

## (Looking good) over there

Everyone knows the centre of gravity of this sport is in Europe, with its concentrated geography, diversity and wealth to support quality and inertia. Over 75 per cent of IRC certificates and 90 per cent of certificates issued by ORC in 2019 went to boats based in Europe. So it's not unreasonable that world championships using the two systems have normally been located in Europe: the 2018 combined worlds in The Hague had 85 entries from 15 countries and the 2019 ORC worlds in Sibenik, Croatia had 109 entries from 17 countries.

Yet what about those who want to play at this level outside Europe: should they never have the opportunity to compete at a venue outside their own culture? Certainly there are credible levels of IRC and ORC competition and extremely talented sailors that come from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, North and even South America, yet the expense of shipping, training and racing their own boats in Europe is a big stretch for all but the wealthiest teams.

It was Steve Benjamin in his role as the US representative in the ORC Congress who suggested three years ago that the regular cycle



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**Whichever the rating system, be it IRC, ORC or ORR, a well-sailed TP52 usually tops the scorecard in the big boat division – which in ORC is Class A. As was the case in IOR, IMS and with those one-designs that also compete on handicap, the refinement achieved in level racing can never be matched by boats racing against the clock. Plus a good TP52 is not only fast, but so quick accelerating that breaking away from the herd is relatively easy**

of toggling the worlds between the Med and the Baltic be interrupted with locating the event where it had not been for nearly two decades: at the New York YC in Newport, RI. The 2016 mandate from World Sailing that the worlds use both IRC and ORC fitted well with this idea since the club was already using both systems, and most agreed it had far too long that the US had been away from hosting a major international event in handicap racing.

This does not mean, of course, that US sailing talent has been sleeping all these years: the size and scale of the domestic scene are so large that, starting in the late 1990s, the advent of offshore one-design classes pulled many of those who used to race in the prevailing system of the era – IMS – into vibrant one-design racing; a racing style that still dominates US keelboat racing, as seen at the many race week events around the country.

Yet the popularity of one-designs did take away most of the

measurement rating culture around the US, which shrank to being used mostly in larger offshore races held on either coast and the Great Lakes, thus affecting only hundreds and not thousands of boats as it had in the past. This has slowly reversed, helped by the recent introduction of ORC use in local fleets – in 2019 nearly 300 ORC and 150 IRC certificates were issued by US Sailing.

Given the 20-year gap since a measurement-based worlds were held in the US – with its strict inspections and measurement protocols – a measurement training seminar is being planned for March in Annapolis. Here at the US Naval Academy it's not nearly as freezing cold as in Newport and handily a range of big boat types are available in the local US Navy fleet. It's hoped this will give a needed tune-up to measurers from around the US and Canada.

Race management may also need a tune-up... with the dominance of one-designs and single-number IRC-type time-on-time rating styles in the past two decades, race managers have evolved to collect only elapsed times and just enough wind direction data to set a square course that fits their race time targets.

Dual-scoring for the inshore races at the 2020 worlds will use IRC ratings alongside ORC's Performance Curve Scoring (PCS). Leg distances and wind directions are of course needed for PCS calculations, which should not be an issue given the advent of trackers and easier access to reliable wind data. Distance races will be scored with single-number choices from both systems.

It's what happens next with results from ORC and IRC that is the tricky bit. However, the technical managers of both systems have agreed on a solution that is cleverer than simply adding the points earned in both, as was done in The Hague.

The plan is to first score each race with each system's ratings to get corrected-time results to determine a winner. The corrected time of that winner is then 'scratched' – meaning set to zero – to allow corrected-time differences to be determined with all the others. The differences in corrected time from the winning boat using ORC and IRC are then averaged and these results are used to create a new ranking list of final results.

This method was tested with the elapsed-time data gathered in 2018 in The Hague and showed a fairly close match: the top boats were about the same in all classes and in all races, with some slight re-shifting deeper in the ranks. The approach did help suppress some of the bigger disparities in some results, particularly in Class C, so it's felt this will produce a fairer playing field in Newport.

Other challenges are in managing the details of how both systems can be used where the rules are just different in their approach. For example, IRC presently rates free-luffed Code Os tacked on the prod as a headsail when the sail has less than 75% mid-girth. This triggers a rating hit because the rule sees this as a headsail that could be used in any context, not just off the wind while reaching.

In contrast, ORC now rates sails smaller than this mid-girth as what are now called 'headsails set flying,' distinguishable from headsails that are tacked at the bow and attach to the headstay. What this all means is that Code Os built for use in both systems will need to be at the more restrictive IRC mid-girth limit of 75% and count as spinnakers. This may not be a problem for the larger boats with four or more allowed spinnakers, but for smaller boats with inventory limits of three offwind sails this could force difficult choices between which two to use among their A0, A1 and A3 sails.

Meanwhile, work is ongoing to negotiate 'friendly' shipping options for boats interested in coming from Europe, with offers from carriers now available to take loads from the Baltic, Southampton and the Med. Overseas teams have already entered from the UK, France, Germany, Italy... and even Argentina.

With 31 entries from six nations as of 1 December, the next worlds is on track to exceed its predecessor in Newport in 2000. There are at least three new boats being built for this event with numerous design optimisations planned for existing designs; with luck this should also help to inject some much needed enthusiasm into the handicap racing scene in the US!

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