



Notes from a championship

ORC's annual world championships are important stress tests for the integrity of the rating system: not just the VPP and how ratings are created but all the other features as well. It's from these events that feedback loops are created that help update the ORC's Green Book, that Bible of championship regatta rules and standards that goes back into the IOR era of big international team events.

Much has changed since then, but the idea that championship events need recognised rules and standards has not, and the late Paolo Massarini was at the forefront of this effort on behalf of ORC for over a decade.

Take, for example, country qualifications. To validate a championship a prescribed number of teams from outside the home nation is required, and conversely a maximum number from the host nation is also prescribed so there is sufficient diversity to carry the label 'Worlds'. In more recent years the addition of all-amateur Corinthian divisions was introduced, with most teams in the Baltic nations recognising this as an important feature for their style of sailing.

Another feature is the choice of class splits to use to define the three classes at a major ORC regatta. In ORC this is prescribed in the rules by a number called CDL, or Class Division Length.

The GPH (General Purpose Handicap) was used for many years as the class split tool, but then some clever teams worked out that you could have a low GPH to qualify to be in a slow class but still have a fast boat upwind where it counted in windward/leeward racing. Pedro Campos was famous for this: in a class of 36-footers his Synergia 40s would have their GPH ratings slowed with use of small downwind sails.

But being first to the top mark is always more valuable because then defending this position downwind is comparatively easy compared to vice versa – especially in heavier old-school monohulls where surfing past an opponent is rarely on the cards.

So CDL targets were invented, based upon a boat's upwind speed in 12kt, and these are now printed on all certificates. The scheme, promoted by Massarini, has worked as intended: now there are series-built boats that are rated intentionally at the favoured top positions in each class while others with some tweaking can also still get there: Club Swan 42s are an example at the top of Class B and similarly the pretty Italia 11.98s in Class C.

Yet in Tallinn these designs were not guaranteed winners. Class B was won by a well-prepared pro team from the Med racing on the new Grand Soleil 44 designed by ORC designer wunderkind Matteo Polli, not the usual ClubSwan 42. The latter design is usually assumed to be the performance benchmark in ORC racing, yet these days this seems to correlate closer to a team's sailing abilities rather than simply boat type.

The other perennially favoured Class B designs were traditionally thought to be the Danish-built X-41s, but this too is probably a false bias because so many competed for so long in the Baltic region as a competitive one-design class driving up performance.

Class C was this year won by the Estonian pro team on *Matilda*, a modified J-112E, repeating class wins in 2018 in The Hague and in 2019 in Sweden in the Europeans. In a breeze they rate very similarly to the larger Italia 11.98.

Class A could have been won (again) by a TP52, but for a dropped kite on the last day which allowed a well-sailed – but not ORC-optimised – Mills 45 built at Premier Composites as an IRC boat to show impressive competitiveness in ORC as well. This was a great surprise to the owner, who bought it from the Australians never imagining that it could ever be a TP52 giant-killer.

A feature under constant discussion was race formats: having space in a week for a 200-mile long offshore and a shorter coastal race, some complained the geometry was too close to being just



Left: the only Mark Mills-designed Cape 31 racing in Estonia was Rolf Relander's local entry *Riot* which finished mid-fleet in Class C – though by finishing 33rd in a healthy class entry of 62 boats Relander can still claim to have finished 2nd in a tiny 'sub-fleet' of faster high-performance designs that also included five ex-Mumm 30s and a Melges 32. A Cape 31 fleet is now growing very quickly in the UK, where as well as having regular one-design racing the boats are collecting plenty of silver racing under IRC – which is less harsh than ORC on lighter faster designs in the smaller sizes. Conversely it can be claimed that, with just a single one-off racing in Class C in an ocean of (often heavily optimised) production boats, the ORC system is encouraging just the typeform that it's aiming at. Perhaps less pretty than his lovely production designs for Italia Yachts, Matteo Polli's new custom racer *Clean Energy* is clearly influenced by rival designer Shaun Carkeek's dramatic IRC Fast40s, as well as his glorious-looking CF520 series-built IRC52s. Where Polli's thinking is clearly ORC-driven is in his stern sections which taper away dramatically reflecting the absence of reaching in typical ORC courses

like long windward/leewards without enough reaching to try speciality sails. Others argued there was too much reaching without allowing passing opportunities – this latter group tended to be the sprinkling of professional Italian teams that always feature at the big ORC events, with the former being more the indigenous Baltic sailors. In the US certainly the trend is away from windward/leeward courses and towards often more interesting coastal races.

It was also nice at the worlds to see new designs, such as the Grand Soleil 44, out in action in the hands of strong competent teams. Similarly a new custom Polli design, *Clean Energy*, built locally at Alpha Yachts. Polli's latest yacht incorporates some increasingly popular design trends seen elsewhere: a reverse bow

with deck chines to reduce weight and windage, inboard shrouds to allow large overlapping headsails, and a novel attachment point for the headstay that extends beyond the bow to maximise the yacht's J-measurement... More on this eco-friendly design to come.

The last interesting aspect to this year's championship was the astounding progress made by the racing culture in Estonia, which has benefited over several years from an infusion of Italian design and sailing talent. This nation has been racing almost all year long without the hindrance of lockdowns, and it shows: the level of the local teams here is now high and quite capable of competing for podiums at serious big boat events anywhere in the world.

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