

## Crossroads

The recent Audi ORCi world championship would have been off the radar for many *Seahorse* readers, given its location in Helsinki and timing during the Olympic media blitz, plus the fact that there were virtually no native English speakers to be found anywhere in the competition! But to achieve the largest turnout ever (124 boats from 12 nations) for an offshore world championship bears comment by any standard.

First, why so many entries? This was due in part to the vigorous web support and early promotional programme undertaken by the organisers at the Merenkävijät Sailing Club... so kudos to them and their sponsors for the strong early commitment.

They expected 70-80 boats and outperformed that by some 50 per cent – not many other events these days can make that claim. They scrambled, but in the end found space for everyone at the picturesque island fortress venue, and then with help from the ORC came up with a clever way to divide the massive 77 entries in Class B into two groups, through a qualification round, to keep the starts and courses manageable with just two classes allowed,

the best in all respects. The event gains caché for this, and if the right buzz is cultivated there could be more high-profile talent in the show. It might not be at the MedCup level, but it could be a good notch or two higher than things are now.

But the other approach too has its merits: more entries makes for more people, bigger venues and more buzz to attract sponsors, who are usually local or regional in scope. If the locations are in smaller towns, then the influx of a couple of thousand sailors, families and support teams can have a noticeable impact on the local economy. Organisers can leverage that effectively for good deals to lure even more participants. Race villages bring the public into the show, which in turn attracts the media and more sponsors, and suddenly the event becomes a truly Big Deal. ORC chairman Bruno Finzi recently gave a presentation paper on this very topic at a trade conference in Crete.

One inescapably complex aspect of ORC championships remains the scoring... where use of Performance Curve Scoring requires precise course lengths and wind directions to be used to derive each boat's corrected time from their RMS files within the ORC database.

Currently this is done through use of the CyAltura and Velum programs, with output exported as HTML files. With good co-ordination between scorers and race committee, accurate and timely results can then be generated. After some hiccups in the first offshore race in Helsinki, things were eventually smoothed out so that results were normally up before the teams got back to the dock.

But calls for faster scoring are getting louder again, and there is a new development for ORC that promises real improvement: Luiz Kahl's Yacht Scoring program of online scoring and event management, widely used in the US, has recently been adapted for PCS use, and when implemented will cut out the HTML output step and post results directly to the web. Competitors, sponsors and spectators can then get results as soon as finish times are entered on the system. And with tracking devices like Yellowbrick or Trak-Trak there can be 'what-ifs' in real time to use during the offshore races.

Alternatively, the ratings could be expressed in simple time-on-time figures for each entry, as they do in Australia and in some other areas using ORC Club, but the preference for PCS is still strong for championship events in Europe. This is in part due to the wide variety of boat types that can be found across each class... Of course, if the boats could be grouped more closely by size and type then a simpler rating style would also become more feasible.

In this regard there are more interesting possibilities ahead: the higher-performance boats taking the Class A podium in Helsinki – Alberto Rossi and his modified Farr 40 *Enfant Terrible*, Thomas Blixt's TP52 *Blixt Pro*, and Roberto Monti's Felci-designed GP42 *Airis* – may point towards a new future in ORC Class A.

Talk on the dock was to use a criterion like HPR to define a class of high-performance boats racing each other to make the competition closer and more relevant while the rest raced in their own classes. There are still plenty of unused GP42s, TP52s and other faster designs kicking around, so this may help catalyse interest in getting them back out on the water. This in turn could even spark interest in new high-performance designs (yes, there are a few out there)... Maybe ORC can help provide a home for them too in its future events.

As always, the challenge remains that fragile balance between quality and quantity... A perennial hot topic – especially leading into November's ORC meetings in Dublin.

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**One thing surely outshone everything else about this year's successful ORC worlds in Finland: in a 124-boat fleet there were only two entries from Italy... and both won their class. Alberto Rossi's tweaked Farr 40 *Enfant Terrible*, with Thomasso Chieffi as tactician, comfortably won Class A, while his countryman Vincenzo de Blasio's NM38 *Scugnizza* took Class B on the tie-break. The 2013 worlds are in Italy where overseas competitors clearly have a mountain to climb**

A and B (ISAF grants only two world champion titles for the event, thus only two classes.)

As with many offshore regattas these days, the vast majority of entries were from the immediate region, and without a qualifying screen most of this population was, well, not exactly world championship calibre. Regardless, size does matter, and there's something to be said for the visceral excitement of a 500m startline with 40-50 boats. Yes, black flags were needed, but in the end eight excellent races took place to decide the series.

With the big turnouts in the last two years' worlds events, and another one anticipated for Ancona, Italy in June 2013, ORC is now at a crossroads: should there be qualifying events to whittle down the turnout to maximise sporting quality? Or is it better to maintain the come-one, come-all policy to spread the love as widely as possible? Each has virtues.

A reduction in entries gives a better opportunity for good courses, with reasonable-sized classes of similar boats usually delivering better competition. And with qualifiers to determine who can come, the overall winners will truly represent the best of