



## Heading for the sun

The annual ORC World Championship has done well in recent editions in attracting a large number of teams, mostly from across Europe, for a solid week of inshore and coastal racing – and this year is no exception. The venue at Yacht Club Costa Smeralda is of course world-class, offering the best in facilities, stunning course areas, race-management skill... and ambience.

The level of the most serious teams this year also looks to be the highest for some time and, with a good diversity of conditions expected over the week, and a wide spread of boat types, the subsequent performance analysis from these top teams is important for the ORC tech team to evaluate the VPP for the following year.

Preparation is of course always a huge factor in the hunt for a podium, with the best teams taking a close look not only at the race format and expected weather conditions, but also a peek at their competition to know how to configure their boat, sails and team. Designer Matteo Polli has long been at the forefront of winning ORC designs, with his pretty Italia 11.98s in particular perennial winners in Class C – while last year his Grand Soleil 44 *Essentia* also dominated Class B at the Worlds in Tallinn.

‘Wind stats for Porto Cervo in mid-June indicate mostly light wind or heavy wind, with not much in between,’ says Polli, ‘which particularly influences the choices we make about downwind sails.’

With a heavy emphasis on windward/leeward courses, fights on the downwind legs within the 30-boat classes are inevitably very close, skewing many teams towards symmetrical spinnakers for VMG and tactical advantage approaching the bottom gates (many of these moderate to heavier designs will not be planing in light to medium conditions anyway, regardless of sail configuration).

The relative increase in rated speed in ORC this year for asymmetrical spinnakers in light air may further reinforce this trend, but

Polli continues to believe it’s still worth having the extra speed in these conditions. ‘It’s also worth having A-sails uprange as well, particularly over 14kt in waves, because the sail is easier to fly in semi-planing or surfing conditions; given this weather expectation I’m seeing trends towards more use of asymmetric sails among the boats I’ve been working with in Classes B and C,’ Polli adds.

Looking at the roster of entries in Class A, with several Ker 46s, and Jason Ker, like Polli, being on the ORC ITC, one would have thought the English designer would also have had some optimisation clients for the event...

‘No, not really,’ Jason said. ‘We’ve been very busy with other work recently, but I honestly think the rule is doing a good enough job that the cost/rating trade-offs for making major changes are simply not there... in IRC either.’ These teams may have finally realised the best gains are made by covering the basics: solid preparation of the team, the boat and well-sorted new sails may get you further than sinking time and money into optimisation loops.

Elsewhere in Class A there are four TP52s at the head of the class, including Hong Kong-based Karl Kwok’s TP52 *Beau Geste* team back to try to repeat their win at the Worlds in 2018. This time the team is on a newer-generation Super Series boat, the 2018 Botin *ex-Onda* from the same mould as series champion *Azzura*.

Kwok’s longtime team manager Gavin Brady has some interesting observations on their approach to this year’s big event. ‘First off, we’re really pleased to be getting back into international competition given the pandemic’s restrictions on travel. This is especially important for us given our team is so international,’ he said.

‘Secondly, this is such a great venue for owners like Karl who really enjoy sailing in classic locations like Bomb Alley. It’s spectacular sailing, something that all of us should remember and make



Having spent their recent championships drifting around the Adriatic or freezing in the Baltic and North Sea, for 2022 ORC enthusiasts have finally made it to Porto Cervo. For decades the rest of the world had the Yacht Club Costa Smeralda pegged as one of the all-time great regatta venues but for some reason – cost perhaps – it was passed over by ORC organisers. Now the problem will be a follow-up

owners appreciate more than just results. I think this is an important realisation that is too often lost among the best teams.'

As for their set-up for the Worlds, Brady feels confident that an approach that is not over-complex will be best, so that they can focus on the basics of racing the various courses in the programme: seven windward/leeward races and two coastal/offshore courses.

Unlike the TP52 Super Series where teams have as many as three mainsails and several headsails waiting in their support RIB, ready to deploy, ORC specifies strict sail limits on each certificate (although as yet there is no limitation on support boats, which Brady thinks should be similarly restricted).

'At \$78,000 for a TP52 mainsail, \$12,000 just for the battens, it's ridiculous the amount of money that can be spent on sails alone,' he says. 'This is why it's important to rein in these costs

with sensible sail limits and I think ORC has the right balanced approach on this. You just have to be smart – for example, our rig is fairly simple, without a lot of deflectors, because I believe with the right luff curve on the main the sail can still be controlled well throughout the range for a single race day.'

ORC also rates speciality headsails and Code 0s, although Brady says he's not too caught up in these either, except exploring the crossovers between an A3 spinnaker and a 75% Code 0 for the tighter reaching angles often encountered in coastal races.

Even with an expressed desire for simplicity, this debate will without doubt roll on within the Beau Geste team: their helmsman is slated to be Ken Read, who as president of North Sails may have some opinions of his own on this topic...

*Dobbs Davis*



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