

***New-generation TS is big enough to offer speed and space, light enough to be manageable, and built to world standards. Mark Rothfield was rapt***

**M**UCH has been written about the revolution in Australian powerboats since a torrent of imports flooded the market in the late '80s. Local manufacturers, following the adage "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em", seized on the many design innovations and thus improved their own products.

Slower to respond have been Aussie sailboat builders; not through lack of desire or talent, mind you, but the big costs/small market factor. They've instead concentrated on what they do best, which is producing the world's best built boats. Nothing wrong with that, except that the craft also tend to be somewhat traditionally styled and appointed.

Now a brave new challenger has emerged, an inspirational 26-foot trailable yacht called the Austral 8 Clubman. And it should succeed, where others have failed — it hails from a well-founded family company, Austral Yachts; it has been developed at a sensible pace, in between other paying jobs; and it was refined by Scott Jutson. Say no more.

What sets it apart? Well, it's little touches of class, such as foot braces in the seats, a flush-fitting fore'd hatch, moulded one-piece tiller/rudder case, cockpit drainage channels, custom-fabricated mast base, recesses for virtually every fitting ... And it's the big things too. Like a thoroughbred hull that performs well on all points of sail, while also swallowing a six-berth accommodation plan.

Atop this is a sleek cabin with a moulded canopy — a la Beneteau — to conceal aft-led halyards. In the cockpit, under the starboard seat, there's a workable outboard well. All are examples of forethought that, unfairly, we normal-

ly only associate with the imported product. Individually they don't amount to much, but collectively they make for a dynamic package.

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.

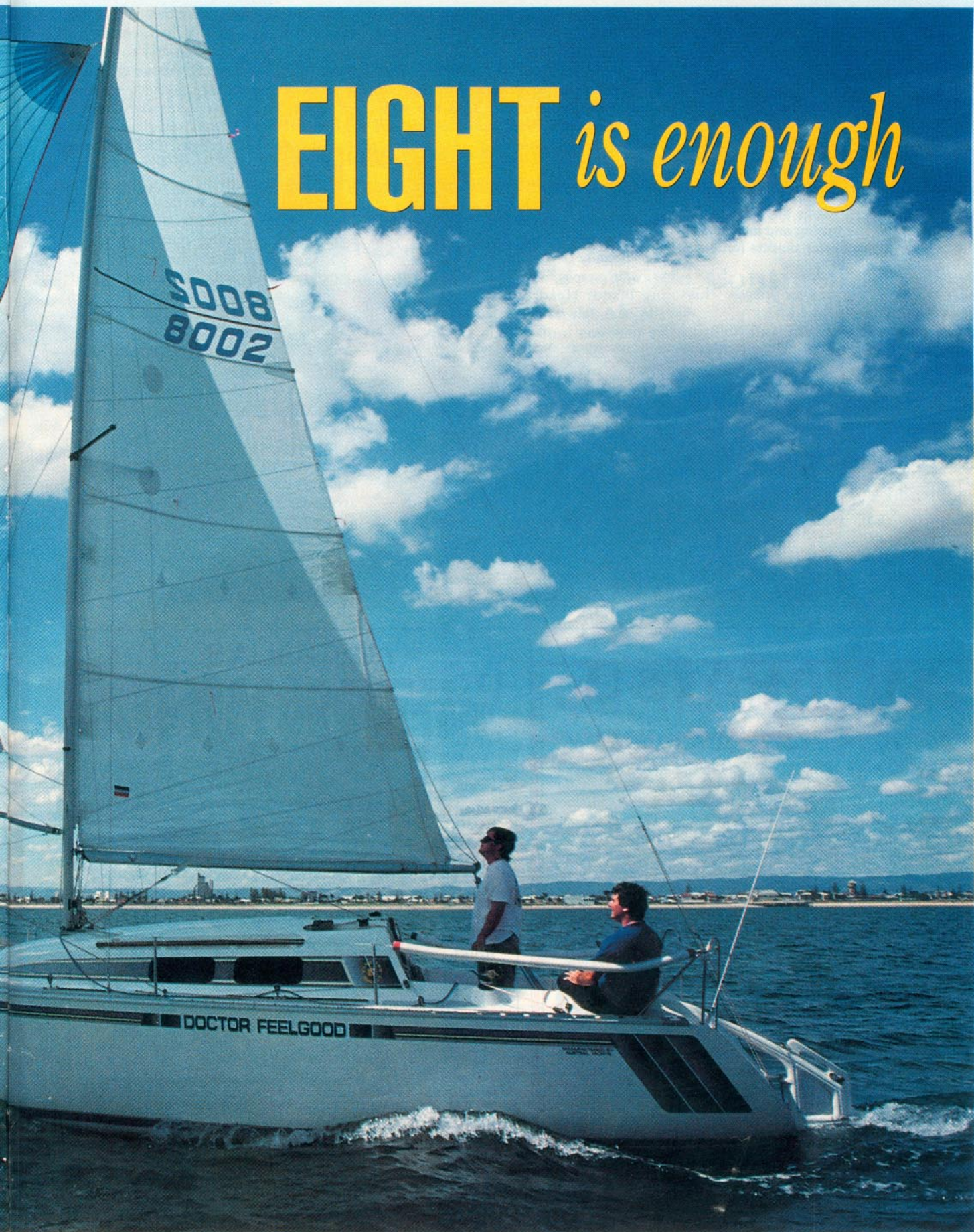
Michael roughed up a hull model and sent it to Jutson, a renowned optimiser, to run through a Velocity Prediction Program. The computer spat out the co-ordinates of a hull with minimal rocker, flattish underbody, firm bilges and square topsides — translated, it spells slippery planing performance, shallow draft (just 22cm with keel raised) and maximum internal volume. Credit for the deck and interior layout, meanwhile, goes to the Austral team.

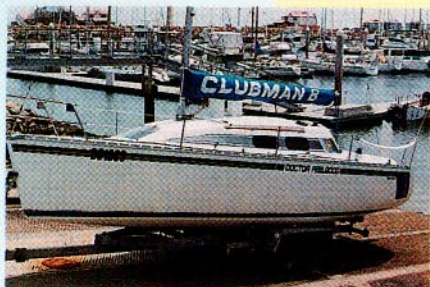
Moulding work is to world class standards. Construction is mid-tech, employing mostly triaxial 'glass, Divinycell foam and vaccum-bagged vinylester resin, backed up by kevlar and balsa in high load areas. A one-piece chassis, incorporating the furniture mouldings, drops into the hull to act as a further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

The rudder system is superbly executed, providing the convenience and efficiency of a dagger and solving the great nemesis; that is, the risk of damage when striking the bottom or a submerged object. The case is open ended, with the rudder's trailing edge



# EIGHT *is enough*





Flattish underbody keeps the hull low on trailer for easier towing and launching. Right: folding dinette for four.

secured by a rounded stopper — this pops out if the foil cops a whack.

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 with 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.

Teak strips line the cockpit floor and seats to provide excellent non-skid and drainage; looks great too. The seats have a cut-out 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 front-runner carpet and teak trim. But somehow, perhaps because of the dimensions, it escapes from looking bland. Headroom is adequate, but not full, and no provision is made for a poptop.

Aft, to port, is a quarter berth that classifies as a double though, as with similar set-ups, the person under the cockpit well 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 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 personal items such as keys, wallets, sunglasses and sunscreen. On the test boat, they were labelled with the crews' names.

The vertical centrecase is used as a pillar for a folding dinette table — it drops down, then outwards. Squeezed in to port is a chart 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. Larger 4WDs could handle that, while two people can manage the rigging and launching procedure. The two traditionally heavy tasks, lifting the mast and keel, are

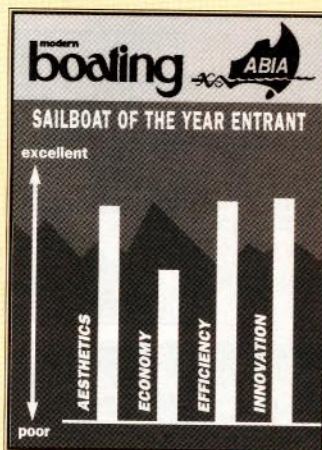
made easy with the use of trailer winch and halyard winch respectively.

The mast, pinned at the base, rose without incident. It's a whippy 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.

Launching from the dual axle trailer was expedited by the hull's shallow draft and we were soon motoring out towards Adelaide's Spencer Gulf at around seven knots. The fully-battened main slid up easily, followed by the hanked-on headsail.

A 5-10 knot breeze ruffled the otherwise calm water and we began working into it. The hull relished the

AUSTRAL 8 CLUBMAN	
LOA/Beam:	8.15m/2.45m
Draft:	0.22m/2.05m
Displacement:	1200kg
Ballast:	450kg
Sail area (working):	32sq m
Auxiliary:	Evinrude 8
Price:	
Stage 1	\$27,000
Deluxe	\$48,000
As tested	\$58,000
Designer:	Scott Jutson
Builder:	Austral Yachts, 20-22 Cottage Lane, Hackham SA 5163
Ph (08) 384 5487 Fax (08) 326 1537	



conditions, 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 coamings and foot holds came into play.

Pointing ability was excellent, a trademark of Jutson's super-efficient keel and rudder profiles. The hull's forefoot rides just clear of the water, so upwind it's better to get weight forward. Downwind it assists planing.

That we did, marginally, once the fractional chute was popped. The gear worked perfectly and she ran true. Timid, she ain't, but nor is she frightening.

How fast? Well, judging from results at the recent TS nationals, the Austral slots in a notch below the hot rod Youngs and Elliots, but above the average



Ross 780, Magnum 850 and Spiders. On CBH the two Australs finished 5th and 9th respectively, first of the cruiser/racers. Not bad in a field of 45.

Hopefully the buying public will appreciate it and find the \$48,000 purchase price not too great a hurdle.

Rudder set-up is brilliant, a moulded case with shock-absorber for the dagger. Auxiliary is hidden in starboard hatch to keep transom clean