



Little LIGHT

A keen amateur crew on a Nicholson 33 won the Rolex Fastnet Race, giant-slaying the multimillion-dollar super-maxis. Elaine Bunting and Jo Cackett report on some of the successes of this light winds race

Inside the Royal Citadel in Plymouth there was tumult as the overall trophy for the Rolex Fastnet Race was handed to the crew of the French yacht *Iromiguy*. As they took the historic Fastnet Challenge Cup, the place erupted with clapping and yelling in pure delight for the two doctors, three engineers, a teacher and a student who had won the race in a 30-year-old Nicholson 33.

"We're an old couple," Jean Yves Chateau, a 58-year-old doctor from Boulogne, modestly says of himself and *Iromiguy*, the boat he has shared for 20 years with three friends. Chateau claims she is worth no more than

£14,000 and her new suit of sails is the most valuable asset. By beating multimillion dollar bespoke yachts and rock star racers habitually bathed in limelight, they stamped out an emblematic victory for every small boat owner, dedicated club racer or weekend sailor.

Undoubtedly, the weather this year helped the smaller boats. Light airs interspersed with dead calms were rattled away by a fresher north-westerly four days after the start, when the biggest of the entrants had finished, but still, *Iromiguy's* win was no fluke. Two years ago, Jean Yves Chateau won the Aile Noire, the premier trophy of the Union Nationale de la Course

au Large, to which his name was inscribed above previous holders such as Loïck Peyron, Michel Desjoyeaux, Christophe Auguin and Olivier de Kersauson. On this side of the Channel, *Iromiguy* was named RORC Yacht of the Year in 2003; the crew are diehards who for the last eight years have sailed their boat back and forth from France to take part in the RORC's offshore programme.

Jean Yves Chateau admits that the weather was perfect for *Iromiguy*. "The boat is very fast upwind in light airs, and also dead downwind in stronger winds, so we had our two best conditions," he says. "After the Fastnet [Rock] we really had good strong



winds and it could not have been more perfect for us." Their only problem, farcically, was nearly missing the start because they'd mixed up British and French summer time.

Other than ideal conditions, Chateau puts his success down to "concentration all the time, good preparation and new sails, good weather analysis and a clever crew which can do everything, from navigating to steering". To cheer further those who baulk at the arms race of discomfort, Chateau says his crew got ten hours' sleep a day "at least" – in their bunks, not napping on the rail. "We have three on deck, three off watch and one floating," he says, adding as an afterthought: "We all get along very well."

Three days earlier, the story had been all about the thoroughbred big boats. There's not much shock or drama in the headline 'Line honours for £3 million super-maxi with professional crew' but what was worth watching was the tussle for line honours and first-ever serious face-off between the 98-footers *ICAP Maximus* from New Zealand, and *Skandia Wild Thing* from Australia. The Australian maxi capsized during the last Rolex Sydney-Hobart Race and this was

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Photomarine

her first offshore outing after repairs.

ICAP Maximus swooped over the finish line in 16 knots of wind, the highest the crew had seen since the start. All day the crew had the bars of QAB marina to themselves because *Skandia Wild Thing* was still back at the Scillies. Pausing from his beer as he heard the news, one of the crew laughed. "That's officially a spanking!"

The edge

There's no doubt which boat had the edge in these conditions. *ICAP Maximus* seems to be a step along the evolutionary scale. This is a boat that is fully powered up, keel completely canted, in 8-10 knots of true wind speed.

"We've learned a lot more about sail combinations and sheeting angles in light airs and now we're disappointed if we aren't going four knots faster than the true wind



Daniel Forster/Rolex



Photos: Daniel Forster/Rolex

Left: the fleet races out of the Solent under spinnaker in light airs. Above: Jean Yves Chateau's race winning *Nich 33 Iromiguy* and (right) he receives the overall trophy. Below: the big story of Simon Le Bon's return to the race in *Drum* fizzled out when he retired halfway through



Photos: Carlo Birelenghi/Rolex, S&S/DPPi

speed when we're reaching with the Code 0," says Charles St Clair Brown, a New Zealand lawyer who is one of the boat's two owners.

The boat's Auckland-based designer Greg Elliott was also aboard. A Fastnet virgin, he smiles at the thought that he went out and got line honours in a yacht he designed. "That'll do," he chortles with typical Kiwi understatement. About the boat, he is not so reticent. He thinks the rotating mast counted for a lot in these conditions. "In the lighter winds it's a very big advantage. The effective area of the sail starts at the leading edge of the mast. We don't have separation and we can effectively induce camber and get a deeper, more powerful foil."

These big monohulls are crowding into multihull territory. "We're never running at an apparent wind angle deeper than 70° – 135° true was 65° apparent for us, no matter what the wind strength," he says.

Though potentially fast, *ICAP Maximus* is difficult to get the most from, as Elliott is the first to admit. The virtuous circle induced by sailing faster than the wind is easy to drop off. "There's a huge difference between having the right sail up at the right time



Carlo Birelenghi/Rolex

Left: the New Zealand maxi *ICAP Maximus* set a new benchmark by sailing up to four knots faster than the true wind. Below: there was close action for crews at the start, until light winds and calms started to stretch them out



Danile Forster/Rolex/DPPi



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and not. The difference, say, between a code sail and a gennaker can be two knots of boatspeed, just like that. Instead of doing 14 knots you're doing 16 knots, and there might only be 12 knots of breeze.

"That's a case of getting the right crossovers, but it's also actually quite hard to change gears. It's heavy gear. Dragging it out and getting it up and down: there's a time factor there as well and you have to average it out. Very interesting."

Elliott adds that trimming on this boat comes more readily to dinghy or multihull sailors than to practitioners of America's Cup-style windward-leeward courses. "It's a tricky, complicated thing. The minute you make a change you get an instant reward – it can be as much as 0.3 of a knot and if you're going upwind

"We're going four knots faster than the true wind when we're reaching"

that's enormous. But it's hard work."

With a fleet of 238 boats, one of the largest of recent years, and the glory favouring the Corinthians and the smaller boats, this Rolex Fastnet Race was a memorable one, but not without its controversies. The RORC was criticised for the lack of a tracking system for the yachts. Followers were left largely in the dark about where yachts were in relation to one another.

A brickbat was delivered by Offshore Challenges, which learnt late on that the multihull size limit of 60ft (18.3m) ruled out Ellen MacArthur's trimaran *B&Q*. Britain's most famous and most newsworthy sailor was forced to sit it out on the sidelines.

Whether that should matter to the Corinthian sailors and the club members who are the core of the fleet is another matter. But a mixture with big, turbocharged racers and rock stars adds undeniable glitter to the race and an inspiring chance for David to square up to Goliath and perhaps chop him down. Ask the skipper of *Iromiguay* how he feels about this dream ending. "I'm so happy I'm living on a little cloud," he laughs.

Rachel Loois



Learning curve

After just one season afloat *Yachting World's* Jo Cackett knocks back the Stugeron and joins the crew aboard a Reflex 38 to round the Rock. So is the Fastnet all it's cracked up to be for a first-timer?

We could just make out the silhouette of the craggy Rock in the distance, like a wrinkled Merlin's hat and its bright sweeping beam of light piercing the twilight. All was silent on the boat as we sat on the rail – the look on the skipper's face was of total concentration as we edged towards the Fastnet. As we passed it at 06:16:03 Wednesday, 10 August, a helicopter flew overhead and hovered behind the lighthouse taking pictures and we radioed into the race officials at Ocean 6. We had reached the Rock 1st in our class, IRC 1!

If someone had said to me last year that I would be on a winning team in the Rolex Fastnet Race in 2005, I would've choked on my Vegemite toast. But it wasn't long before

I went from riding the Australian waves on a surfboard to slicing through the cold British waves aboard a yacht.

When I first started working as editorial assistant at *Yachting World*, I thought I'd better actually learn something about sailing. Completing my Competent Crew proved useful but racing was another ball game all together. When I was asked to join Sailing Logic Racing for a campaign that led to racing in the Fastnet on Reflex 38 *Puma Logic*, I jumped at the chance. But I didn't realise the magnitude of the Fastnet's importance as a race renowned for its challenging offshore conditions, attracting boats of all sizes and types, with professional and amateur crews.

Jon Regan



'If someone had said to me last year that I would be on a winning team in the Rolex Fastnet Race, I would have choked on my Vegemite toast'

But we were in safe hands with skipper Philippe Falle of Sailing Logic Racing, a highly experienced round the world sailor and RYA Yachtmaster Instructor. He was helped by first mate Sara Stanton, an RYA Yachtmaster with many sea miles under her belt.

The crew ranged in age from 26 to 65 years. They consisted of Mark – ever-vigilant navigator; Brian – otherwise known as Schoomy for his speed on the helm; Jon – known as Badboy Jonboy, a big crew motivator and chocolate provider as he worked for Mars; Annie – Sara’s bow protégé and the girl we feared waking up for her watch; Alex – keeping us entertained with his wry humour; Richard – keeping us entertained with his obscure observations; and me – coined Wombat, because I’m Australian and at times slow, but definitely not fat and furry! After living in close proximity, stumbling around in our underpants, throwing up and falling asleep next to each other on the rail, it wasn’t long before we became close mates.

Feeding the fish

During training my predisposition to seasickness was a bit of a bother. I wondered how I would seriously survive the Fastnet if I couldn’t even get out of the Solent without feeding the fish.

But things started looking up – or staying down – and my anxieties were abated by taking Stugeron which, despite giving me horrific dreams and making me feel like I’d had a heavy night with the Rolling Stones, did seem to work. I learnt how to work through it, and during the Fastnet I felt fine the whole way, attributing it to the smooth sailing conditions and getting my sea legs.

Not only was I conquering my seasickness but as a team we were performing better. Our results went from the top ten to the top five and amazingly we won the Channel Race just before the Fastnet. There was a new sense of determination emerging – we had come a long way and could go further.

And further we did go – particularly during the first half of the race. Out of the Solent we made the most of the inshore sea breeze, enabling us to gain some westing and catch the crucial tidal gate at Portland Bill, making headway towards Land’s End. As Philippe said, the first leg of the race was “immensely important. Tactically getting to Land’s End was the most challenging, having to deal with tidal gates, the sea breeze and gradient winds”.



Photos this page: Philippe Falle



Above: Jo on the spinnaker guy in warm sunshine during training, with Grant trimming and Jon on the helm. Left: Richard and Alex try to keep the kite flying in the light winds on the Fastnet Race

We slipped into a watch pattern of three four-hour watches during the night and two of six-hours during the day. After a couple of days I’d fallen into the rhythm and four hours’ sleep actually made me feel refreshed, except when I slept right beneath the grinding winch.

A flat and calm Celtic Sea wasn’t what I was expecting, but with plenty of sun and very little wind, that’s what we were getting. When the wind dropped to 2.5 knots only 46 miles from the Fastnet Rock, we all had to dangle our feet over the side and hike out.

The water looked like mercury as the boat hardly moved an inch. We then heard an eerie muffled noise of firing cannons in the distance. Another competitor, a catamaran named *Dazzle* was nearby and had also fallen to the mercy of the windless afternoon. But the situation didn’t seem to get them down as they shouted to us to ask if we’d started rationing the beer yet.

Life onboard their cat seemed one long party and they cranked the music up as we bobbed along beside them, while the

cannon blasts continued in the background.

Life onboard also revolved around mealtimes, which were nothing short of fantastic. Moroccan lamb, two-bean casserole and pesto pasta were just some of the culinary delights onboard courtesy of Philippe’s mum, Jane. We were much better off than others. We heard the Volvo Ocean Youth Squad aboard John Merrick’s *Farr 45* had enjoyed a nice freeze-dried breakfast.

Round in 1st

Rounding the Rock in 1st place was the highlight of the race, but as Philippe said, “watching the four boats getting two miles



ahead of us in the next five miles of the race was not." Unfortunately, as we headed south from the Fastnet Rock back towards the Scilly Isles, the wind filled in from the north, benefiting those boats behind us. As Philippe explained: "They were doing eight knots and we were doing six, as it was filling in from the north we had less gradient wind than they did."

While the news deflated our spirits a little, Philippe perked us up with a speech on how well we had done to get to the Rock in 1st position and we became all the more determined to get back the miles we lost. On the run home with the north-westerly we kept the kite constantly trimmed. Philippe, who was pretty tired by now, sat at the chart table studying the weather and every now and again popped his head up to say:



Andy Dare

'Our efforts had paid off. We were exhausted, sunburnt, but ecstatic'

"Come on guys, the numbers are down." By the evening we managed to creep up on some of the IRC 1 boats such as *Longbow* and *White Knuckles*, two Prima 38s.

After pulling kelp from our rudder on the final day we made it to the Scilly Isles, with the Prima 38s, and with top boats *Magnum* and *Meta Baron* in our sights. Everybody worked tirelessly, pulling, grinding, constantly getting neck ache staring up at the kite.

Despite the intensity of the home run everyone had a laugh when at one point I was grinding for the trimmer and called, "Numbers are down!", only to turn my head to see Philippe on the helm!

As the wind oscillated around 12 knots we alternated between the lightweight and the mid-weight kites. Moving into the night as we rounded The Lizard, the wind built to 17-18

Philippe Falle



The winning team



Mark Taylor

Philippe Falle (skipper): RYA Yachtmaster Instructor, skipper for five years instructing for Challenge Business and former chief instructor of Formula 1 Sailing.

Sara Stanton (first mate): Challenge Business crew volunteer co-ordinator. RYA Yachtmaster with extensive inshore and offshore racing experience.

Annie Norris: investigator for HM Revenue and Customs. Sailed Southern Ocean leg of Global Challenge 04/05, and Round Britain and Ireland in 2004.

Alex Seippel: investment banker. Some cruising experience.

Brian Phillips: director of air-conditioning equipment distributor. Sailed two legs of Clipper Race 2000.

Jon Regan: operations manager for Mars. Sailing experience includes cruising, inshore racing, dinghy sailing and windsurfing.

Richard Jefferies: banker. RYA Coastal Skipper, with dinghy sailing and inshore racing experience.

Mark Taylor: environmental consultant, lives in Edinburgh. Sailing experience includes dinghy racing and skippering charter boats.

Jo Cackett: *Yachting World* editorial assistant. RYA Competent Crew with some cruising experience.

Results – IRC Class 1

RORC Series: 1st at time of going to press.

Myth of Malham (Cowes to Jersey): 8th.

Morgan Cup Race: 4th.

Cowes to St Malo Race: 6th (1st Reflex 38).

Channel Race: 1st.

Rolex Fastnet Race: 1st IRC 1B, 3rd IRC 1, 1st Reflex 38, Winner of School Boat Trophy, 53rd IRC overall.

knots with plenty of pressure on the kite. Tension was high as we headed into Plymouth, an eerie silence hanging over us with only the sound of the lapping boats nearby. Richard recalls: "I found the end stressful because we thought we were battling for 1st and one mistake could've cost us a place."

Finishing at 01:34:12 on Friday, 12 August, we cheered ourselves across the line, our welcoming party in a RIB riding beside us ready with gifts. After a shower of champagne we stumbled ashore and found out we'd come 1st in IRC 1B and 3rd in IRC 1 on corrected, just behind the well-sailed Prima 38 *Bounty Hunter* and an X 442 *Ster Wenn 5*. We'd also won the Reflex 38 class and, to top it off, the School Boat Trophy!

Teamwork

Our efforts had paid off. We were exhausted, sunburnt but ecstatic. Such an amazing result for a school boat crew that had only been together since April this year is phenomenal, especially when other boats in the fleet had been racing together for years. At the time of going to press, *Puma Logic* was leading IRC 1 in the overall RORC series.

Persistence and teamwork were the key, led by a fantastic skipper with an intuitive sense for the wind. As the skip said: "I think we worked superbly well as a team. We were hitting 95-100 per cent of our target boat speeds. We had a strong belief that we could do well, and knew it was down to the teamwork, not to the individual. I had a firm belief we could do it. I knew we had a good team and a reasonably good skipper!"

Now it's over I'm left with memories of a tough, tiring but brilliant race. And the image of rounding the infamous Irish Fastnet Rock 1st in class among the bigger boats will always remain in my mind – for a wombat that's pretty special.

Do you want to do the Fastnet?

Sailing Logic Racing, based at Shamrock Quay, Southampton, offers a programme of yacht racing and race training, with courses and coaching at all levels in a fleet of Reflex 38 yachts. Both directors, Alison Smith and Philippe Falle, are round-the-world sailors, with extensive racing and management experience in the yachting industry. Philippe is a RYA Yachtmaster Instructor and Sailing Logic Racing operates as an RYA training centre. Sailing Logic. Tel: +44 (0)23 8033 0999. www.sailinglogicracing.co.uk

Race in two hemispheres

Bored with repeatedly doing the Sydney to Hobart Race, Aussie sailors Alex Whitworth and Peter Crozier sailed their 33-footer round the globe to do the Fastnet – and then sailed straight back. Jo Cackett met them in Falmouth



Top left: Peter looks chilly as they round Cape Horn; Peter and Alex arrive in Falmouth; raising a toast in the Falkland Islands with the naval liaison officer (left)



Photos: www.berrimilla.com

hanging onto the tiller and I felt the boat starting to roll. We went to 150° and then flipped up when the wave passed through. With the cockpit floor over my head I grabbed the tiller and hung on.”

Alex describes his own experience in his web log: “I was sitting by the shrouds tied to the boat and Pete shouted and I looked up into the wave – translucent bright blue and just starting to break – more or less through the lower spreaders. I grabbed the shrouds with both arms and was overboard in white water... and came down with a bang on a stanchion as the boat came upright.”

The Southern Ocean threw up some gale force winds but the real test was after *Berrimilla* rounded Cape Horn. After a stopover in the Falkland Islands, crossing the Atlantic proved more difficult than expected as they sailed through two storms, with the wind a steady 70 knots, preventing them from making much headway north-east.

Peter recalls the feeling of isolation during the storm. “I remember I was down below still doing the five-hour watch and I imagined this is what it was like when people were in a bomb shelter in the Blitz.” To take his mind off the turmoil outside, Peter would remember

times in the past spent with his wife and children. With a gleam in his eye while sitting in a backpackers’ hostel in Falmouth, he said: “That’s

when I asked myself ‘Why am I here?’”

Which begs the question: how did Alex and Peter get along being at sea together for a total of 126 days? Peter replied: “It seemed to work well. We have a lot of difference of opinion but normally a G&T at 5pm will resolve it!” They suffered only minor health problems such as muscle wastage and as Alex said: “Everything starts to get soft and soggy.”

“We have a lot of difference of opinion but a G&T will usually solve it”

gale south of New Zealand. They retired to Dunedin for five days as Alex had severely bruised his ribs.

Peter explains what happened while they were under bare poles in 45 knots and a strong south-westerly swell: “Two waves coalesced and we ended up with a really bad hollow wave. As it was hollowing out I tried to disengage the self-steering. I was

If you heard that a couple of middle-aged Aussie blokes were on a mission to complete the Sydney to Hobart Race in a 33-footer, sail to the UK via the Falkland Islands to race in the Fastnet, and then return for another go at the Sydney-Hobart, you’d think they were barmy. But then, Alex Whitworth and Peter Crozier are Australian.

So when asked why they wanted to take on such an epic voyage, Alex answered: “Seemed like a sensible thing to do! It’s dull doing the Sydney-Hobart over and over.”

Alex, 62, was born in Britain and learnt to sail on the Beaulieu river. He met Peter, 59, through the Royal Navy Yacht Club in Sydney. Their boat *Berrimilla*, a Broga 33 designed by Peter Joubert in 1977, had proved she could withstand heavy weather after surviving the 1998 Sydney-Hobart, which tragically claimed six lives.

And she needed to be sturdy. Their voyage to Britain took 159 days, including stops at Hobart in Tasmania, Dunedin in New Zealand and Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands. During that time they encountered squalls reaching 50 knots and were knocked down during a south-westerly

Fastnet fortunes

Berrimilla had a fantastic Rolex Fastnet Race. Arriving in Plymouth on Friday, 12 August with a time of 19:33:52, she came 8th in IRC Class 3, a staggering 11th IRC overall and 2nd in the two-handed. “We’re pretty chuffed,” Alex said after the race, “We had some good weather advice, and went out towards the separation zone in the Channel, which was the best call we made.”

Alex and Peter are heading back to Sydney

non-stop via the Cape of Good Hope and are planning to get there in 110-120 days in time for Christmas and the 2005 Sydney-Hobart Race, which starts on Boxing Day. “We’re only halfway,” Alex said, “but it was worth it.”

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