



Royal Ocean Racing Club Rating Office

Cruiser Racing Seminars

Report, Findings and Actions

1. The Seminars

Over the winter of 2012/2103, the RORC Rating Office held a series of cruiser racing seminars at clubs around the country. These were in response to reported falling turnouts and were aimed at addressing an apparent malaise in cruiser racing in both club and open events. We wished to communicate with Clubs and sailors, hear their views, broaden appeal, work with the Clubs and describe the initiatives that we are taking. The seminars were definitely not IRC specific and were aimed at cruiser racing generally. They did of course include much IRC specific content and we hope of course that if turnouts generally can be improved, that will in due course filter through to IRC.

We held 13 seminars at:

Royal Cornwall YC, Falmouth.
Parkstone YC, Poole, Dorset.
Blackwater SC, Maldon, Essex.
Kip Marina, Glasgow, Scotland.
Brighton Marina YC, Brighton, Sussex.
Cardiff Bay YC, South Wales
Pembroke Haven YC, South Wales.
Royal Western YC, Plymouth
Royal Southern YC, Hamble.
Guernsey YC, Guernsey, CI.
Island SC, Cowes, Isle of Wight
Liverpool YC, Liverpool.
Pwllheli SC, North Wales.

We must express our thanks to the clubs who hosted these seminars and also to the individuals in the clubs who made the detail arrangements. Without both of these, none of this could have happened.

Attendance at the seminars ranged from 25 to in excess of 80 with a total of well over 500 individual attendees. Club attendance ranged from 2 in Guernsey (there are only 2 clubs!) to 23 at Blackwater SC with a total of in excess of 100 clubs represented. We are more than pleased with the level of attendance achieved.

Overall, this series of seminars has been very worthwhile. Many issues were raised with 'robust' discussion at all seminars.

The primary issues to emerge are noted below together with actions that we are or will be taking in response.



2. Primary Issues

2.1 Courses

Everywhere we went there was general agreement that windward/leeward courses are far too common. There is a general feeling that a variety of courses is to be encouraged and would create more enjoyable racing.

These comments were however tempered in a couple of places by comments to the effect that including too many reaches would generally favour sprit rigged boats.

2.2 The IRC Yearbook

In a number of places, it was commented that the IRC Yearbook is perceived as too 'grand prix'. We already try to make the Yearbook content appropriate to the majority. This is a balancing act which we may need to re-address.

2.3 Crew

The most consistent comment made was the increasing difficulty in finding crew and also the absence of youngsters in the crew pool. In a few places, clubs have had some success in ameliorating this by fostering links with local schools and colleges.

It was suggested more than once that we should reduce IRC Crew Number. This however was countered by some owners reporting that they wanted to sail with more crew. Diametrically opposing views. Reducing IRC Crew Number would also inevitably lead to accusations that IRC was restricting the number of people able to go racing.

There is no 'right' answer to this.

We have already initiated discussions with the RYA about what initiatives they might be able to take to try and address the crew issue.

2.4 Fragmentation

In most areas, racing is run under IRC and a handicap system, to date either PY, 'club' handicap, or a regional handicap system such as the CCC system used on the Clyde. The introduction by the RYA of the National Handicap for Cruisers (NHC) was generally seen as a good thing which would reduce fragmentation and enable easier inter-club racing.

The sole exception to this is the use of the VPRS rating system in Poole. The issue of the inability of Poole based boats to race elsewhere or visiting boats to race in Poole was noted, together with the potential fragmentation of the sport that VPRS and similar systems could cause.

2.5 Certification Cost

Broadly, little resistance to the level of IRC fees was noted. Within this however, the cost for small boats on cheap swinging moorings was mentioned a couple of times, as was the cost of trial/amended certificates. It was also made clear a couple of times that "Some people will never pay anything for a rating/handicap".

A number of owners also commented on annual revalidation fees. While these are inevitable, we need to explain better why they are needed.

It was suggested that new application fees should be kept low. This is already Rating Office policy. But the commentators had no answer to the fact that reductions in new application fees would inevitably result in increased revalidation fees to balance the Rating Office's books.



2.6 Progressive Handicap Systems

Currently, only a few clubs run progressive handicap systems under which handicaps are routinely adjusted to reflect actual performance. With one exception, these are wholly subjective with adjustments made by a local handicapper. The single exception is Port Edgar YC on the Firth of Forth which has been running all their racing under an objective mathematically based system for many years. This has apparently been very successful in maintaining turnouts. After initial scepticism when the system was first introduced, it was reported that the level of handicap complaints is virtually zero.

2.7 National Handicap for Cruisers

The new RYA National Handicap for Cruisers (NHC) was included in the seminars as a key element in enabling boats to quickly and easily go racing and to encourage inter-club racing. Generally, the concept of NHC was readily accepted. A majority of clubs appear willing to either adopt NHC immediately or to shadow its use with a view to adoption later in 2013. A number of issues were repeatedly raised and will need to be overtly addressed by the RYA.

- In a few cases, individual commentators expressed concerns over the potential dumbing down effect of progressive handicaps. We did not however sense any general acceptance of this view. It was accepted that NHC was largely about ease of participation.
- Concerns were expressed in most seminars relating to the relatively simplistic Base TCF List and particularly the absence of variations for eg different propeller installations, etc. Our reply that the progressive nature of NHC removed any need for these was not always readily accepted.
- The issue of a late entrant to an event not being on the Base TCF List was raised a couple of times. Overt guidance from the RYA is needed, particularly when this happens out of office hours.
- It was suggested that eg the first two races in an NHC series should count half points. This might be worth exploring.
- It is suggested that the RYA should focus on the above in developing and promoting NHC.

2.8 Dual Scoring

The use of dual scoring (ie a handicap system alongside IRC) has long been promoted by the Rating Office. Despite this, few clubs have adopted this policy. As a result of the information provided in the seminars and subsequent discussion, it is now anticipated that more clubs will adopt this policy.

The primary benefits of dual scoring are the removal of the need to split an already small fleet into separate classes, and the ability of newcomers and the less experienced to compete against the established racers. Evidence from Ireland, where dual scoring is routinely used, is that this policy is very successful in maintaining turnouts and encouraging participation while enhancing the quality of racing.

Concern was expressed in one seminar in respect of dual scoring of mixing less experienced PY/club handicap sailors with IRC sailors. We consider this to be derogatory to the former group and do not share the views expressed.

2.9 Limited Validity IRC TCCs

The introduction of these on an experimental basis in GBR in 2013 was widely welcomed with a very significant number of clubs and events indicating that they will accept them.



It was suggested that LV TCCs should also be applicable to a club series. It was explained that such series are not what LV TCCs are aimed at and that it is appropriate that owners who are sufficiently committed to compete in a whole series should hold a full IRC certificate.

2.10 IRC Incentive Schemes

Based on feedback received during the seminars, the decision taken earlier this year to cease offering these due to lack of interest has now been reversed and arrangements will be considered with interested clubs on an individual basis.

2.11 IRC Advocates

It was suggested that we should set up a system of 'IRC Advocates' around the country. These would be experienced sailors and other individuals willing and able to help newcomers through the intricacies of IRC.

We have already taken the decision to do this.

2.12 Sundry

In addition, the issues below were also noted:

- There was a general acceptance around the country of a need for all involved to be proactive in addressing the current issues that the sport is facing.
- It was suggested that we should have some form of corporate 'IRC Club Membership' to enable any boat in that club to race under IRC. While this may be a good theoretical idea, in practice it would almost certainly be impossible to administer.
- Notwithstanding that IRC calculation of TCC is not disclosed, it was suggested that we could be a little more open in eg describing the effects of annual changes. We have accepted this point.
- A number of suggestions for the development of IRC were made including age allowance for sails, a dry sailing penalty, the re-introduction of penalties for hi-tech sails, allowances for cruising and other loose kit carried aboard, a second TCC with just the No.3 jib, etc. In all cases, it was explained that none of these ideas were new, that all had previously been considered, and that while some of them might have merit, that in practical terms they were all either impossible to administer or would simply lead to abuse.
- It was suggested that developments such as the increasing use of bowsprits, as opposed to spinnaker poles, were de-skilling sailing. While a bowsprit may be easier to handle than a spinnaker pole, we do not generally share this view. Use of bowsprits opens the sport to a wider range of boats and sailors. They also require the development of different skills to get the best from the configuration.
- The complexity of the IRC new application form was raised. The introduction of IRC Advocates will help in this respect. The Rating Office are also reviewing application systems generally.
- The complexity of the Racing Rules of Sailing was mentioned. The ISAF website already includes a simplified set of rules. The RYA also publish a book (also available as an app) 'The Handy Guide to the Racing Rules. This latter is however not well publicised. The RYA should be encouraged to promote both of these.
- Changes in society with increased family and work pressures were raised on many occasions as being contributory to reductions in turnouts. Directly, there is nothing that we can do about these. In planning events, clubs are however strongly recommended to



structure their events such that they are easy to do and recognise the conflicting time pressures on owners and sailors.

3. Actions

As a result of these seminars, the RORC Rating Office will be taking the following actions.

- 3.1 Work with the RYA and others to focus on cruiser/racer crew initiatives. These should be aimed at both younger sailors and also at newcomers and existing cruising sailors.
- 3.2 Formally set up an IRC Advocates system. This is already well advanced and will be in place during the Spring of 2013.
- 3.3 Liaise with the RYA in the development of NHC. This is already underway.
- 3.4 Review the experimental Limited Validity IRC TCCs with a view to continuation in 2014. Consider whether these might be more widely offered internationally. It is already clear however that this would be administratively and practically difficult.
- 3.5 Reinstate IRC Club Incentive Schemes.
- 3.6 Review IRC Crew Number. We will need to try and establish (across all sections of the fleets) whether there is a genuine wish to change this.
- 3.7 Re-consider the IRC Yearbook content. This needs to balance the often conflicting perceptions of club and 'grand prix' sailors.
- 3.8 Explain overtly and clearly why we have to charge IRC revalidation fees.
- 3.9 Formally consider 'IRC Club Membership'. It is considered unlikely however that this will be practical or desirable.
- 3.10 Request GBR IRC Committee Members to report this year on NHC, dual scoring and Limited Validity IRC TCCs.
- 3.11 Consider how we might better explain annual IRC changes. A brief explanation of this year's changes has already been published (www.ircrating.org). Feedback from this will be used to explore how we might further develop it.
- 3.12 Review IRC application forms. How could these be made simpler? Changes have already been made for the 2013 form. Noting that sailing is a complex sport, ultimately further simplification may be impossible. As part of a much wider international project, these are already under review.
- 3.13 Liaise with the managers of the VPRS rating system to minimise conflict and fragmentation.
- 3.14 Continue discussions with the RYA and others in GBR towards an RYA approved set of safety regulations for inshore racing.
- 3.15 Propose to the RYA that the ISAF simplified racing rules and the RYA 'Handy Guide to the Racing Rules' should be more widely circulated and publicised.

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