

Wet Weta



LIMITED OPTIONS FOR THE CURRENT RANGE OF TRAINING DINGHIES LED ROGER

Kitchen to develop the Weta TC 4.3m mini-trimaran: a boat that could revolutionise the learn-to-sail market.



Kitchen has sailed all his life and has chaired Yachting New Zealand's Youth and Junior Committee for two years – he is a crusader for involving more people in the sport, but believes the range of boats available for teaching kids – and even adults – lacks sparkle.

“We needed to explore other avenues to introduce a wide range of people into sailing,” he explains.

Three years ago, Kitchen was in France where his son, Chris Kitchen, was competing in the youth world championship. Roger Kitchen was impressed by the French teaching system, which lured children with the thrill of multihull sailing. “I saw the French do all their teaching in catamarans at quite a young age,” he says. “They were sailing in groups of three so they had their mates with them and were clearly enjoying themselves. A boat has to sail nicely to capture kids’ interests.”

Back in New Zealand, Kitchen met with multihull designer Tim Clissold who agreed there could be a market for a small recreational multihull that would provide two to three children or a small family with a lively, manageable sail.

But he argued that while catamarans offer a speed and stability edge over monohulls, they are notoriously more difficult for inexperienced helmspersons to tack and do not carry weight particularly well. His solution: three hulls would be better than two.



Over three years, the Kitchens and Clissold have developed the prototype, a 4.3m mini-trimaran named *Bandit*, as a tribute to the late Sir Peter Blake who named his first boat that name, and will launch the first production model in June.

Roger and Chris Kitchen enjoy sailing *Bandit* so much it almost felt imposing to borrow her for a Saturday morning sail for *Boating New Zealand*.

Chris Kitchen, 20, is an Auckland University engineering student and recent Olympic trialist in the Laser class. He has helped his father refine the systems and doubles as chief test pilot.

On the day of our sail, father and son towed the boat from its home in the family garage and, in just 30 minutes, had converted the boat from its storage configuration to ready-to-sail.

The mast, a standard Paper Tiger section with added diamonds, takes only a few minutes to step. They plan to manufacture the spars themselves.

The beams that hold the two floats and form the trampoline area slot nicely into the main hull structure. *Bandit's* beams are carbon fibre but the production models will use aluminium for cost efficiency. The lacing on the trampoline will be swapped for a neater, quicker Velcro fastener on all production models.

The 3m² jib is on hanks and easily dropped; the screacher is on a roller-furler. Controls for both lead back to the cockpit. The main, jib and screacher sheets run through lightweight Harken blocks.

There is no boom so, apart from the cunningham, the cockpit is clean and uncluttered, reflecting Kitchen's philosophy of keeping it simple.

With a windsurfer-style square top, large roach and full-length battens, the 7.5m² mainsail looks too powerful, although it is

reefable. Kitchen says he felt so happy with the stability of *Bandit* he recently added 800mm to the rig.

"We've had 13-year-old kids sail her with full sail area, no problem," adds Chris.

The final touch before launching was to bend on the sheets. Chris took the helm for the sail out to the Waitemata Harbour. Laser sailors are known for their body kinetics so his enthusiasm for some easy sailing is intriguing.

We pulled on some cunningham, sheeted in and headed upwind. It immediately became apparent this boat has a pedigree: she's like a 29er with stabilisers.

Upwind in 10-12kts of breeze, the Weta had oodles of power and pointing ability thanks to the daggerboard in the centre hull. The helm was light and responsive throughout the speed range.

The windward hull neatly skirted the waves as the boat powered up, cruising at six to seven knots, while the leeward hull had ample forward buoyancy. There is no boom to bash you on the head during tacking – Clissold also did away with a boom on his 10-metre catamaran, *Pulse*.

Will the Weta nosedive? Chris has tried for a year, in up to 30kts of breeze, but failed to get *Bandit* bow-down. Clissold explains: "If you're driving the boat hard into waves, it'll just keep going and become a torpedo rather than trip over."

Even so, the Kitchens have considered how to right the Weta should a novice helmperson manage to flip the boat, and it's ingenious. The two floats are hollow and will have inspection hatches on the stern. Should the boat turn turtle, the crew can unscrew one of the inspection hatches and flood the leeward hull to raise the upwind float clear of the water. From there, the small trimaran should right in a similar manner to a catamaran.

The Weta TC 4.3m trimaran can be rigged in about half an hour. *Bandit's* mast is a standard Paper Tiger section with added diamonds but the owners intend making their own for production models of the boat. It disassembles into a main hull and two floats which fit easily on a standard trailer.

SPECIFICATIONS

boat	Weta TC 4.3m
loa	4.3m
beam sailing	3.7m
mast height	6.4m
weight	70kg
sail area:	
main	7.5m ²
jib	3.0m ²
screacher	7.5m ²



The biggest asset for novice sailors is the ease of sailing in gusty conditions – there is no need to dive into the cockpit during the lulls. "Let the floats do the work," says Chris, happily perched out on the trampoline.

It was time to open up the 7m² screacher, set from a 1.2m carbon prod. The ride was sensational – and wet. The centre hull planed easily but the bow wave hit the crossbeams and sprayed up into our faces. A spray skirt on the forward beams will remedy this. The chase boat opened the throttle to stay in touch as *Bandit's* speed hit 15kts, speeding downwind in perfect control.

It seemed all that was missing was the locker to store lunch and spare kit but Chris pointed to the aft section of the main hull, due to have a watertight hatch cover fitted for that reason.

OK, just one question left: will the boat sell? Without the clout of a major manufacturer Kitchen will have to work hard to market the Weta but he has an edge – like its insect namesake, the Weta has a way of playing on your mind.

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