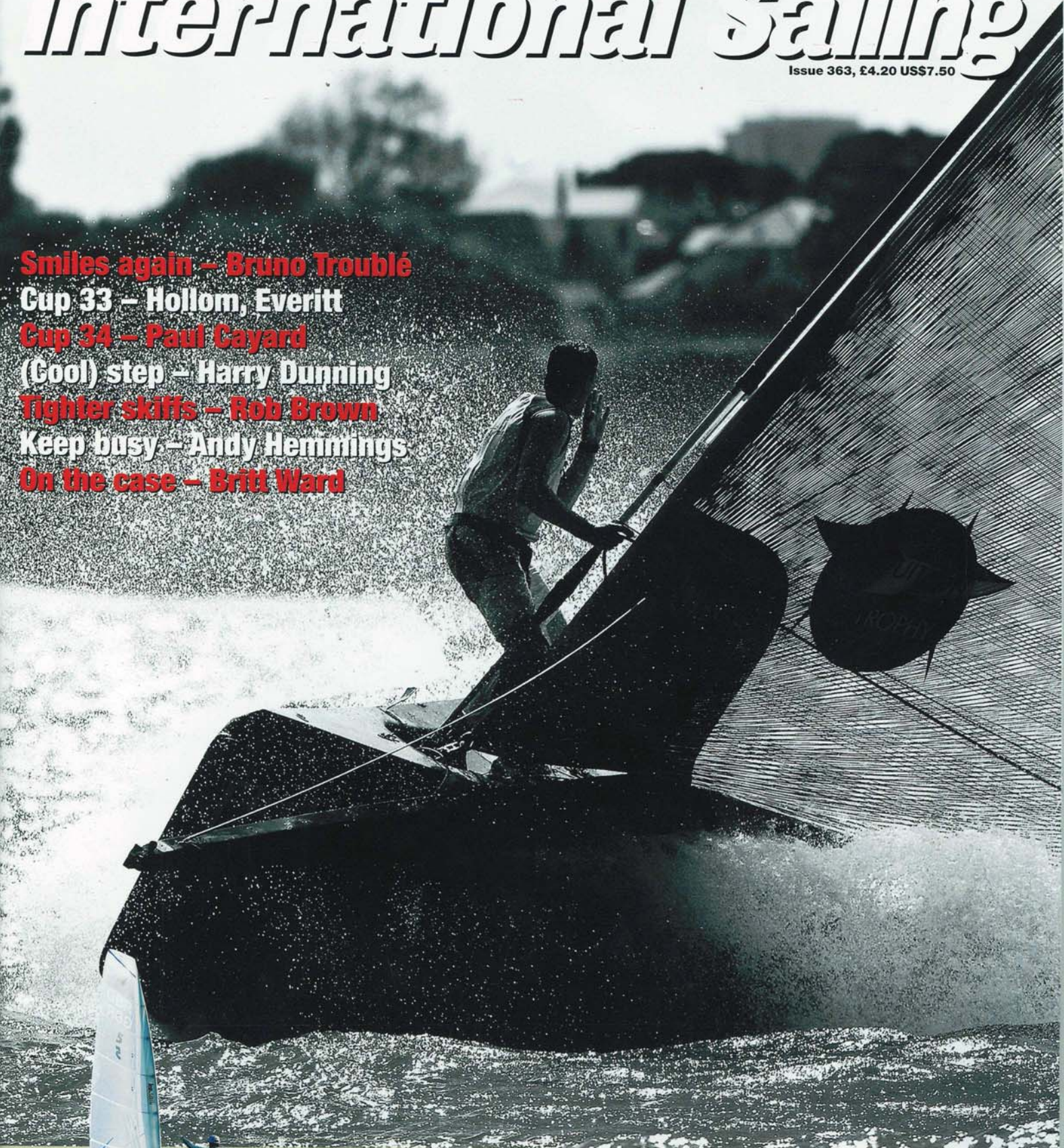


# Seahorse

## International Sailing

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**ARABIAN  
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# Confidence

Ever so quietly master custom raceboat and foiler Moth builders McConaghy Boats are lining up to break into the larger one-design marketplace...

## The philosophy

One of the things you hear a great deal about when you are talking to the brains trust at McConaghy Boats is due diligence. Discussing the McConaghy 36 owner-driver project with managing director Jono Morris, company development manager Cameron McTavish and project manager Rob Brown, it is clear there are four pillars of wisdom meticulously observed at McConaghy Boats in Sydney, and by Mark Evans building the Mach 2 Moths, the Elliott 6 and very cool

Optimists over at McConaghy in China. In no particular order, these are that to be a good boatbuilder – and to survive – you need a good design, a good builder, to be good businessmen and have a good marketing plan.

Simple? Yes. Easy? No. Plenty of yards have folded because they addressed only two or three of the above, and many have struggled because of a precarious ride on one of their niche creations. McConaghy rigorously apply all of the four points to all of their products – marine and industrial. And then they keep checking that they are still doing it.

Take the McConaghy 36. Jono Morris and Mark Evans have long been looking for a production boat to build alongside projects such as *Alfa Romeo*, *Leopard 3* and the recent *Lutra 80*; well aware that if they were going to control their destiny, they have to build the right boat (for right boat read affordable), which is high-quality construction and high performance on the racetrack – while paying the closest attention to corporate governance and financial discipline. The tipping point for

the McConaghy 36 was an approach by owners of existing mid-sized designs who were quite clear on what they wanted and, more importantly, what they didn't want from the boats they raced. Some of the more frequent comments included:

- There's a lot of complexity in design that does not add much value given how the boat is used – our galley, head, bunks, holding tank, freshwater tank, nav station are simply never used...
- It takes 10 people to sail my boat, but there are only six or seven real jobs onboard...
- We are spending a lot of money after delivery, sometimes equal to the purchase price of the boat, to get it ready to race...
- Removing the keel and the rudder for transport adds significantly to overall maintenance costs...
- After a very successful 10-year run my current class is witnessing a fierce arms race that has inevitably narrowed its appeal.

So together with designer Harry Dunning, McConaghy listened hard and



The flexibility and pedigree behind the new McConaghy 36 can be demonstrated by a quick scan of the range of products with which the company has acquired its reputation for build quality, reliability and exceptional composite manufacturing. From the supermaxi *Wild Oats XI* (far left) to the latest Mach 2 foiler *Moth* (left), McConaghy have an uncanny knack of being able to turn out consistently fast and frequently extreme boats, one after the other... and they rarely seem to fail

drew up a boat without all that expensive and heavy furniture down below.

Performance is essential to the new class, and the McConaghy 36 will beat virtually any existing 40-footer round the track. Importantly, once the boat leaves the shed you can't play with the hull or foils. The fittings are standard, but all are of McConaghy's trademark high quality. And the 36 comes with a class electronics package. This is a very strict one-design. With hull, foils and rig standard the only significant variable left is the choice of sailmaker.

The McConaghy team knew that to succeed and break the mould (sorry) their new boat would have to:

- have plenty of sail...
- plus plenty of stiffness and power to offset it.
- to go upwind solidly like a much larger boat...
- yet perform offwind like a high-performance dinghy.
- be simple and straightforward...
- with nothing that is not needed.
- be built to exacting standards...
- with the finest materials and quality of construction.

And finally it would need to be easily transportable, with a two-part spar and height clearance low enough to trailer without having to remove the keel.

Plenty of due diligence was put into identifying the best dimensions for the

boat for efficient transport without compromising performance. McConaghy and Dunning looked at current fleets and associated transportation costs, concluding that attracting (and keeping) owners came down to providing a top-end performer, with tight rules, which is easily transported on a flat-rack.

Project manager Rob Brown: 'There has to be protection for the owner. When people buy into a class they must know what their outer limit is. What is the financial ceiling here? No more bottomless money-pits...

'All the moulds are CNC-milled for precision construction with the focus on keeping costs down. With proven build techniques, good tooling and McConaghy's own resin infusion system we can generate a light, strong and stiff boat. And by keeping away from pre-preg and Nomex we remove at least US\$85,000 from the boat. It's taken a while, but everybody involved wanted to spend the time to get it right before we started building.'

Reliability is vital. Two observations from the McConaghy portfolio say a great deal. First, second and third across the line in the 2009 Rolex Sydney Hobart, and a comment from Bora Gulari on winning the windy 2009 *Moth* Worlds on his Mach 2. 'I was a little unnerved watching other people break their boats for no apparent reason – but my own boat was 100 per cent reliable throughout.'

The first McConaghy 36 will be trialed in June, with five boats sailing in Sydney

before Christmas. McConaghy's most successful client Neville Crichton – with 144 wins on his latest Maxi *Alfa Romeo* – has his shilling on boat no1, planned to feature a high-gloss clear-coated carbon finish.

The initial intent is to develop an east coast Australian circuit, including Audi Victoria Week, the Audi regatta in Sydney and Hamilton Island. This will then be rolled out on the east and west North America coasts. For Europe the team is looking at the best spots to develop a hub to give critical mass on three continents. Then in time a world championship. Nothing new here but the vehicle; and that is the crucial thing.

North Sails have worked on the rig with Dunning to ensure the boat can be handled by a range of skills and crew weights (there will be a maximum weight limit). Creating service teams to help the owner after the boat has left the factory is the other reason for having hubs of boats rather than individual examples scattered about. Sail buttons will also be used – but you earn more by sailing more. Sail more regattas and you get extra buttons.

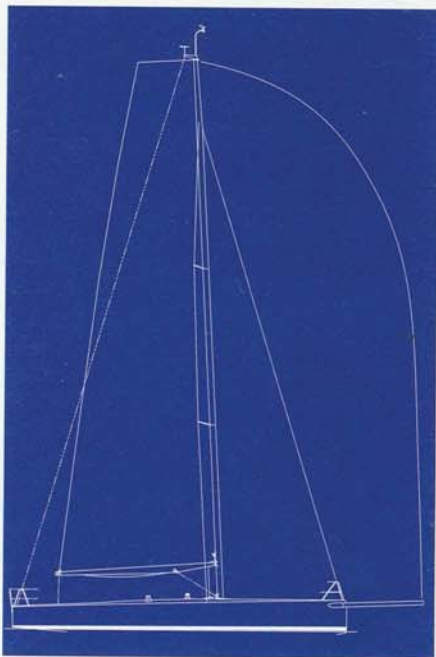
Interestingly, the Farr 40 worlds will be in Sydney next year, where the embryo McConaghy 36 fleet will be up and running... That could prove a talking point.

*Blue Robinson*

#### The product

Thirty-six feet has been a magic size for offshore designs. Even before the Mumm ▷





**Above:** the GA of the new McConaghy 36 one-design. By stripping away all of the redundant elements usually bought but rarely if ever used, the base price of this screaming-looking flyer has been kept down to around US\$215,000. Oh yes!

**Left:** in a nutshell... upwind performance comparisons between the new 36-footer and a Farr 40OD, itself no slouch in 8kt and 16kt of wind. Downwind the difference is – not surprisingly – much more dramatic

a full vacuum environment, which eliminates any air voids. The resin itself is also put into a vacuum chamber after mixing to evacuate air from the pot before infusion starts – further eliminating voids in the finished job.'

Utilising the talent and techniques they have in-house at their facility in Zhuhai, China (an hour west of Hong Kong), the McConaghy team also plan to fabricate their own carbon spar package rather than jobbing this out to an existing sparmaker. While there may be some learning curve in this approach, it should ultimately give them even stronger control on their one-design standards.

#### High-tech and fast... yet simple and affordable

Nonetheless, in a climate of somewhat shaky economics it still seems bold to invest, as Evans and co-owner Jono Morris have, to promote another offshore one-design. But in developing a genuinely new design that fits demanding design criteria for only US\$215,000 all-up ex-sails, the McConaghy team may have found an important niche, one that Rob Brown confirms has already gained a commitment from five owners.

'We believe this yacht will attract owners who've had previous experience in racing keelboats who are now looking for a lot more performance while staying with a proper one-design,' says Brown. 'We think that this boat will appeal to owners who are thinking of stepping up from sportsboats as well as across from Farr 40

and Sydney 38 one-designs; we are hearing more and more that owners of this type of raceboat are tired of going slow and spending a lot of money in the arms race.'

Having been a member of the Cup-winning Australia II programme and thereafter winner of many big skiff titles, Brown has a broad sense of the game and can sniff out a trend. 'It is time to step into something that is going to be a lot of fun, a well thought out concept and a class that is also well managed and promoted. And a boat that does not drag around all the extras you never use: bunks, cooking appliances... kitchen sink and so on!'

Brown is a strong proponent of no-compromise designs, unlike some of the new boat offerings in the market now, and is no fan of the IRC typeform at this size. 'Fundamentally IRC encourages you to carry unwanted furniture to increase the tonnage for rating purposes. IMS was the same. Some one-design yacht classes that strive for high performance nevertheless carry all of the above which are never or very rarely used.'

He also believes the strict one-design concept is important to keep control over costs. 'Once you have purchased any handicap boat, to any rule, to stay competitive you are forced to spend huge amounts of money in optimising just to stay in the game. When this 36 leaves the factory all you have to do is maintain it.'

'With the first five boats racing here before Christmas 2010, and with the interest we have had in the boat from all corners of the globe, I don't think it will be long before we have good fleet sizes racing and a well-structured owners' association to ensure the interests of the investor are well catered for.'

'Investor'? Isn't this the builder? Well, here too the McConaghy team have played it smart, structuring owners as co-investors so that they too share in the risk and the reward of the venture.

Sitting around after racing in Key West, New York-based Alexis Michas, who has owned several one-designs over the past two decades, including a Mumm 36, a Farr 40 and now a Melges 24, explained that this is what first attracted him to the project: 'This is very similar to living in a New York co-op, where everyone has a vested interest in the assets being well maintained and managed. If they are, then the value is retained for all. It's very different from simply buying a boat only.'

So, the cynics will argue, how will this rocket ship be successful when two previous attempts at carbon 36-footers from Farr in recent years didn't take off? But perhaps Brown is right, now is the time to catch a market of owners keen on something different, fresh, new and bold...

Let's hope so, we'd all like to see something so fresh and innovative catch on and succeed. Look at how the Melges 32 has recently taken off so dramatically. And probably for quite similar reasons.

*Dobbs Davis*

# XZ90 SLING



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