better.

Like many before them, Auckland yachties Graham and Shona Matthews were in pursuit of the perfect performance-cruiser. They heard that Steve Marten, formerly of Marten Yachts, was working with a designer to develop a range of performance-cruisers so they commissioned him to project manage what would become the *M55*, with M for Marten.

But like military intelligence, the term 'performance-cruiser' is an oxymoron. Every item such as fridge, freezer and hot water cylinder that enhances a yacht's cruising ability also adds weight and compromises its racing ability.

For this reason, Graham, an engineer, invested in the high-tech hull. This gave *Equilibrium* some precious weight credits which could be traded for cruising luxuries without sacrificing too much performance, and means the 55ft (16.8m)

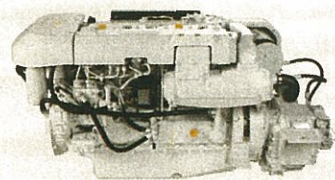
yacht with 3.5-tonne lead bulb weighs in at just 12.6 tonnes.

*Equilibrium* is the first-born in what Steve Marten hopes will become an M-range of yachts and she carries an impressive pedigree. Her distinctive chamfered gunwale bears some resemblance to Emirates Team New Zealand's TP52; both boats were designed by Botin-Carkeek, formerly head designer for ETNZ. The chamfer lowers the topsides visually, and is lighter to build. Other

**At a glance** ▶ loa x beam 16.73 x 15.43 ▶ draft 3.9m ▶ displacement 12.6 tonne ▶ engine Yanmar sail drive 75hp ▶ fuel 360 litres ▶ water 360 litres

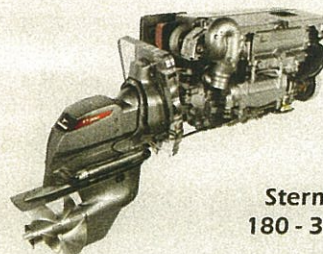
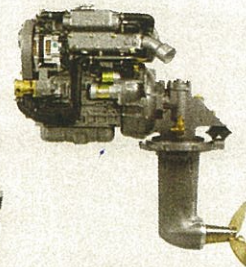


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Words **Rebecca Hayter** Photos **Ivor Wilkins**

ETNZ links are the structural engineering by Giovanni Belgrano and the deck layout which had input from sailor Don Cowie.

Another crucial element was regular Thursday meetings at Lloyd Stevenson's boatbuilding yard.

"It involved the owners, project manager and builder all nutting out the details and having friendly debates," says Lloyd. When electronics were on the agenda, for example, the meeting included representatives from Advance Trident,

Enertec Services, Half Moon Bay Electrical and BEP Marine.

*Equilibrium's* build time was 18 months including the plugs and moulds; future M55 yachts could be finished in 12 months. Medium-tech carbon technology would be an option for a cruising-oriented version.

### SAILING

As one of her crew puts it, *Equilibrium* is a weapon upwind. The direct quadrant steering is smooth and immediately in

**Test conditions** > 10-14 knots nor'east.



“This lady will always have the perfect outfit for every racing and cruising occasion.”

touch with the rudder. *Equilibrium* is exceptionally eager to take the lifts too; in 8-9 knots, she was pointing at 37 degrees true, making around 7 knots boat speed.

Graham says *Equilibrium* sails as her speed polar diagrams have indicated. Here's a sample:

- 10kts true wind speed (TWS), sailing at 39 degrees true wind angle (TWA): 8.2kts boat speed;
- 16kts TWS, sailing at 35 degrees TWA: 8.7kts boat speed;
- 25kts TWS at 34 degrees TWA: 9.1 knots boat speed.

With her ballasted 3.9m draft, she stiffens at an early angle of heel and tends to stay there; the fabricated steel keel lifts hydraulically to 2.3m draft for anchoring. *Equilibrium* has close sheeting angles, thanks to inboard tracks on the coachroof, and outboard tracks for reaching.

The 25m Hall Spars high modulus-carbon fibre mast with three swept spreaders is the same light, stiff technology as on the TP52 champion, *Quantum Racing*. The mast is supported by Hall Spars seamless carbon rigging, which claims to be 15% smaller in area than its competition, with carbon fibre chain plates.

Downwind, the weight of *Equilibrium's* cruising interior has some impact and she doesn't boogie with the same energy as the dedicated, stripped-out racers in A Division. Our gennaker ride in around 12 knots of wind was a respectable 10 knots but Graham and his crew have seen 19 knots boat speed in more than 25 knots true.

Again, from the polars:

- 10kts TWS, sailing at 135 degrees true: 9.25kts boat speed;



- 16kts TWS, sailing at 135 degrees true: 11.54kts boat speed;
- 25kts TWS, sailing at 135 degrees true: 16.46kts boat speed.

The Doyle Sails Stratis wardrobe ensures this lady will always have the perfect outfit for every racing and cruising occasion. The 106m<sup>2</sup> mainsail has a conventional leech, ie no square top, in deference to her cruising life. With the 70m<sup>2</sup> number 1 genoa, her working sail area is 176m<sup>2</sup>.

Her wardrobe includes: numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 genoas, a storm jib that can also hoist on a removable inner stay as a staysail, a trysail and a roller furling headsail. She has a fractional code 0 and masthead code 0 for light airs, and A2 (310m<sup>2</sup>), A3 (240m<sup>2</sup>) and A4 gennakers. There is no spinnaker.

Following Wednesday night racing in the summer, her crew will fit the furling headsail and she'll be ready to go cruising for the weekend.

But wait. Whether *Equilibrium* is sailing as a fully-crewed racing yacht or a two-handed cruising yacht, there is more: hydraulic and electric power. All the usual halyard, mainsail and foredeck controls run aft under-deck to banks of recessed jammers, port and starboard, on the coachroof. Two Harken 50 two-speed electric winches do the hard work in the hoists.

Since the lifting keel required hydraulic power anyway, the Thursday committee decided to direct hydraulic power to the traveller, outhaul, boom vang, back stay



and to the inboard and outboard genoa cars. Just to put that in perspective: I recently raved about hydraulically-powered genoa cars on the 44m superyacht *Imagine II*.

The traveller is hydraulically-powered on a 3:1 ratio, and the mainsheet is a simple German system running back to the mast and under the decks to the mainsheet winches by the helm stations, so there is minimal hardware or ropey confusion in the aft cockpit. Easing or bringing up the traveller requires only a finger on the appropriate button. Even an All Black with a strained adductor

longus tendon could do it.

I felt quite splendid with my fingers resting nonchalantly on the stunning carbon fibre wheel. This was

partly due to the Simrad screen which displays chartplotting duties and flow charts of data from the yacht's C-zone which monitors the ship's systems. But the array of stainless steel buttons like those on superyachts was even more Gucci. The skipper's buttons control the retractable RMC bow thruster and the up/down for the lifting keel.

More buttons on the outer sides of the consoles give the mainsheet trimmer instant control of the hydraulic traveller, outhaul, boom vang and backstay, and



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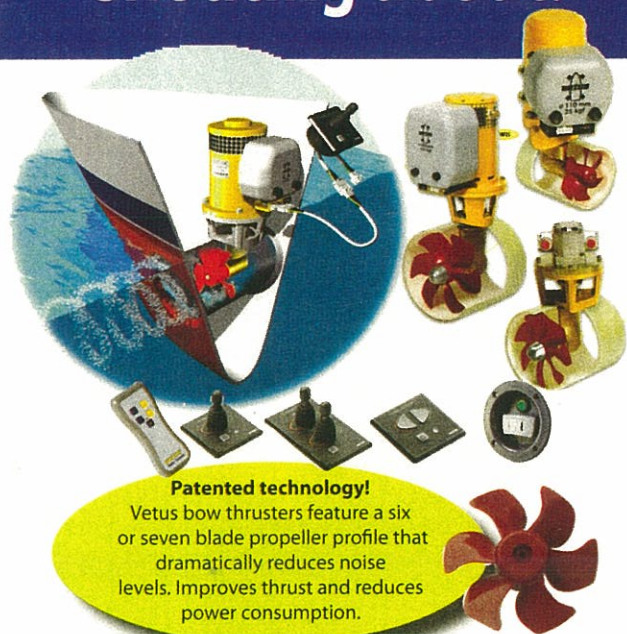
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the electric, three-speed Harken 60 mainsheet winches.

The jib trimmer has buttons on the coaming for jib and gennaker sheets on the three-speed Harken 65 primaries, and the hydraulic car pullers and furler. The high winch speeds come in useful in the gybes.

Only the foredeck crew on *Equilibrium* do any serious manual labour, lugging sails from the deep starboard bow locker or along the side decks from the huge lazarette which could take a small kayak. Extending the carbon fibre gennaker prod is also done manually on the foredeck.

The foredeck is clutter-free with flush-fitted hatches for the anchor well and sail locker. The anchor system also reflects trickle-down superyacht technology. The anchor sits in a carbon fibre arm which, with a gas strut, easily lifts up and over to lay the anchor ready for launch, clear of the plumb bow. The remote-controlled windlass does the rest.



## INSIDE EQUILIBRIUM

The interior continues the clean, light appeal of above decks. Quarter cabins have large double berths with foldaway pipe berths. For offshore racing these cabins can each squeeze in four crew. To port is the day head with electric toilet, shower and carbon fibre hand basin.

The galley runs along the port side with sink, freezer, vege locker, pull-out rubbish bin, Force 10 gimballed oven and a microwave/convection oven, plus a full-standing fridge. Lockers under the port sidedeck provide customised storage for crockery and for food items. A U-shaped galley would be preferable for offshore, but difficult to accommodate with the keel centre case.

To starboard, the saloon table can seat up to 10. It is dark walnut inlaid with the yacht's logo, the chemistry symbol for equilibrium, in palladium foil. The sole is light bamboo in tongue and groove style.

The dining settee houses the lithium ion batteries which saved about 250kg





over conventional batteries. The batteries charge off the engine and, via a Mastervolt inverter, supply 240V power. There is no genset. Water and fuel tanks are integral, under the sole. The saloon table is a good place to sit and admire the immaculate standard of build by Lloyd Stevenson Boatbuilders.

The Yanmar 75hp sail drive, hot water cylinder and Spectra watermaker are beneath the cockpit and are accessed from large hatches in the quarter cabins. An ultra-long drawer in the top of the companionway reveals a toolbox.

Another great idea is the hanging locker to starboard which houses a rack that pulls





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out for easy retrieval of wet weather gear. Exhaust ducts in the locker guarantee dry, warm gear. It's luxury indeed. The nav station is between the wet locker and the saloon table.

For'ard, the owners' cabin is one step lower than the galley to maintain headroom. The island berth lifts on for'ard hinges to reveal masses of storage. The ensuite features an electric head, hand basin, and glass shower door featuring the equilibrium logo.

## OUR VERDICT

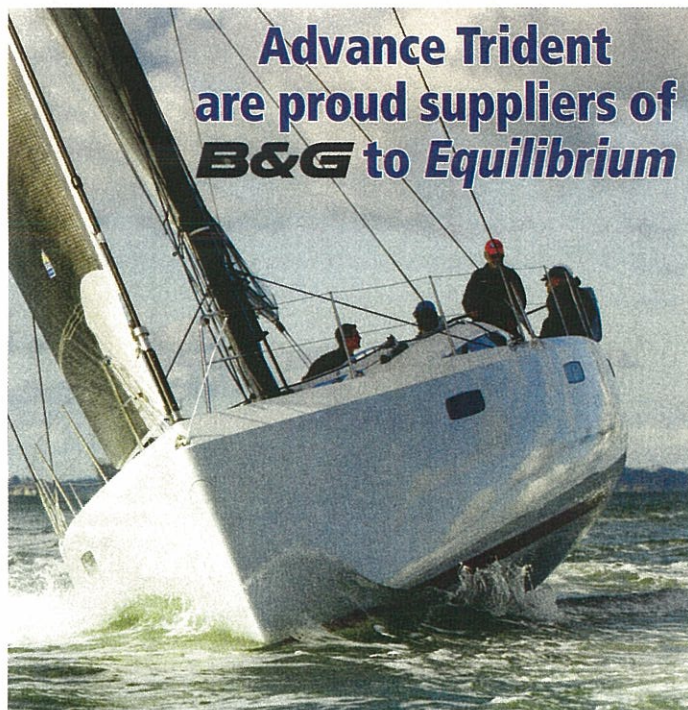
**Equilibrium's use of the latest technology presents an ideal balance of racing and cruising performance in a superbly-built yacht, set off by Altex's new high gloss in 'Whisper Grey'. She is a fast, powerful yacht, but the bow thruster and her use of hydraulic and electric power mean she is easily managed by two. When the anchor's snugged in, the cockpit and saloon create large comfortable social spaces. You don't find those on a TP52.**

## M55 Equilibrium technical



### M55 Equilibrium

designer Botin-Carkeek  
 builder Lloyd Stevenson  
 Boatbuilders  
 loa 16.73m  
 lwl 15.43m  
 beam 4.7m  
 draft, keel down 3.9m  
 draft, keel up 2.3m  
 displacement 12.6 tonnes  
 engine Yanmar sail drive 75hp  
 fuel tank (180L x 2) 360 litres  
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