



## (A little) offshore again?

Among the usual discussions on technical, administrative and promotional matters at this year's ORC Annual Meeting there will be some spirited debates on racing formats for ORC championship events. These may result in some revisions to ORC's guidelines contained in its 'Green Book', the venerable tome dating back into the decades when we still had serious international offshore team events like the Admiral's Cup, Sardinia Cup, Kenwood Cup etc. For these events the Green Book was the bible, governing the structure of the regatta; it remains so for major ORC championships.

It's interesting to consider: given that the Worlds and Europeans in recent years have been quite well-attended, sometimes exceeding 100 entries across three classes, could there yet be fresh traction for reviving national team play within these events?

In any case, the current Green Book rules have evolved to suit the preferences of those sailors who race at these events, and the ORC staff and host clubs tasked with having to enforce the rules. Changes come only with consensus among committee members and the chairman, who for years was the late great Paolo Massarini.

Paolo was friendly but firm about having well-defined and enforceable high standards appropriate for genuine championship status. It was in Paolo's era that ORC established fixed class definitions so that owners and designers had optimisation targets year to year. Participation levels also increased significantly in northern and southern European venues.

However, with this came a growing preference for windward/

leeward formats, perhaps a reflection of the preference for short-course day racing in the Med, supported by the numerous pro sailors who had migrated over into handicap racing from one-design classes.

Obviously for race managers it's also usually easier to keep to the regatta schedule with short courses avoiding the uncertainties of overnight racing.

In recent years the ORC Chairman Bruno Finzi has added a little weight to ORC offshore races by making them non-discardable in a championship series. Yet there are still only two out of eight or nine races in a week in a typical championship that are described as 'long offshore' (still barely 30-36 hours for the slowest boats...) or 'short offshore' (10-12 hours for the slowest boat, seven or eight at most for the fastest). All others are windward-leeward. (This is different for the new Double Handed ORC championship events, which consist typically of a single long offshore race.)

Submissions to be considered by ORC this year from various nations will test this question of formats. And the argument the Swedish delegation has made is compelling: when doing an analysis of the eight races in Class C in the 2021 Worlds in Estonia they determined that the total sailing time of the regatta was around 35 hours, of which the two offshores comprised 80 per cent. And yet in scoring the same two races accounted for just 25 per cent of the points. An analysis of this year's ORC Europeans in Hango, Norway yielded a similar result.

Next year's ORC Worlds are in Kiel, and the Germans have already



The Offshore Racing Congress – ORC to you – runs several annual championships for ORC classes (always at European venues). These now attract large entries and many professional teams – especially in the Med – racing a good range of offshore designs, with the biggest boats in Class A in the 42-52ft range. Modern offshore yachts racing for an ‘offshore’ championship, yet the longest race runs for no more than 35 hours. The biggest growth elsewhere, in IRC in particular, is today found in offshore events – empowered by the growth in Corinthian shorthanded racing. The Med boys will take a lot of convincing... elsewhere a move further out to sea for the ORC may be surprisingly popular

hinted they want to have an inshore race followed by a short coastal race starting the same afternoon, to test a broader range of skillsets on the same day. And even though the USA has yet to host an ORC championship since the IMS Worlds in 2000, there is a similar growing preference here for more offshore and coastal racing.

Yet in the Med cultures there is no such expressed preference! Racing in southern Europe is targeted very firmly at windward/leeward sailing and yachts (and crews) are optimised accordingly. And this is a powerful lobby – the rating offices in Italy, Spain and Greece issue around 40 per cent of the world total of ORC certificates, yet none has submitted any proposal to reconsider formats.

Despite this, ORC has not completely abandoned support for offshore racing (sic): the recent advent of an ORC Double Handed championship, to coincide with the Gotland Runt, saw 91 two-handed teams registered. Next year’s big Double Handed ORC event will be in Barcelona, where a good turnout is expected, and the next Aegean 600 may include a double-handed division for a European title, though probably with a shortened course...

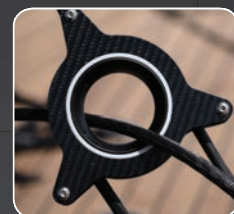
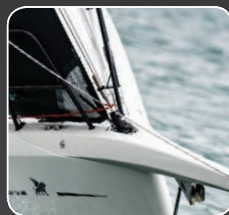
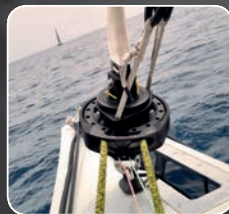
Going further in the shorthanded direction, a Spanish submission has asked to have declared crew weights for ORC DH reduced from the default figure of 170kg to accommodate singlehanders – now increasing in numbers in the region.

All these discussions will test the flexibility of ORC to meet the needs and expectations of a changing community... and perhaps even return a little more ‘Offshore’ to an organisation that calls itself the Offshore Racing Congress.

*Dobbs Davis*



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