



## (Definitely) a step in the right direction

### The prologue

The Offshore World Championship in The Hague is now part of history and it is time to look back trying to draw some conclusions. As expected, the event was particularly interesting since for the first time ever the results were calculated using both the ORC and IRC systems, with the sum of the points used to produce the final rankings in each race and in the series overall.

A tight six-day programme allowed for two offshore and seven inshore races that ticked most boxes. Wind conditions were generally light to medium, in the offshores ranging from 0-12kt and on the inshore courses mainly between 8 and 12kt. As a result the choice of ORC Triple Number employed was usually 'Medium' with only two races scored using the 'High' number (actually, the breeze was frequently on the crossover so the committee had some hard calls making their choice – directly affecting some results). Under IRC scoring there is of course just a single TCC number to work with.

Strong currents were always expected in The Hague with a maximum velocity of about 2kt – though most of the time the direction was aligned with the course axis. Although this flow velocity during the inshore races was steady, even employing time-on-time (much preferable in tide but the first time this has been tried at a major ORC event) this still had a big impact on the results as it influenced the balance between time spent sailing upwind and down. Since handicap systems in general do not take current into account, when the ratio between wind and current speed is low some boats will

always be favoured and this is true whether you are using a time or distance-based format.

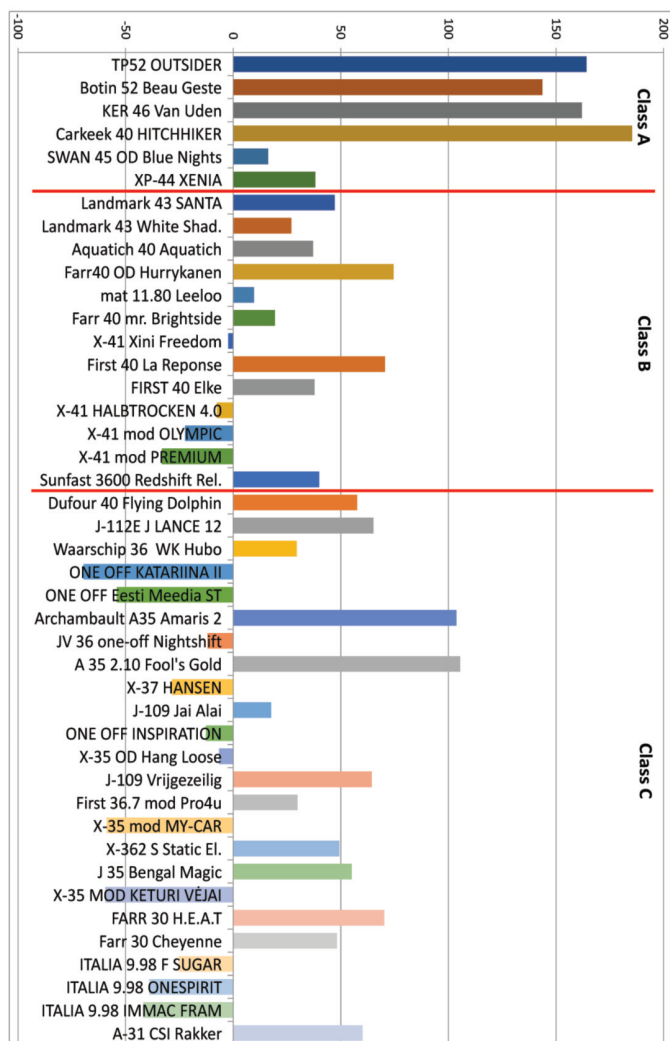
### The play

IRC and ORC certificates had been issued for all the 85 entries using the same measurements, so it is possible to compare precisely both ratings and results across the fleet. Looking at the final results, each class had its own story, since the number of entries in each category varied considerably as did the characteristics of the boats.

Class A had just a small number of entries (nine), almost all of which were proper racing machines not designed for handicap racing apart from the Ker 46 and the Botín 52 that were born as IRC-driven designs. The overall standings confirm the supremacy of the big high-performance boats – the Botín 52 *Beau Geste* and the TP52 *Outsider* ended the regatta with a considerable lead over the third-place Ker 46 *Van Uden*.

The only two cruiser-racers in this class, the Swan 45 *Blue Nights* (2017 ORC European champion) and the X-44 *Xenia*, could not do much to get onto the podium.

Interestingly in this fleet the ORC and IRC scores were almost identical in all races showing a good match between the rules and confirming that at this size both systems favour fast boats. On the other hand, it was disappointing to see that a Swan 45 – one of the nicest cruiser-racers around – even when sailed by a good crew



could not achieve a single 'combined' podium (scored under ORC alone the Swan would have scraped two thirds).

Between the highest-performance boats it is also clear that size still matters. In fact, the professional crew racing the Carkeek Fast40+ *Hitchhiker* with Hamish Pepper calling tactics never once beat either of the two 50-footers under either handicap system. Food for thought for the rulemakers.

Class B was a different story. Twenty-seven entries in a very homogeneous fleet both in terms of size and of sail area vs displacement ratio. The level of the crews was high but not as professional as in Class A. At this medium size the two systems are generally less in agreement, with IRC rating faster than ORC, resulting in some big differences between ORC and IRC scores in this fleet. In the top 10 overall the boats with a good IRC rating compared to ORC are the Landmark 43 and the First 40 *Elke*. On the other hand, there are all the X-41s which are less favourably treated by IRC but which have historically been very successful under ORC. The differences here can reach more than one minute per hour – a lot when you are talking about quite similar boats.

Nevertheless, the top six positions would not change much if scored only under ORC or IRC. The Landmark 43, winner of the 2016 ORC Worlds, proved again to be the strongest opponent and was only ever threatened by the best of the heavier X-41s. The Farr 40 OD *Mr Brightside*, which I had modified specifically for this event, also showed good potential and with a bit more preparation could have been in contention for the podium.

Class C, the largest fleet with 49 entries, was as usual the most competitive as well as being the most diverse group in terms of design. This class is also where the biggest discrepancies between IRC and ORC are found. Moreover, the relative differences between some boats here reached more than three minutes per hour, meaning that two boats with the same ORC rating had a difference of three minutes per hour under IRC. This created huge scoring divergence, up to 20 places in some cases. In fact, I still find it hard

Left: this graph represents the delta in seconds per hour that a reference boat (X-35 One Design) has to give (positive) or has to be given (negative) under IRC versus applying its ORC offshore single number. The bars to the right of the zero axis represent boats that have a more favourable IRC than ORC rating with respect to the reference boat. Using an extreme example, in Class 3 the one-off *Katariina II* has to give the Archambault 35 *Amaris 2* almost three minutes per hour more under IRC than ORC. The relatively heavy X-41s (opposite) have been very successful at previous ORC championships but are less favourably treated under the IRC system and showed less strongly in The Hague

to believe that an unmodified Farr 30 one-design could get 27th under ORC and 4th in IRC in the same race!

Analysing the standings of Class C, it is also important to take into account that the final part of the offshore race had a massive influence on the top half of the scoreboard as it carried double points and could not be discarded in the event of a poor result.

Inevitably there were complaints from those who did less well in the long race but this was the World Offshore Championships and so it is hard to find much sympathy.

That said, in the interests of 'suspense' in the future it may be better to run the long race at the end of the series – just as the triple-point Fastnet Race was once the concluding event of the Admiral's Cup at Cowes.

This emphasis on the offshore race did eliminate a few serious contenders at the beginning of the week, but should not detract from the fact that the overall winner, the J/112E *J Lance 12* (also the current IRC European Champion), showed very consistent results throughout the regatta, with excellent crew work inshore and a boat that performed well in all conditions both inshore and offshore.

*J Lance 12* also had one of the lowest IRC vs ORC ratios in the fleet – in other words, her rating under either system was similar.

Second was one of five of our Italia 9.98 designs that were competing, *Immac Fram*, which is actually one of the more heavily penalised boats under IRC. Then in third we found *Team Pro4u*, a well-optimised First 36.7 with an impressively good IRC rating!

That said, in Class C it was generally difficult to correlate results to rules since the racing was always close and even the best crews dropped down into double-digits on occasion. However, within a tight fleet it is no surprise that the faster boats benefited as much as ever from clear air in front. In this class the rankings would also change a fair bit if the rating systems were used in isolation. Under just IRC *J Lance 12* would remain on top but the rest of the podium would change; under ORC the overall winner would have been the Italia 9.98 *Immac Fram*, with the X-37 *Hansen* in second and the much-travelled Cossutti 34 *Katariina II* in third.

From a personal perspective I am satisfied to see three of my designs in the top 10 in such a different type of event and with one boat on the podium, proving that with a good design balance it is now possible to have a boat that performs well under both rules.

Overall 'The Hague' was a very enjoyable event with some very close racing in really nice conditions. The mixture of the two handicap systems did produce some difficulties at the measuring stage because of the different approaches but nothing that could not be solved – in fact, the spirit of co-operation between the two rule teams was one of the event's highlights.

Probably the most disappointing aspect of this first 'coupled' event was the fact that only a very small number of IRC-designed boats entered the series – despite the venue being so close to the heart of IRC activity. It would have been interesting to see more than one Fast40+ or some JPKs and other successful IRC boats competing with the proven ORC designs that took part. This was partly a matter of scheduling, but it will also take more than one such event for everyone to be fully sold on the concept. All considerations when organisers are planning for the future.

The biggest positive to take away from The Hague is that this year's joint world championship represented the first step towards a unified international rating system. Much more needs to be done before we get to an eventual solution but this first experience will surely help us in getting there. And that is in the interests of all of us who enjoy offshore racing.

Matteo Polli

Matteo Polli Yacht Design

