

review

**Dibley 7.5m
Sportsboat**

WORDS BY **SARAH ELL**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
BRYCE TAYLOR
OR AS CREDITED



WEAPON *of* CHOICE

Sportsboat sailing is fast, fun, frequently wet, appealing to those who want maximum thrills for a reasonable cost.

Long-time sportsboat stalwart Phil 'Phizzle' Houghton was bitten by the bug nearly 30 years ago, and is back on the water with a new design menacingly called *Weapon of Choice*.

H

oughton, a life-long sailmaker who currently lives in Whangārei running the local loft for UK Sails, owned and raced on some of the fastest sportsboats of the '90s, including the Bakewell-White 8.5 *Bohica*.

More recently he's been dabbling with an Elliott 6.5, *Repeat Offender*, chopping bits off it and refining other aspects into a more modern configuration. A couple of years ago, he decided to get back into the game with a new boat, working with designer Kevin Dibley to create a full-carbon, 7.5m trailerable sportsboat to sail both at home in club races but also at regattas further afield.

Weapon of Choice, as his new boat is called, certainly looks like she means business. The hull shape is eye-catching and, like the name, a little aggressive, with a hard chine running the whole length, to a wide, open stern with a hard, boxy corner. That was one of the first changes made when the design was still on the drawing board: originally the lines were drawn with a more traditional shape.





“When we designed it originally, it had a chine running the full length but rising slightly in profile at the aft end where it would flatten out once heeled,” Houghton says. “We then decided to drop the chine further in profile, to flatten the aft sections. The chine came out exactly where the waterline should be, so that was perfect.”

Dibley went down the reverse-sheer scow bow aesthetic, more usually seen on large offshore racing yachts, adding to the striking look but also with a design impact, taking weight out of the bow and increasing the stiffness of the hull. “It’s a design concept – it’s not just w**** factor,” Houghton says with a laugh.



FAR LEFT *Weapon* with her new rig and new wings at the inaugural PIC Harbour Classic. Photo LiveSailDie.

BELOW & R Rum racing on a brisk Friday evening last year.



UK SAILMAKERS NEW ZEALAND

Phil Houghton
1 Finlayson Street, Whangarei
+64 9 430 2801
021 222 3902
phizzle@uksailmakers.com

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The hull and decks were fully built out of carbon fibre – “there’s not one block of wood in her,” Houghton says – by Northland boatbuilder Richard Edlin. Houghton then finished her off and kitted her out, with a friend from Team New Zealand helping out with the rudder and vacuum-bagged carbon centreboard, which weighs just 6kg.

Under the water, in the parts you don’t see, the boat has just a small, 180kg bulb off a Shaw 650 sportsboat, and a high-tech Dibley-designed ‘whale fin’ rudder, its shape based on the flukes of a humpback whale, with ‘tubercles’ along the edge of the blade to adjust the flow over the blade. Houghton has been pleased with this ‘experimental’ rudder, with its steady flow along most of the blade and the tubercles adding lift near the tip. Dibley has drawn a slippery bulb for future boats specifically designed for this boat.

The boat was launched early last year, in time for her first Bay of Islands Sailing Week, but her big debut came at the inaugural PIC Harbour Classic in March last year, where she won division three. This year, in a slightly different configuration, the *Weapon* was fourth boat overall over the line and first monohull, resulting in quite the celebration.

Since the boat has been launched, it’s changed configuration a few times – something Houghton says has always been part of the plan. Racks have come and gone, and now the hull sides sprout small, solid, clip-on wings to help get the crew weight outboard.

“We tried having racks with *Bohica*, but the boat ends up so wide that if you come in late to the start, there’s no room. We were always starting to leeward and getting passed,” Houghton



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says, adding, “We’re getting older too – you can’t take a wheel-chair onto the racks.”

It’s had several new sails – naturally, for a sailmaker’s boat – and in the past few months it’s gained a new rig as well. “We decided to replace the rig because the old one wasn’t very stiff,” Houghton says. “We got a new tube from C-Tech and have gone to double spreaders.” That’s also meant moving to a mainsail with an even bigger roach and square top – adding a further 800mm, so it’s now around two metres across the top – although the most recent gennaker is actually smaller and a different shape to previous iterations.

“We’ve gone from 80m² to 60, and we still feel it’s too big,” Houghton says. “I’m going to make a new one which is more the same shape as the Magic 25 gennakers, with a different aspect ratio and about 48m², and I think that will actually be quicker.”

Houghton likes the idea of developing a hull which can be ‘retro-fitted’ to existing boats to bring them into the twenty-first century. “There’s all these people bumming around in forty- or fifty-year old boats with new carbon foils and deck gear. If you could build something like this for a reasonable price, you can just upgrade the hull as well, keep all your other new gear and you’re good to go.”

He’s interested also in kitting out a second hull with a small cabin so it is able to sail in trailer yacht events, which have different class rules but the same general philosophy: taking your boat around the country to race against other fleets. Last year he and long-time crew member Wally (Mark Wallis) headed south to sail in the Aviemore Classic trailer yacht regatta, in

inland south Canterbury, and despite the fact it snowed at Labour Weekend, enjoyed the experience.

The *Weapon* makes the occasional excursion to Auckland for a race or regatta, and I got to hop on for a rum race late last year. Rigging up in the Westhaven carpark on a Friday afternoon, music on and beers in the chilly bin, brings back happy memories of my own sportsboat days, now, er, about 20 years ago.

The boat is easily rigged up and launched, and once we work out who’s pulling what piece of string, we’re away. We’re sailing four-up today and no extras, which is a bit of a shame as it would have been great to have the opportunity to really have a downwind blast. There’s plenty of room in the huge, open cockpit to move around, and the sailing systems are well





OPPOSITE The boat with racks as reviewed, and below, showing the current configuration with clip-on wings and a new rig. Photo: LiveSailDie.

BELOW While fast from the get-go, as we experienced here, *Weapon of Choice* has since been tweaked.

thought-out and positioned to make it easy to trim and get the best out of the boat.

Naturally, there's a stereo system on board, so we have to play the 'battle song' the boat is named after, by Fat Boy Slim (if it's not familiar to you, look it up on YouTube and enjoy the fantastic video). Despite the lack of gennaker it's still a fun and fantastic ride down the harbour, and reminds me how much fun sportsboat sailing can be.

Edlin has the mould and the plan is to take

further hulls off it; Houghton says he currently has an enquiry from a potential owner for a hull, and he's thinking about taking another hull for himself to fit out slightly differently, experimenting with adding a small cabin. He's also thinking about selling the boat to Australia, where sportsboat rules ban trapezing and a boat like this would be a weapon indeed.

She might be a 'Weapon in Progress', but I get the feeling that's how her owner likes it. There's always something new to explore. **BNZ**



Dibley 7.5m Sportsboat

BASE PRICE
\$POA

MANUFACTURED BY
Edlin Marine/Phil Houghton
www.boatdesigner.co.nz
www.uksailmakers.com
www.dibleymarine.com

HIGHLIGHTS

Fast, fun and
eminently tweakable

Easily transported
to regattas around
the country

Has potential for
other yachties
seeking to upgrade
older hulls

SPECIFICATIONS

loa 7.5m
beam 3.906m
draught 1.85m
displacement 930kg (sailing)
sail area (Main and
Foretriangle) 35.612m²

