

A new experience (for all)

It's been nearly 20 years since the IMS Worlds at New York YC in 2000 when an offshore world championship was held outside the Baltic or Mediterranean regions, so the excitement is building for this year's worlds coming up in mid-July in The Hague.

Already a strong turnout is indicated by the volume of entries seen in Classes B and C, even though Class A is still a long way off the 50-entry per class limit; that said, at the time of writing a number of high-profile boats in the 46-52ft range have just begun requesting details of the event which is encouraging. Maybe it's a slower burn for the bigger boats who know they are less likely to be squeezed out by entering later on.

It's been tempting to read into the combined use of both ORC and IRC ratings at the event being a popularity gauge for both



The Humphreys-designed Aquatic 40 ghosts along in the very light airs of last year's ORC Worlds in the Adriatic. The boat only launched just before the 2017 event and will be better prepared this year – as well as happier in the breezier conditions of the North Sea. The new boat showed good pace last year on coastal stages but, with its all A-sail configuration, was nowhere near ready to take on the heavily optimised, conventionally rigged ORC-specific competition on windward-leeward inshore courses

systems, but this is probably not true: teams who decide to enter want the opportunity to compete against their peers in a well-run world championship sailing event, and the choice of handicap rules, while important, will not deter those who enjoy the sort of good, close racing these events have provided in the last several years where entry counts have exceeded 100 boats.

Besides, a look across the boat types entered shows mostly production designs that are raced in both systems and reflect the types of boats people like to sail at home. They are mostly fast, dual-purpose boats, such as the Italia 9.98 which has been winning in ORC championships when raced by top teams but is attractive simply because it is a modern, nicely designed boat available at a good price. Designer Matteo Polli says a larger cousin of the 9.98 is underway at Italia, but it is unlikely to be ready for The Hague.

The Baltic-based, purpose-built custom designs from Cossutti will be on hand, as will the Humphreys-designed Aquatic 40 (issue 456), campaigned by its owner from Norway. Neither has yet to find the podium in a major event, but maybe with good sailing and what's anticipated to be a wider than usual range of conditions this will be the year.

And there are also numerous older raceboat designs that have held value in being competitive and fun to sail, such as several Farr 30s that have been released into handicap racing from class-based

competition in their first two decades of use.

A brief look over the entry lists also shows some returning world and European ORC champions from northern Europe, yet sadly none has yet committed to come from the southern climes, not even any defending champions from last year's worlds in Trieste. This may be an issue of timing – it would be a rush to get back in time to race in Copa del Rey, for example – but don't underestimate how high cost can deter owners from committing to having big boats hauled across Europe.

Transport cost should not be an inhibition for UK and France-based teams to join in, however, and though some have signed up there are not as many as organisers expected; it could be that the IRC Europeans in the Solent, immediately before the worlds, are siphoning off available budgets of time and money for teams who are forced to choose only one major week-long event per season.

But we'll see, it's not too late... especially in Class A where the greater than usual offshore orientation of this year's format (particularly with the likelihood of some fast sailing conditions in the North Sea) may hold more appeal to the bigger, faster boats.

There have, however, been some serious enquiries from more far-flung teams, such as Karl Kwok's Pac 52 which has been competing on the US west coast under the direction of NZL-based Gavin Brady, and this would inject a strong dose of new design and sailing talent into Class A. There have also been some from the US who prefer not to thrash their way to Bermuda and are seriously considering a European tour.

Regardless of the teams signed up already, there are many extremely good racers and, after a week of seven inshore and two offshore races, this event will produce deserving world champions in each class.

One possible deterrent for potential IRC-based entries is not being familiar with the more complex ORC measurement and scoring protocols. Getting an ORCi certificate does demand more effort since the rating rule requires more data to be used to calculate a greater range of ratings than the single-number approach of IRC.

While sail measurements are the same, freeboards and an inclination are also needed for the ORCi certificate, in addition to several more rig measurements and a declaration of crew weight; IRC crews may be more used to just hanging their yachts off a load cell on a hoist to obtain boat weight for the Endorsed IRC certificate required for bigger events such as this.

But in truth these extra ORC measurements are not hard to achieve for any boat with an IRC Endorsed certificate, and the IRC and ORC measurement teams have been collaborating on how and where to offer this service in areas where there is not an existing measurement infrastructure... a number of new ORC measurements have already been completed, with more scheduled.

The lengthy pre-regatta measurement routine will also seem onerous to those new to these championship-level events, but a necessary step to ensure the integrity of the regatta. And the protocol of having the top performers checked after each day's racing will be taken seriously as well, with ORC rules allowing very slight tolerances but with prescribed penalties for non-compliance.

The use of the ORC's Triple Number ratings in the scoring scheme will seem a further complexity to the IRC entries, yet too simple for the seasoned ORC teams used to Performance Curve Scoring (PCS)... but this compromise is necessary given the effect current is expected to have in the course areas used – where the PCS system can be vulnerable.

Triple Number is actually simpler than it sounds, being a three-tiered method that was pioneered in the Netherlands and is now widely used both there and elsewhere; think of it as three fixed IRC TCCs, one being applied for each of three broad wind-bands.

In fact, don't be surprised if some IRC sailors racing yachts that sit away from the mainstream design parameters even come away favourably impressed by the benefits of a three-tier system that gives them a better chance of scoring more consistently across a varied week-long regatta. You never know! □