

THE STARLING CLASS

INTRODUCTION

The Starling class yacht was conceived and the design commissioned by John Peet in the late 1960s. At the time there were no single-handed boats available to teenagers for bridging the gap



The prototype Starling sailing off the Glendowie Boating Club in the early 1970s. Originally the sail design was fully battened, however this was changed to the current format after feedback from sailors indicated a flexible sail layout was more suitable. Photos: John Peet.

between the P class and the adult Finn, OK, Cherokee and Zephyr classes. Many young sailors were leaving the sport because the step to the adult classes was too great. A stepping stone class was required. In consultation with parents of current P class sailors a set of criteria was formulated for the proposed class: -

- The boat should cater for teenagers not able to cope with adult monotypes.
- Crew weight of approximately 50 – 70 kgs.
- The boat should be easily handled in fresh conditions, plane readily and have good windward performance.
- The appearance of the boat to be of high priority.
- Buoyancy to be of P class standard.
- Cockpit space for two teenagers or one adult.
- Construction to be simple.
- Very close restrictions so that all boats to have equal performance. e.g. masts from standard aluminium extrusion, sails from the same material and same loft.

Des Townson, the designer of the successful Zephyr, Mistral and Dart yachts of the period was approached to design the boat and he completed this in June 1969. To confirm the simplicity of the construction concept, teenager David Peet built the prototype as his first boat-building project. The Starling was launched at Westhaven, Auckland on Anzac weekend 1970. Extensive testing of the prototype was completed over the following months by dozens of P class sailors. Feedback was very supportive and encouraging, with a great deal of enthusiasm expressed for the concept and the finished prototype.



The Glendowie fleet of Starlings racing at Kohi Yacht Club in early 1971. Following events like this and others at Auckland yacht clubs, a mini building boom was commenced that resulted in the first National Championships a year later with forty-five boats competing. The following Nationals in 1973 had seventy-three entries.

Photos : John Peet

The feedback from sailors was considered and as a consequence, a slight modification to the hull and a minor construction change were incorporated in the second and final design of the boat. The sail area was increased slightly and the fully battened sail was replaced with the profile currently in use. Des Townson then gifted the design to the Glendowie Boating Club and club members built six more Starlings. Many Auckland yacht clubs were visited by the new Glendowie fleet and the boats were made available for local sailors to trial. A mini building boom followed and by 1973 the class was granted national status by the Yachting Federation of New Zealand.

In the early 1970s plans were sold for \$4, sails \$32 and it was possible to launch a home built Starling for \$150.



Starlings sailing in Tauranga at the 2004 North Island championships.
Photos: Brian Peet

SAILING VENUES

Fun sailing and serious racing for the Starling class sailors is organised by yacht clubs throughout New Zealand. In addition, many clubs offer learn to sail and coaching for all experience levels.

There is a national Starling championship held each year in January. The management of this regatta is allocated by Yachting New Zealand to a suitable yacht club and is alternated between the North and South Island. This is a very popular event giving families the opportunity to travel throughout the country and re-establish friendships from previous classes and sailing events. The racing attracts a wide range of sailors from the experienced youth sailors to those who are competing for the first time. It is not unusual to have a fleet of more than 100 boats.

WHERE TO BUY A STARLING AND EQUIPMENT

Starlings are available in either wood or GRP fibreglass. Wooden hulls have sail numbers from 1 to 1999 and GRP hulls are numbered from 2000. The GRP hulls are available from Sail One, Auckland. Ph 09 376 6763. Wooden hulls can be built by either amateur or professional builders. To build your own Starling, purchase a plan pack from the class registrar for a fee of \$140. This includes a building plan, the allocation of a sail number and a copy of the class rules. The fee also covers the cost of the first measurement. A building guide is attached to this website. If you wish to have a boat professionally built, contact your local yacht club for a builder in your area.

There is a vigorous second-hand market for Starlings and good examples are always in demand. Well-built and well-maintained boats can have an unlimited life. When buying second-hand, try to find a boat as close to the minimum weight as possible, (41 kgs). The spars and sails are relatively inexpensive to replace, so even very early boats can be upgraded to be competitive provided they are not overweight.

The sail is one-design and these are currently made by North Sails. The spars are also one-design and are available from A Foster and Sons. Foils are of optional design, only limited by the maximum dimensions specified in the class rules. All other fittings are of optional design and brand.



An unidentified sailor having a wild ride at the 2006 Starling Nationals, New Plymouth.
Photo: Brian Peet.