



by James Boyd

*The only constant in 98 years of the Rolex Fastnet Race - the famous Fastnet Rock itself.
Photo: ROLEX/Kurt Arrigo*

refined Transatlantic Race for the Kaiser's Cup in 1905. This latter race had spurred Thomas Fleming Day, editor of *The Rudder*, to run the first Bermuda Race in 1906, mainly as an exercise to prove that such races were not solely the preserve of the super-wealthy in their giant schooners, but that smaller yachts could successfully compete in them too.

A competitor in the 1924 Bermuda Race was British WWI veteran, yachtsman, adventurer and sailing journalist, Weston Martyr, at the time working as a shipbroker in New York. Even for an experienced seafarer like Martyr, competing in the Bermuda Race was an epiphany. Soon after his return home he described offshore racing as "the King of Sports" in a seminal letter published in *Yachting Monthly*: "It is without question the very finest sport a man can possibly engage in: for to play this game it is necessary to possess in the very highest degree those hallmarks of a true sportsman, skill, courage and endurance..."

In this same letter Martyr challenged the UK yachting establishment, suggesting that it lacked crew with the necessary experience and skill to win such an offshore race. To rectify this, he proposed holding such an event on home waters, an idea that gained traction not just in the yachting press but across the wider media too. To organise this a committee was formed comprising Martyr; Lt Cdr E.G. Martin OBE RNVR, part of the Martins Bank family and a keen yachtsman (and subsequently the first Commodore of the RORC) and Malden Heckstall-Smith, editor of *Yachting Monthly*.

Despite alternatives, like finishing in Spain or rounding the Tuskar Rock off southeast Ireland, as well as criticism that a course running down the Dorset and West Country coasts was not 'offshore', Martyr's suggestion of a race from the Solent to the Fastnet finishing in Plymouth was chosen. At 615 miles it also represented a similar distance to the Bermuda Race and this would subsequently establish an international trend for 600 mile offshore races, from the Sydney-Hobart (1945) to the China Sea Race (1962) and Middle Sea Race (1968) and culminating in this year's Roschier Baltic Sea Race.

Today the race continues to attract a giant fleet with entries from all over the world, comprising everything from pro teams in their Ultime trimarans, the foiling IMOCA's of the Vendée Globe and the giant Class40 fleet, to the bulk of competitors in the IRC fleet, ranging from top maxi teams, through the core RORC competitors aboard their racers and cruiser-racers, and on to the family cruisers and sailing schools out to enjoy a 'once in a lifetime experience'.

FLYING HIGH AT FIFTY

First run in 1925, 2023 will mark the 50th edition of the Rolex Fastnet Race, the founding race of the Royal Ocean Racing Club. In fact after a strong start, the 'Ocean Race', as the Fastnet Race was first called, nearly withered and perished, down to just six entries in 1933, when it became biennial.

Slow to grow beforehand, post WWII the race struck a chord, solidifying its reputation internationally as the cornerstone of the one of the world's top grand prix yacht racing events - the Admiral's Cup. Following the horrific

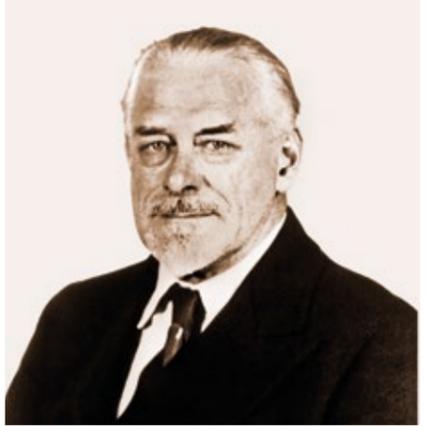
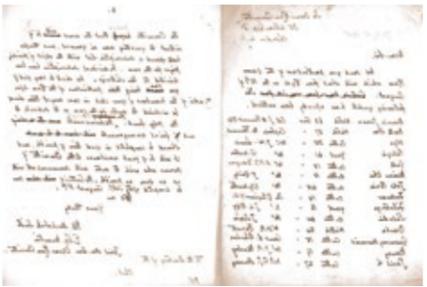
storm that caused multiple fatalities in 1979, it did well to survive both this and the eventual demise of the Admiral's Cup. Since 2001 it has benefitted from the arrival of Rolex as its prestigious title sponsor and the incorporation of French professional classes. Over 98 years the Rolex Fastnet Race has evolved to become by far the most successful of the world's 'classic 600 mile' offshore races, with a record 400+ entries expected on the start line to celebrate its historic 50th, which, as in 2021, will finish in Cherbourg, France.

How it all began

At the time of the first race in post-WWI Britain, yachting racing was largely an inshore pastime, although a high profile one thanks to the enthusiastic participation of King George V and other aristocracy and Sir Thomas Lipton still challenging for the America's Cup with his series of Shamrock J Class yachts. However offshore racing in the UK did not exist as a sport, unlike the USA where the New York Yacht Club had rather rashly run its first race across the Atlantic in December 1866, and the more

7 starters
Overall winner and line honours: *Jolie Brise* - Lt Cdr E.G. Martin - 6d 2h 45m

FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS



While there was considerable interest in it, the first 'Ocean Race', as the Fastnet Race was then called, attracted a motley collection of yachts. The rules created by the organising committee permitted the entry of 'any fully decked yacht of any rig with a waterline length of 30-50ft'. They had to be in cruising trim and carry a lifeboat. Remarkably, there was a restriction on professionals sailing on board, limited to those that could be 'normally accommodated in the fo'c'sle,' although their professionals were less Olympic medallists and more commercial seafarers. 16 yachts entered, including one from the USA, but come the starting gun at midday on Saturday 15 August, only seven started. All were British save one - Spanish opera singer Ingo Simon, and even he was sailing a Bristol Channel pilot cutter.

Hard to understand now, but at the time the race was more attractive to the cruising community, where yachts were typically

skipped by their owners and largely crewed by friends. A moot point was the banning of IYRU metre classes, typically sailed by professionals and frequently with the owner not even on board. They would certainly have been more advanced racers, but not seaworthy enough.

At this time pilot cutters were perhaps the most appropriate vessels for offshore racing. Since the mid-1800s they had been developed for speed and seaworthiness, enabling their crews to speed out into the Western Approaches to vie for business with ships wishing to employ their pilotage services. However, by the 1920s this competition had ceased and sail-powered pilot boats had mostly been replaced by steam-powered ones. Here they now had renewed purpose: In addition to Simon's *Saladin*, *Jessie L* was another Bristol Channel pilot cutter on the start line, albeit the sole entry with a new-fangled Marconi rig. *Jolie Brise* was a 44ft LWL 48 tonne French pilot cutter, built in Le

Havre in 1913. She had the age-old advantage of being the biggest and one of the newest entries. *Fulmar* was a 1901 cutter entered by the Royal Engineers Yacht Club, while *Gull* was an elegant 1896 Camper & Nicholsons cutter sailed by Irishman H.P.F. Donegan. *Banba IV* and *North Star* were Colin Archer-type cruising ketches, based on Archer's Norwegian pilot cutter designs, with *North Star* the race's only new yacht.

While the course was essentially the one we all recognise, it had some differences: The start line was off Ryde and set by the Royal Victorian Yacht Club. The boats exited the Solent to the east, past the Forts and south of the Isle of Wight, bound for the Fastnet Rock, which they left to starboard (ie the opposite of today's rounding), before turning on their heels for Plymouth, where they were welcomed by the Royal Western Yacht Club.

The prevailing wind for this course is westerly, but for the first race it started out from the

ENE, making for a beat out of the Solent. In the dying breeze the slower boats resorted to inverting sails and rigging up 'watersails' (unused jibs slung beneath the boom). *Banba IV* jury rigged no less than nine sails.

After a light first night the lead trio of *Jolie Brise*, *Gull* and *Saladin* broke away. By 14:30 on Sunday *Jolie Brise* was approaching Portland with *Gull* inshore and slightly ahead, and *Saladin* some way offshore, all making solid progress downwind in a building easterly. By the Lizard *Jolie Brise* had pulled ahead with *Gull* chasing hard under full sail, cutting inside and was 10 minutes astern at the Runnel Stone.

Out into the Celtic Sea, in light to no wind, *Jolie Brise* and *Gull* enjoyed a match race for the lead while *Saladin* and *Fulmar* were able to catch up. However the rolling motion proved too great for *Gull* whose topsail halyard broke, ultimately costing her the race. When the breeze did eventually fill in *Jolie Brise*

benefitted the most, first to round the Fastnet Rock at 19:50 on the Wednesday, followed by *Gull* at 08:35 the next morning, with *Fulmar* and *Saladin* in her wake.

Fate was smiling upon *Jolie Brise*: her return journey saw the breeze back into the SSW and build, allowing her to average more than eight knots. The wind continued to strengthen, and off Falmouth she saw Force 7, forcing her to drop the mainsail. However conditions then again abated, allowing the mainsail to be reset along with a spinnaker, which carried her most of the final miles. She crossed the line on Friday, 21 August at 14:45, in an elapsed time of 6 days 2 hours 45 minutes.

The trio behind had a tight race into Plymouth with *Fulmar* leading and *Gull* once again on a charge. However *Fulmar* clung on to take second in 6 days 22 hours 48 minutes, with *Gull* 47 minutes behind, those positions standing after time correction, based on the Boat Racing Association's system of measurement.

The slower boats astern were treating the race as a spirited cruise. Dinghies had been launched to visit competitors as they too were becalmed or to buy fish from a passing smack.

Later, out in the Celtic Sea, the going got tough as they experienced the worst of the gale. Approaching the Fastnet Rock on 20 August, *Jessie L* retired into Crosshaven. *Banba IV* considered retiring too, but resumed racing after the wind abated.

At the finish line *North Star* was disqualified for having turned on her motor to counter the ebb tide just before she had crossed. In the same predicament the following night *Banba IV* was more patient and did the right thing, kedging short of the line: meanwhile, at a dinner at the Royal Western Yacht Club, in its clubhouse upon Plymouth Hoe, competitors and stakeholders in the first Fastnet Race founded the Ocean Racing Club, with *Jolie Brise's* owner Lt Cdr E.G. Martin as its first Commodore.

Showing surprisingly advanced communications for the day, the lighthouse keepers on the Fastnet Rock were able to telegraph back to the race committee the times competitors rounded.

There were seven starters in the first race in 1925.
Photo: Beken of Cowes
Right: To date the only boat to have won three Fastnet Races - *Jolie Brise*.
Photo: Beken of Cowes
Far right: Weston Martyr spurred the first race to be run.
Photo: Ian Dear Archive/PPL

Photos on pages 14-27: 1927 - Nelly; 1928/1995 - James Boyd; 1929 - *Jolie Brise*; 1931/1937/1947/1977 - Beken of Cowes; 1939 - Latifa; 1949 - Ian Dear Archive/PPL; 1953/1957 - Carina; 1959/1961/1963 - Eileen Ramsay/PPL; 1969 - Cork Examiner; 1975 - Daniel Forster/PPL; 1985 - Drum: Rick Tomlinson/rick-tomlinson.com; Panda - Nick Meers; 1993 - Jamie Lawson-Johnston/PPL; 2011/2017 - ROLEX/Carlo Borlenghi; 2013/2015/2019 - ROLEX/Kurt Arrigo

1926

9 starters

Overall winner: *Ilex* - Royal Engineer Yacht Club

Line honours and record: *Hallowe'en* - Col J.F.N. Baxendale - 3d 19h 5m 30s

The Fastnet is repeated on an annual basis and, after much discussion, is run on the same course, but with the Royal Yacht Squadron sending the boats off to the east from Cowes. Many entries returned including *Jolie Brise*, *Gull*, *Banba IV* and *Saladin* plus the Royal Engineers in a 20 ton 1899 vintage Nicholson design *Ilex*. They were joined by the first American entry, the Alden schooner *Primrose IV* and a new Fife cutter and scratch boat, *Hallowe'en*. The race's first female skipper entered, Mrs Aitken Dick with her own cutter *Altair*. *Hallowe'en* reached the Fastnet Rock in 61.5 hours. The slower boats hove-to in a gale short of the Rock. *Gull* retired leaking severely. *Ilex* lost three overboard while reefing – all recovered – and went on to win.



14 starters

Overall winner: *Tally Ho* - Lord Stalbridge

Line honours: *La Goleta* - R.St.L. Beverley

1927

A heavy weather Fastnet Race in which 14 started but just two finished – the brand new Alden schooner *La Goleta* and Lord Stalbridge's cutter *Tally Ho*. Three made it out into the Celtic Sea but one, due to a navigation error, closed on the Irish coast – 50 miles off course! *La Goleta* and *Tally Ho* endured a monumental heavy weather match race all the way back to the finish. Among the retirees were *Jolie Brise* and *Ilex* and two US schooners *Nicanor* and *La Goleta*, most suffering severe leaks, full of water and with much broken gear and sails, one former metre class entry even broaching – no mean feat in such a heavy boat.



1928

12 starters

Overall winner and line honours: *Niña* - Paul Hammond

After the previous race a minimum LWL of 35ft was introduced and the Channel Race created for the smaller boats. The fleet was getting more international, with its first French entry and two American schooners which had competed in a transatlantic race to Spain. One, the Starling Burgess-designed double staysail schooner *Niña* (right) was the event's first purpose-built ocean racer. In addition to an array of double speed and ratchet winches, her rig permitted a multitude of sail combinations between her spars including nine staysails from the giant Golbwobler to the Queen, changed during the race an unheard of (at the time) 23 times. The race was held in mixed conditions and often poor visibility with stronger winds as the leaders finished. The 50ft LWL *Niña* was runaway winner on line honours and corrected time, a result sparking much indignation in the UK where the event was still considered a 'spirited cruise', but embraced by the Club which made *Niña*'s skipper Sherman Hoyt a Rear Commodore.



10 starters

Overall winner and line honours: *Jolie Brise* – Robert Somerset

1929

A small entry included two French boats, one the scratch boat Baron de Neufville's yawl *Guerveur*, while *Jolie Brise* had been acquired by RORC founder member Robert Somerset and was one of several repeat customers including *Saladin*, *Ilex*, *Neptune* and *Amaryllis*. Among the entry was the radical new *Maitenes II* sporting a 75ft tall Bermudian rig which had a torrid time, being unprepared. Despite mild conditions there were three retirements as the fleet for the first time experienced northwesterly headwinds en route to the Rock. *Jolie Brise* (left) was first home as the wind went soft for those astern of her.



1930

9 starters

Overall winner and line honours: *Jolie Brise* – Robert Somerset

A long brutal race, for wind speed but also for being upwind to the Fastnet Rock and then, with the wind veering east, upwind most of the way to the finish too. The small entry (some suggested being due to the RORC's Santander Race, introduced in 1928) were similar to 1929 but included the American steel schooner *Lelanta*. The navy on *Neptune* led but had to retire to Plymouth leaking, handing the lead to *Jolie Brise*. The breeze increased with crews taking second and third reefs. Returning from the Rock, *Jolie Brise* had 12 hours of favourable breeze before it abruptly returned on the nose. *Jolie Brise* won her third Fastnet Race, albeit under different owners, a feat never since repeated.



1931

17 starters

Overall winner: *Dorada* - Rod and Olin Stephens

Line honours: *Patience* - H.E. West

The beginning of the 'US' decade' was highlighted by the Stephens brothers' *Dorada*, a light displacement, low wetted surface area, yawl-rigged racing yacht, beneficiaries of a new rating formula whose rigging allowance rewarded two-masted yachts. After winning the Transatlantic Race from the USA, they and their compatriots all raced the Fastnet, taking the top four places.

The race started slowly with no wind and all but one kedging on the line. It remained light for the next 48 hours but conditions later turned heinous in the Celtic Sea, similar to those in 1979. Amid broken gear and one boat hove-to for 56 hours, Colonel Charles Hudson, co-owner of *Maitenes II*, was sadly lost overboard. It was the closest finish of this era, with five boats arriving within 90 minutes, but after time correction *Dorada* won by a massive eight hours. Offshore yachting in the UK had come of age, acknowledged by the RORC receiving its Royal Warrant. From here it was agreed that future races would be held in odd numbered years.



6 starters

Overall winner: *Dorada* - Rod and Olin Stephens

Line honours: *Flame* - C.E. Nicholson

1933

Perhaps due to the brutal conditions of the previous race, the entries for this edition were meagre, but bolstered by the return of *Dorada*, plus two American schooners *Grenadier* and *Brilliant*. The race took place before Cowes Week and the course changed, for the first time exiting the Solent westwards but then returning to finish in the east Solent. This was to return boats to the Solent for a coastal race series, which ultimately proved unpopular. The race started again in a flat calm with *Dorada* first into the breeze and leading out of the Solent although, by the Fastnet Rock, designer Charles E Nicholson's own cruising cutter *Flame* led on the water. Conditions remained light, freshening slightly on the return off Land's End, benefitting the larger, heavier schooners. *Brilliant* and *Grenadier* enjoyed a match race into the finish, *Brilliant* pipping her rival to the post after being four miles astern at St Catherine's Point. However they were both beaten by *Flame*, while *Dorada* scored her second consecutive corrected time victory.



1935

17 starters

Overall winner: *Stormy Weather* - Philip LeBoutillier

Line honours: *Kismet III* - J. Colin Newman



The start date clashed with Cowes Week so the race instead set off from Yarmouth, the finish returning to Plymouth. Favourite was *Dorada*'s development, *Stormy Weather*, skippered by Rod Stephens. Like *Dorada* in 1931, she had won the Transatlantic Race beforehand. After its nadir two year's earlier the event was growing, with 13 UK entries including the Nicholson cutter *Foxhound* and the 72ft steel yawl *Trenchemer*, the latter built to the RORC rule.

Despite suffering a start line collision, the converted 15 metre Fife *Kismet III* led out of the Solent, relishing the light conditions. By Start Point *Stormy Weather* was in front, but *Kismet III* was first round the Fastnet. Returning from the Rock, *Foxhound* was in good shape until a poor landfall off the Cornish coast, then being becalmed for eight hours. *Kismet III* fended off *Trenchemer* for line honours, while *Stormy Weather*'s victory made it three in a row for the Stephens brothers.

29 starters

Overall winner: *Zeearend* - Kees Bruynzeel

Line honours: *Elizabeth McCaw* - R.J. Reynolds

1937

By now a fully fledged 'sport' in the UK, in 1937 the fleet comprised yachts better suited, equipped and experienced for racing offshore. Divided into Racing and Cruising classes, the fleet showed the emergence of European designs such as *Bloodhound* from Charles Nicholson, *Ortac* from Robert Clark and *Maid of Malham* (right) from Laurent Giles. Both the favourites, *Maid* and *Ortac*, were the minimum 35ft LWL. For the first time, the Scilly Isles had to be left to port returning from the Rock. The boats set off in a light northerly, with the Fife *Elizabeth McCaw* over early. The front runners made fast progress led by the Fife *Latifa*, round the Rock as the wind turned westerly. *Maid of Malham* was caught in a failing wind and thick fog on the approach to the Rock while, en route to the finish, the leader *Latifa* was becalmed for eight hours, allowing *Elizabeth McCaw* to pip her to the post by just 14 minutes. The Stephens-designed Dutch yawl *Zeearend* won by almost two hours, sailing a near faultless race.



1939

26 starters

Overall winner: *Bloodhound* - Isaac Bell

Line honours and record: *Nordwind* - Kriegsmarine - 3d 16h 23m

The fleet was divided into three divisions - Open, A and B – according to length, the latter two having sail restrictions. The course was changed again, this time with the Scilly Isles left to the north both out and back. With WWII just one month out, the German navy, the Kriegsmarine, fielded the 60ft yawl *Nordwind*, built to the maximum limit of the RORC rule, while the Luftwaffe entered the smaller *Walkure*.

In a gusty northerly, *Nordwind* led out of the Solent but with *Latifa* in hot pursuit, an intense match race that would last to the finish. *Nordwind* ultimately claimed the new Erivale Cup for line honours, setting a new record. For the leaders the wind had faded between the Lizard and the finish, but those immediately astern were able to cover the last 45 miles in half the time, and overall victory went to American-owned *Bloodhound*, rounding out the Fastnet's US decade.



1947

27 starters

Overall winner: *Myth of Malham* - Capt J.H. Illingworth
Line honours: *Latifa* - Michael Mason

With racing resuming after WWII, RORC created new classes based on length and performance: Class I (LWL 38+ft <60ft rating), Class II (LWL 27.5-38ft 27.5<38ft rating) and Class III (LWL 19-27.5ft <27.5ft rating) of which Class I and II were eligible to enter the Fastnet. There was another course amendment, the race starting off Southsea, leaving the Isle of Wight to starboard and with no limitations at the Scillies.

Yacht design kept advancing with John Illingworth and Laurent Giles's *Myth of Malham* (right), described (most politely) as 'the ugly duckling' with a headsail-orientated sailplan, brutally sawn-off bow and stern, light displacement and high freeboard. Alongside new designs were old faithfuls such as *Latifa* and *Bloodhound*. This was an extremely slow race, with light wind outbound and headwinds back to Plymouth. *Latifa* took line honours from *Bloodhound* while *Myth of Malham* was overall winner on corrected time by six hours.



Overall winner and line honours: *Carina II* - Dick Nye (left)

1957

41 starters

The first Admiral's Cup, a device to promote yacht racing between the US and UK, was held, comprising the Channel Race, Cowes Week's Britannia and New York Yacht Club Cups and culminating in the Fastnet Race. The main prize went to the British team of *Myth of Malham*, *Uomie* and *Jocasta*.

An updated version of the RORC rule was introduced, sealing up loopholes and reflecting modern yacht design such as the greater importance of headsails.

The race was another rough one, setting off in a fresh southwesterly, which increased to gale force by the evening, abating slightly only for another, stronger, gale to arrive. There was much carnage, from stripped winches and snapped halyards to severe leaks and of course many blown sails. Ultimately just 12 finished. First home was *Carina II*, despite a severe leak, scoring her second consecutive overall win.



29 starters

Overall winner: *Myth of Malham* - Capt J.H. Illingworth
Line honours: *Latifa* - Michael Mason

1949

The race started from Cowes heading west, leaving the Scillies to port on the return leg. Illingworth (left) was coaxed into entering *Myth of Malham*, against newer equivalents *Gulvain* and *Fandango*. The Royal Artillery Yacht Club's *St Barbara* led out of the start in a building westerly, with many in the fleet retiring due to gear failure and seasickness. Off the Lizard the remainder experienced a gale causing most to go hove-to. *Myth of Malham* forged on, following *Bloodhound* upwind, tacking between the Scillies and Land's End, helped by using a state of the art RDF set.

In the gale, *Latifa* led *Bloodhound* and *Myth of Malham* around the Rock. *Myth of Malham* lost a spreader fitting and broke her spinnaker pole while making 10 knots under her nylon spinnaker. Finishing third on the water in Plymouth, *Myth of Malham* won her second consecutive Fastnet overall. The last arrivals finished after 10 days, the pilot cutter *Theodora* taking even longer, arriving with no sails left untorn.

1959

59 starters

Overall winner: *Anitra* - Sven Hansen
Line honours: *Anna Marina* - K.E. Hedborg

For the first two days conditions were light, resulting in much kedging, often with fog or torrential rain. With Max Aitken's *Drumbeat* first out of the Solent, the leaders managed to make the tidal gates, *Anna Marina* out in front of the Club's *Griffin II* and the Swedish S&S yawl *Anitra*. Spread out, they headed across the Celtic Sea into northwesterlies that built to gale force at the Fastnet Rock. The leaders enjoyed a fast run back from the Rock but fell into light winds again at the Scillies. *Anna Marina* was first home, but it was the sixth to finish, *Anitra*, that took the overall win - Sweden taking both top prizes.

In the Admiral's Cup there was no US team so it was opened to all nations, attracting the French, Dutch and an all-star Italian team packed full of sailing talent, including seven Olympic sailors, plus Francis Chichester navigating! Thanks to *Griffin II*'s second place in class the Brits retained the Cup on 135 points to 123.



1951

29 starters

Overall winner: *Yeoman III* - Owen Aisher
Line honours: *Circe* - Carl Hardeberg

America returned for the first time since WWII with *Malabar XIII*, while Rod Stephens was skippering the S&S design *Circe*. The race also had its first Australian entry in *Waltzing Matilda*.

The start was the most miserable on record with near gale force southwesterlies, torrential rain and even mist. *Malabar XIII* was dismantled at the Shingles, while others rode out the gale in the shelter of Hurst. After the gale had blown out there were very light winds with which the leaders crept to the Rock. 100 yards from the Rock *Bloodhound* had to kedge, allowing *Circe* to round 30 seconds ahead. Meanwhile Owen Aisher's *Yeoman III* was fourth to round, now holding a huge lead in Class II.

Under spinnaker to the finish, *Circe* scored a deserved line honours victory, although it was on this occasion the smaller Class II front runners that prevailed overall, with *Yeoman III* coming out on top.

40 starters
Overall winner: *Favona* - Sir Michael Newton
Line honours: *Bloodhound* - Isaac Bell



1953

Given the increased popularity of the 35-footers, thanks to better materials as well as a reflection of tough economic times post-WWII, Class III boats were permitted to enter. There were also separate starts for the first time. As a taste of things to come, the USA fielded a strong team with a Bermuda Race winner in each class, including *Carina* (left) and the S&S designs, *Loki* and *Gesture*.

The race started in light conditions and much of the fleet missed the tide at the Needles, so progress was slow down the Channel. Racing remained tight between the Class I leaders with *Bloodhound* creeping ahead of *Foxhound* at the Rock. Meanwhile the Class III leaders were up with the Class II leaders, benefitting from some late breeze. Unquestionably a 'small boat race', victory went to the 32ft Class III Robert Clark design *Favona*, whose elapsed time back from the Fastnet Rock had been quicker than the 63ft *Bloodhound*'s.



95 starters
Overall winner: *Zwerver II* - Otto van der Vorm
Line honours: *Stormvogel* - Kees Bruynzeel

1961

The fleet size doubling, and with the Admiral's Cup gaining momentum, the Fastnet Race had come of age. Entered by regular competitor, and overall winner in 1937, Kees Bruynzeel was the legendary 'super ketch' *Stormvogel*. First home by eight hours, she might have beaten *Nordwind*'s record had it not been for a broken main halyard and three hours becalmed at the Lizard. While the leaders were crossing the Celtic Sea, a brief but violent Force 9 between the Lizard and Land's End forced smaller yachts to sail under bare poles, many suffering blown out sails and ultimately causing 30 retirements.

At the Fastnet Rock, Ren Clark's Class II yacht *Quiver III* was leading overall, but ultimately overall victory went to the S&S-designed *Zwerver II* (left), which had been knocked down twice en route to the Rock and had to heave-to for five hours. This time Holland took the top prizes. The US returned to the Admiral's Cup, alongside France, Holland, Sweden and Britain. They started the Fastnet with a 13-point advantage and had a tough race, with *Figaro* blowing out both their big spinnaker and mizzen staysail and having to frantically repair them, while *Windrose* broke her boom and *Cyane* her tiller. Nonetheless they became the first nation to prise the Admiral's Cup from the Brits, winning by 10 points.



1955

47 starters

Overall winner: *Carina II* - Dick Nye
Line honours: *Mare Nostrum* - Enrique Urrutia

This was another light race, but on this occasion a fast one for Class I. There was another strong US entry across all three classes with Dick Nye's *Carina II* (right) favourite having won the Transatlantic Race, plus the big trophies at Cowes Week. *Mare Nostrum* of Spain's Enrique Urrutia had main halyard problems early on but this delay meant she left the Solent on a better lift, rocketing her into the lead, while behind the wind shut down for many in Class III. Off Land's End John Illingworth, back on the minimum length yawl *Mouse of Malham* took the lead in Class III.

Mare Nostrum led Class I at the Rock while *Bloodhound* and *Foxhound* duelled, *Carina II* nipping at their heels. The Spanish S&S design held the favourable breeze to the finish, however those chasing were becalmed. Sixth home on the water, *Carina II* won the race overall. Class III had a tougher time upwind, often stopping to the extent that the top six all finished within 15 minutes, with *Mouse of Malham* prevailing.



1963

127 starters

Overall winner: *Clarion of Wight* - Derek Boyer DFC
Line honours: *Capricia* - Einar Hansen

The race entry continued to grow and it proved a top year for Britain. Derek Boyer and Dennis Miller teamed up to build S&S's first design to the RORC rule, *Clarion of Wight*. She became part of the British Admiral's Cup team which faced five other nations, this time including Germany. Going into the Fastnet Race, just five points separated Sweden, Britain and the USA.

The pre-start was tough on the Brits when *Clarion of Wight* suffered a collision, breaking a spinnaker pole and holing her deck, and Max Aitken's *Outlaw* sheered her gooseneck. Both continued nonetheless.

The race was a classic upwind affair. The brisk westerlies took their toll on gear, including two dismantlings and crew seasickness even on the giants of the fleet, *Stormvogel* and the S&S 74 *Capricia*, the latter with Rod Stephens on board. *Capricia* would go on to claim the Erivale Cup for line honours ahead of *Stormvogel*.

The race overall was won in the Celtic Sea outbound to the Rock by those who headed east of the rhumb line and then got lifted up to the Rock. *Clarion of Wight* was leading at the Rock, rounding just before the breeze faded and went on to win not only Class II, but the race outright, causing the British Admiral's Cup team to win by 13 points. The US team was runner-up - *Dyna* and *Figaro* had sailed exceptional races only to be let down by *Windrose*.

It was a great year for British sailing, winning both the Admiral's Cup and the Fastnet Race.

1965

151 starters

Overall winner: *Rabbit* - Dick Carter
Line honours and record: *Gitana IV* - E. de Rothschild - 3d 9h 40m

The race mostly took place in clement, light to variable winds, but about face - a run to the Rock and a beat back, although it increased to Force 7 at the Rock. It was a race for the biggest and smallest. Baron Edmond de Rothschild's *Gitana IV*, a Sangermani 90 - the biggest yacht ever to have entered - finally broke *Nordwind's* 26-year-old race record, first home by 17 hours, despite being becalmed for six hours off the Lizard. But the race was won by the smallest in the fleet, the 34ft *Rabbit* (right) skippered by her designer Dick Carter. This revolutionary yacht featured a separate spade rudder and a trim tab on the keel, and halyards running inside the mast.

The Admiral's Cup saw the first challenge from Australia, which started the Fastnet 14 points ahead of the Brits. However the mild conditions didn't suit the Aussies and Britain successfully defended, to win by its biggest margin, thanks to class wins from *Quiver IV* and *Noryema IV*.



1966

209 starters

Overall winner and line honours: *Pen Duick III* - Éric Tabarly

Once again there was a quantum leap in participation, passing 200 for the first time, marking out the Fastnet truly as the world's largest offshore yacht race.

Held in moderate conditions, the race belonged to Éric Tabarly and *Pen Duick III*, which the future French legend had designed himself and had built in aluminium for the 1968 OSTAR, her schooner rig releasing much unrated sail area. She pulled ahead of the substantially longer *Gitana IV* when the latter's mainsail headboard pulled out en route to Bishop Rock. After the leaders finished, the breeze shut down leaving the Class I boats on top, *Pen Duick III* winning by 2.5 hours from *Figaro IV*. Inshore racing techniques began to be applied to offshore racing with, for example, the offwatch being called on deck for major sail changes.

In the Admiral's Cup Finland and Spain were new entries while the strongest teams were from the USA and Australia. Well trained and organised, but without the newest hardware, the Australians this time started the Fastnet a massive 44 points ahead and, with strong performances in all three classes, especially from *Mercedes III*, won by a massive 107 points.



1969

179 starters

Overall winner: *Red Rooster* - Dick Carter
Line honours: *American Eagle* - Ted Turner

After a fine start - the Admiral's Cuppers for the first time getting their own gun - this was a tricky light airs affair with many mass park-ups and restarts. For the first time the Fastnet Rock had to be left to port. Ted Turner's *American Eagle* led Jim Kilroy's maxi *Kialoa II* by three hours at the Rock followed by Max Aitken's *Crusade*, this trio keeping the breeze to the finish. Turner's converted 12mR clung on to arrive home just four minutes ahead of Kilroy's mighty maxi.

The race ended in controversy when the official time for *Crusade*, and that recorded on her chronometer were out by three minutes, an error which handed Dick Carter's exceptional, and exceptionally sailed, centreboarder *Red Rooster* (above) the overall prize by just 68 seconds. *Crusade* failed to win a protest, matters made worse when her rating was later discovered to have been too high.

To give some idea of the Admiral's Cup 'fever' of this era - for the British team there were 18 contenders, eight built especially. One chosen was a GRP Swan 43, the event's first production boat. For the first time the British team had sponsorship from Dunhill, a team manager was appointed and the team trained as rigorously as in any other elite sport. Going into the Fastnet, the US team were in fourth place with only an outside chance of winning, but managed the near impossible mostly thanks to *Red Rooster's* victory.

1971

179 starters

Overall winner: *Ragamuffin* - Syd Fischer
Line honours and record: *American Eagle* - Ted Turner - 3d 7h 11m 48s



The RORC rule was replaced by the internationally accepted IOR with five classes ranging from Class I (33-70ft rating) to Class V (21-23ft rating). The Britannia and New York YC Cups were taken out of the Admiral's Cup and replaced with two 30-mile stand-alone races. The finishing gear was also made state of the art, including a special Seiko crystal chronometer, radar and a night vision scope (accompanied by an army officer).

With British Prime Minister Ted Heath leading the British team with his S&S 43 *Morning Cloud II* (left), suddenly there was huge media interest in the Admiral's Cup and the Fastnet Race although, despite its size, the latter was increasingly becoming seen as part of the former. The Admiral's Cup had grown to 16 teams, including South Africa and Brazil, and media interest was piqued still further when Heath's team overcame the USA and Australia to recover the Admiral's Cup.

American Eagle led the fleet out of the Solent in a moderate-strong northwesterly which later died, especially affecting the smaller classes whose progress was further hampered when the wind, when it finally arrived, provided a beat to the Rock. Conditions remained favourable for Class I with *Cervantes IV* the only Class II boat able to keep up, leading overall at the Rock. Ultimately a brutal run back to the finish, in which all the frontrunners blew kites and halyards, saw Ted Turner's converted 12mR not only win line honours ahead of another future America's Cup legend, Alan Bond on his maxi *Apollo*, but also set a new race record. Overall the race was claimed by *Ragamuffin*, but this was not enough to bring the Admiral's Cup back to Australia, after *Koomooloo's* rudder had broken.

1973

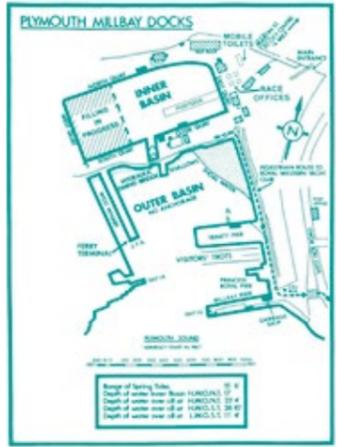
268 starters

Overall winner: *Saga* - Erling Lorentzen
Line honours: *Sorcery* - James F. Baldwin

Thanks to Edward Heath's participation, the huge publicity from the previous race generated a record entry in 1973, among them 16 Admiral's Cup teams (including Portugal). Here competition continued to be ever the more intense, with pure racers being built, crew trained and techniques such as spinnaker peeling developed with no purpose other than winning the Admiral's Cup. But this proved to be one of the lightest Fastnet Races, beset by calms. Even the start had to be delayed by 30 minutes to wait for the slightest zephyr to fill in. When the tide turned foul there was much kedging, rock hopping and grounding.

Initially the C&C 61 *Sorcery* was trading places for the lead with the Derektor 54 *Salty Goose*. Despite the conditions, the larger boat still managed to reach the Rock ahead of *American Eagle's* time in 1971, however *Salty Goose* took hours 'finding' the Rock (in this pre-GPS age), leaving the challenge for the lead to the S&S 56 *Charisma*. Far from getting away, the leaders were becalmed off the Bishop Rock as those astern closed in, and then faced a painfully slow, foggy passage to Plymouth. *Charisma* looked set to win, only to be becalmed and forced to kedge 300 yards short of the line. With a slow finish for the remaining classes, victory went to *Saga*, the Franz Maas-built S&S 57 of her Brazil-based Norwegian owner (part of the Brazilian Admiral's Cup team).

In the Admiral's Cup, Germany held a tiny five-point lead over Australia going into the Fastnet. The team of *Saudade*, *Rubin* and *Carina III* was first to get all their boats home to Plymouth, thus becoming the first European team to claim what was rapidly becoming sailing's biggest prize.



1975

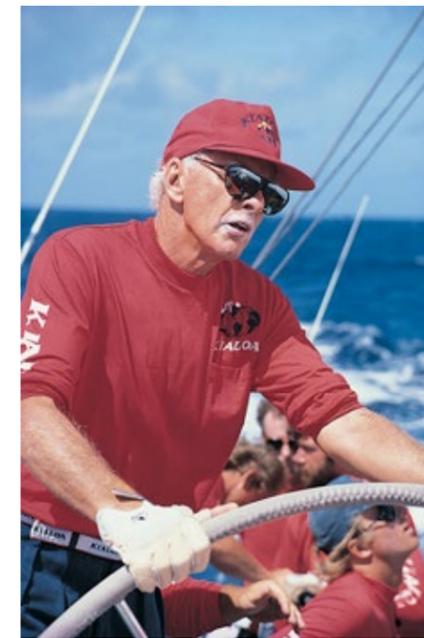
256 starters

Overall winner: *Golden Delicious* - Richard & Harvey Bagnall
Line honours: *Kialoa III* - Jim Kilroy

Another huge race with a record 19 Admiral's Cup teams and near record turn-out in the Fastnet Race itself. After a promising start, weatherwise this proved a repeat of 1973 with much light wind and fog, however a spring tide propelled the fleet down Channel, the big boats making Portland Bill before the tide turned. Smallest to make it through this gate were the renowned Bagnall twins on the Holland-designed Nicholson 33 prototype *Golden Delicious*. Lady luck must have been smiling on this team for, even before crossing the Celtic Sea, they had hit a rock and sailed off intact and later a crew had been pitched overboard but had managed to hang on and been recovered.

The S&S 79 *Kialoa III* of Jim Kilroy (left) led Tabarly's *Pen Duick VI* and *Saga* around the Rock on the Monday afternoon (the order they would maintain to the finish), followed by *Golden Delicious* the following morning when the breeze backed and built to 30 knots, providing the front runners initially with a fast run to Bishop Rock. *Golden Delicious'* winning move came from heading south of the rhumb line at this point, thereby enjoying better pressure. While *Saga* again claimed Class I, the Bagnalls won the overall prize with other Class IV yachts *Polar Bear* and *Trocar* filling the podium.

In the huge Admiral's Cup, the British team comprising the S&S 47 *Battlecry*, the Frers 46 *Noryema X* plus Robin Aisher's Peterson-designed *Yeoman XX* performed well. Finishing 12th, 5th and 11th respectively in the Fastnet Race enabled them to comfortably defeat the second-placed defending champions, Germany and another strong US team with its powerhouse trio of Ted Hood, Dennis Conner and Ted Turner as its skippers.



1977

286 starters

Overall winner: *Imp* - David Allen
Line honours: *Ballyhoo* - Jack Rooklyn

If the three previous races had had light patches, the 1977 race took 'light' to a whole new level, creating a mockery of a race - the slowest on record - with crews running out of food and water. It took the fastest boats three and a half days to reach the Rock and line honours winner, the Australian Lexcen 72 *Ballyhoo* finished in five days seven hours, slower even than *Hallowe'en's* time in 1926. For the first time there was a Class Zero for the maxi raters, attracting 16 yachts including most of the 1977 Whitbread Round the World Race entries.

Once again the race got off to a promising start, the tide flushing the fleet down to Portland and on to the Lizard before the first big park-up and restart occurred with big boats and small mixed up. This state of affairs was still the case at the Rock where there were extraordinary mass roundings. Raul Gardini's *Il Moro di Venezia* was first around the Rock but, en route to the finish, was later overtaken by *Ballyhoo* sailing closer to the shore to avoid the foul tide, and going on to claim line honours. *Saga* claimed class honours for a third race in a row, this time in Class Zero, however the Ron Holland-designed *Imp* prevailed in Class II to win overall.

Imp's performance in the Fastnet was not enough to secure the US team the top place in the Admiral's Cup and the British team of Fastnet Class I winner *Moonshine*, *Yeoman XX* and *Marionette* (right) was able to successfully defend its title. In this, the first year Champagne Mumm supported the Admiral's Cup, the US came home second ahead of a consistent Hong Kong team.



A WATERBORNE HELL

1979

303 starters

Overall winner: *Tenacious* - Ted Turner

Line honours and record: *Condor of Bermuda* - Bob Bell - 2d 23h 25m 23s

In 1979 the Fastnet Race became world-renowned outside of the sailing community, but for all of the wrong reasons.

By far the worst ever disaster in the history of yacht racing occurred when the bulk of the Fastnet Race fleet was struck by a violent storm with hurricane force gusts while en route to the Fastnet Rock. It happened suddenly, with almost no warning: The Met Office's shipping forecasts and gale warnings had anticipated a brief, localised Force 8 gale, which they only raised to Force 10 at the time it struck. For competitors there was little physical warning other than foreboding cloud formations, but no typical plummeting of the mercury until the very last minute.

The storm developed on the evening of Monday 13 August, two and a half days into the race, and blew its hardest in the Celtic Sea between 02:00 and 06:00 on the Tuesday. The middle and small boat bulk of the fleet caught its brunt.

The culpable depression had been shot east across the Atlantic, sandwiched between an east-moving depression to the north and the static Azores high to the south. Its progress northeast slowed on the Monday evening, its centre just short of making landfall on Ireland's west coast. This caused it to intensify, its pressure dropping suddenly and sharply to 978mB. Its cold front passed slowly over the fleet bringing with it the usual wind shift from the southwest to northwest. The intensity of the pressure drop either side of the front created giant steep waves, many of them breaking. However it was the 90° wind shift that caused them to come from different directions, frequently merging to form giant 10-15m tall rogue waves. It was this evil, once-in-a-lifetime, rapidly-developed sea state that was able to toss the yachts around like toys in a bathtub.

The incident was not helped by coming at a time when the Fastnet Race had reached its first pinnacle - with 19 Admiral's Cup teams and a record total of 303 starters from 336 entries (an entry size not repeated for another 30 years). During the storm 112 of these - almost half the fleet - experienced knock-downs and 77 suffered full capsizes. The effect of this on the yachts was devastating. 11 were dismasted while others broke sails and rigging, and a disproportionate number suffered rudder breakage (a design flaw of yachts from this period). With most hatches

and washboards unable to maintain watertight integrity, interiors were awash, electrics were malfunctioning (and thus engines and radios), while heavy items such as batteries and cookers - having released themselves from their mounts - were crashing around, adding to the destruction and chaos below.

But this waterborne hell had an equally catastrophic effect on the crews, many of whom were thrown out of the cockpit and at best remained tethered, but battered and bruised, left hanging over the side like a fender as their boat righted.

Others were not so lucky. Well documented are the plights of the yachts *Trophy* and *Grimalkin*. The former suffered two knockdowns leaving her without mast nor rudder and the interior awash. Expecting *Trophy* soon to be rolled and sunk, her crew made the decision to take to her liferaft which was successfully accomplished. A yacht attempted to come alongside but got into their own difficulties in the process and lost contact with the liferaft. Soon after, the liferaft capsized and two of its chambers were destroyed. Two crew were washed out and could not be rescued. A third was lost while the liferaft further deteriorated. Eventually two survivors were lifted off by helicopter while the other remaining three survivors were picked up by the Dutch destroyer *HNLMS Overijssel*.

Grimalkin was not only rolled, but pitchpoled too. Her skipper was already suffering from a head injury and was drifting in and out of consciousness when she was again rolled, this time remaining inverted for several minutes. During this, three were washed overboard but remained tethered. However, as she righted, her skipper was washed away while two other crew were found slumped in the bottom of the cockpit, motionless and presumed dead. The remaining three took to the liferaft and on the Tuesday morning were rescued by helicopter. In fact, the two in the cockpit had 'only' been unconscious and were subsequently thrown out of the boat as it was again rolled. While both came round, only one survived who was later also rescued by helicopter.

Ultimately the storm cost 21 people their lives - 15 competitors and six from the vessels *Bucks Fizz* and *Tempean* that were shadowing the fleet. As the wind abated to Force 9 on the Tuesday morning, so the biggest rescue

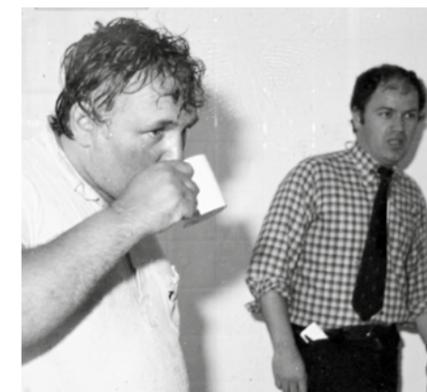
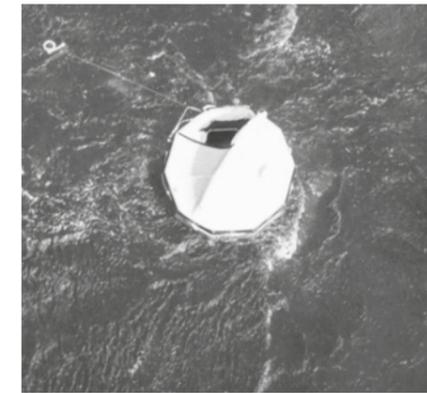
mission to be mounted in peacetime took place, involving all the rescue services, including the RNLI and Royal Navy, plus all available commercial shipping and fishing boats in the area. 125 individuals were rescued and 20 yachts were towed to safety, with 24 abandoned and five lost altogether. While rescue attempts made by others in the fleet typically weren't successful, several were, notably that made by Frenchman Alain Catherineau and his crew on *Lorelei* who, displaying superb seamanship, rescued the crew of the RORC's club boat *Griffin* from their liferaft. Alain was later made Yachtsman of the Year in Britain.

Overshadowed by the carnage, the maxis had made it around the Rock before the worst of the weather. They enjoyed a supreme blast with Bob Bell's *Condor* famously being knocked flat while under spinnaker, picking herself up and resuming her run, at times hitting unheard-of speeds of 27+ knots. While Jim Kilroy's *Kialoa* had rounded the Rock ahead, *Condor* was first home, setting a new race record of just under three days. The Australian team of *Police Car*, *Impetuous* and *Ragamuffin* won the Admiral's Cup for a second consecutive occasion.

Behind, unsurprisingly, the retirements were huge with 36 finishers from 56 starters in Class I; 23 from 53 starters in Class II; just six from 64 starters in Class III; six from 57 in Class IV and just one finisher, Willy Ker's well travelled *Contessa 32 Assent* from 58 starters in Class V.

A subsequent inquiry into, and report on, the 1979 Fastnet Race, carried out by the RORC and the RYA, resulted in all aspects of the race being improved. These wide-ranging measures included: the beefing up of scantling requirements and stability for the yachts; the specification of rudders (prone to breakage on yachts of this period - especially those with carbon fibre stocks); better boat identification; making trysails mandatory equipment; ensuring that crew went on sea survival courses and covered race miles to qualify; the re-design of washboards (to prevent them falling out); more robust fitting of heavy gear such as batteries and cookers; the spec of on board comms equipment and lifelines; making reporting mandatory (in 2007 this was superseded when tracking was introduced).

Ultimately the storm cost 21 people their lives.



The 1979 Fastnet disaster saw the largest ever rescue effort mounted in peacetime. Photos: Royal Navy

1981

250 starters
Overall winner: *Mordicus* - Taylor/Volterry
Line honours: *Condor* - Bob Bell

An enquiry after the 1979 tragedy brought about improvements to the Special Regulations, with VHF radio now mandatory equipment and, by 1983, some electronic aids were permitted for, for example, position fixing. There was still a strong turn-out for the Fastnet and 16 Admiral's Cup teams with the British team leading into the final showdown. The race started with a beat in 15-20 knots, the wind remaining on the nose to the Rock, later dying near the Scillies when it was a case of catching the breeze to the finish.

Bob Bell, and a crew including Dennis Conner, claimed line honours on Bell's maxi *Condor*, but conditions favoured the small and the overall winner was the eight-year-old Belgium Super Arlequin Half Tonner *Mordicus III*, winner of Class V. Meanwhile with *Dragon's* 11th, *Victory's* 15th and *Yeoman XXIII's* 25th, the British managed to retain their points advantage to reclaim the Admiral's Cup. A number of ratings issues with boats at this time included *Victory's* but, even with her subsequent higher rating, the Brits would still have won.

1985

222 starters
Overall winner: *Panda* - Peter Whipp
Line honours and record: *Nirvana* - Marvin Green - 2d 12h 34m

With the wind typically westerly and blowing Force 6-8 as Atlantic depressions rolled through, it was another breezy Fastnet, resulting in a spectacular number of retirements, with only 84 finishing.

For the duration, the race for line honours was an intense match race which came down to just 31 seconds with Marvin Green's famous maxi *Nirvana* first home ahead of *Privateer*, setting a blistering race record - some 10.5 hours quicker than *Condor of Bermuda*. However the keel loss and capsized (below) of rock star Simon Le Bon's *Drum* attracted significant media attention.

In the Admiral's Cup, just three of the 18 Admiral's Cup teams succeeded in getting all their boats home.



The German team, this time comprising *Outsider*, *Rubin G VIII* and *Diva*, once again provided an offshore racing masterclass, winning by an unprecedented 280 points from Britain. It would have been larger had the British's team's *Panda* (below) not won the Fastnet Race overall and had *Phoenix* (Graham Walker's replacement for *Indulgence*, after Harold Cudmore and the RORC's former CEO famously sank her on Bembridge Ledge) not been the event's top boat.



1983

222 starters
Overall winner and line honours: *Condor* - Bob Bell

As the only maxi to compete, entering the Ron Holland maxi *Condor* was like bringing a gun to a knife-fight. Bob Bell and his team crossed the finish line almost a day ahead of the next swathe of finishers. Winning line honours for a third consecutive edition, *Condor*, for the first time, also made it 'the double', winning overall too, as conditions turned light for the slower boats.

Champagne Mumm came on board as title sponsor of the Admiral's Cup at a time when sponsorship in sailing was controversial. 15 teams took part and, partly through poor selection of its trio, Britain's 8th place was its worst result ever, while Germany won by 167 points, the biggest margin ever. Their trio of *Sabina*, *Outsider* and *Pinta* melded into an immaculate campaign with the *Sabina* and *Outsider* minimum raters especially benefitting from a light Fastnet Race.



1987

Overall winner: *Irish Independent* - Stephen Fein
Line honours: *Nirvana* - Marvin Green

This was a classic upwind race down the Channel but, for once, the wind didn't veer into the northwest as soon as the boats broke through into the Celtic Sea. *Nirvana* returned to better her record but was unable to do so, while overall victory ultimately went to the Dubois One Tonner *Irish Independent* (above). Better known as Stephen Fein's *Full Pelt*, this had been chartered to the Irish Admiral's Cup team but due to being a sponsored boat, she wasn't eligible to win the Fastnet Challenge Cup, instead awarded to the British team's *Juno*. (Only some 30 years later was *Irish Independent* instated.)

In the Admiral's Cup 14 teams competed with victory going to a well practiced and coached New Zealand team of *Goldcorp*, *Kiwi* and a Brad Butterworth-skipped One Tonner *Propaganda*, for the first time. Kiwis were on a roll at this point with a strong challenge for the 1987 America's Cup, dominating the next Whitbread Round the World Races and most parts of pro-yachting.

1989

Overall winner: *Great News* (IOR) - Randy Short, *Diane* (IMS) - Robert Schwartz; *Desperado* (CHS) - Richard Loftus
Line honours: *Steinlager 2* - Peter Blake



By this point IOR was in steep decline and, given that a few years earlier the ORC had introduced IMS and the RORC/UNCL CHS, for this race there were winners scored under all three systems although the Fastnet Challenge Cup was still awarded to the IOR winner.

The substantial Whitbread fleet had their own class and, as a micro-example of what would occur in the round the world race, the battle of the Farr maxi ketches saw Peter Blake's *Steinlager 2* prevail over Grant Dalton's *Fisher & Paykel* by 6 minutes 14 seconds on corrected time.

In the 14-team Admiral's Cup, a strong entry from the UK, comprising *Jamarella*, *Juno IV* and *Indulgence VII*, finally regained the trophy, finishing ahead of Denmark and New Zealand. However victory overall in the Fastnet went to John Calvert-Jones's Farr 50 *Great News*, chartered to Randy Short for the event and racing in the US team, with Tom Blackaller helming.



1991

Overall winner: *Passage* (IOR) - Raul Gardini; (IMS) *Iona* - N. Brown; (CHS) *Min-o-Din/Youth Challenge* - John and Matt Humphries
Line honours: *Congere* - Bevin Koeppel



The Admiral's Cup team configuration was turned into level rating bands - One Ton, Two Ton and IOR50 - with just eight teams entered. While providing a simple 'first across the line wins' format it also showed the IOR to be in its final death throes. The powerful Italian team was favourite, but a concerted effort by Corum Sailing Team, in particular their strong weather and tactical planning, saw the French leap from fourth place to win the Admiral's Cup by just 0.62 points from the Italians after a light wind Fastnet Race. The CHS prize was won by the half tonner *Min-o-Din* skippered by a 20-year-old Matt Humphries who would go on to skipper the 1993 Whitbread Round the World Race entry *Dolphin & Youth*.

1993

Overall winner: *Eagle* (CHS) - Anthony Todd; *Indulgence* (IOR) - Graham Walker; *Encore* (IMS) - Jim Dolan
Line honours: *Galicja '93 Pescanova*

In the fight for line honours, as an endorsement of the Whitbread Round the World Race's new 60ft class, the Spanish *Galicja '93 Pescanova* beat Dennis Conner's *Winston* into second place, but surprised everyone by finishing ahead of all of the maxi ketches, including eventual round the world race winner Grant Dalton's *New Zealand Endeavour*.

Several start line infringements resulted in the maxi *Nicorette* being disqualified, as was the provisional overall winner of the Fastnet Trophy, the Tripp 55 *Aurora* after a port-starboard with the eventual IMS winner, Jim Dolan's *Encore*. For the first time the overall prize was for CHS, going to Tony Todd's Dubois 50 *Eagle*.

Meanwhile the Admiral's Cup saw the tightest of wins for one of the event's longest supporters - Germany - by just 0.25 points. This came after a spate of incidents such as *Great News II's* mast breaking and *Jameson 3* suffering a broken boom, while *Nippon* retired following a MOB incident. Steve Fossett's ORMA 60 trimaran *Lakota* sailed the race unofficially, knocking six hours off *Nirvana's* record.

1995

210 starters
Overall (CHS and IMS) and line honours:
Nicorette - Ludde Ingvall

Despite a powerful line-up of line honours contenders such as *Sagamore*, *Boomerang* and two Whitbread 60s, the lightweight IMS-optimised *Nicorette* (below) performed a 'horizon job' on her heavier IOR opponents. In ultra-light conditions, no records were broken but the rich got richer. On the water *Nicorette* arrived home more than 24 hours ahead of *Sagamore*, the second boat to finish. Under CHS they won by a similar margin and the Finnish team's trophy haul was unparalleled.

In the Admiral's Cup the Mumm 36, the one-design of the moment, was introduced to the line-up but considered too 'inshore' orientated. Fortunately it survived in the light conditions, albeit tough on crews forced to live on the rail on the brisk return journey from the Rock. After missing out so narrowly in the previous two editions, finally the Italian team overcame the USA to claim victory.



2001

229 starters
Overall: *Tonnerre de Breskens* - Piet Vroon
Line honours: *Stealth* - Gianni Agnelli

With a new headline sponsor in Rolex SA, the line-up for 2001 included maxis such as *Stealth*, *Morning Glory* and *Nicorette*. There was also hot competition between the VO60s, won by Jez Fanstone's crew on *News Corp*, providing a first taste of the imminent Volvo Ocean Race. *Tonnerre de Breskens* (right) prevailed under both IRC and the RORC's new grand prix rule IRM. Owner Piet Vroon was a popular winner, finally claiming the Fastnet Challenge Cup on his 20th attempt!

The race had a tough start, upwind into 28 knots, and the fleet divided in two with the wind veering into the northwest to give the mid to small boats a fast run back from the Rock. The overall results saw a mix of yachts from across the fleet doing well under IRC Overall and no one nation dominated.

1997

245 starters
Overall: (IMS) *Royal Blue FCC* - Gunnar Ekdaht;
(CHS and line honours) *BIL* - Ross Field;
(IMS) *Morning Glory* - Hasso Plattner

Supported this time by Champagne Mumm, this race saw several amendments to the SIs, including boats being prevented from going west of the Scillies outbound and the introduction of the Pantaenius Buoy, as a spreader mark after the Fastnet Rock. The start was postponed briefly due to fog, providing time for the sea breeze to establish for a classic beat down the Solent. However, over the first night the breeze vanished, forcing most to kedg.

Laurent Bourgnon's double Route du Rhum winning ORMA 60 *Primagaz* was first home, but it was *BIL*, skippered by Volvo Ocean Race winner Ross Field, that secured monohull line hours and the CHS prize. Her Ericsson 80 sistership *Nicorette*, skippered by the 1995 winner, was second. Meanwhile Ludde Ingvall's 1995 winning boat was back, rechristened *Royal Blue* and now under skipper Gunnar Ekdaht, and still showed her pedigree by claiming the IMS top prize.

Just seven teams (IMS, ILC40 and Mumm 36) competed in the Admiral's Cup, but the competition was high with the USA taking home the top prize for the first time since 1969, retribution for 1995 - but only just: Thanks to the frontrunners running out of wind approaching Plymouth, the US ILC40 *MK Cafe* was able to sail around the Italians and into the lead, while *Flash Gordon 3* was second home to *Madina Milano* among the big boats.

1999

213 starters
Overall: *Whirlpool-Europe 2* - Catherine Chabaud. Line honours and records (mono): *RF Yachting* - Ross Field - 2d 5h 8m 51s (multi): *Fujicolor* - Loick Peyron 1d 16d 27m

In a major re-working, the Admiral's Cup was set up as a stand-alone event, with the Fastnet Race replaced with a more Mumm 36-friendly race around Wolf Rock. This Admiral's Cup-free Fastnet Race still attracted a strong turnout including Ted Turner (right) on the maxi *Sayonara*. Conditions were ideal for record breaking, with 20+ knot northeasterlies making for fast Celtic Sea crossings. Some faster boats completed the entire course without tacking, whereas some of the slower boats found themselves deep-water kedging off the Lizard en route back to Plymouth.

With the advent of IR2000, the race's main prize was for the first time under IRC (although the maxis still had an ILC prize). Remarkably, the outright winner was the canting keel Open 60 - *Whirlpool-Europe 2*, skippered by Catherine Chabaud, the race's only ever female overall winner to date.



2005

283 starters
Overall: *Iromiguy* - Jean-Yves Château
Line honours: *Maximus* - Charles St Clair Brown/Bill Buckley

There were several innovations this year, with the 13 IMOCA's pulled from IRC to race in their own class, won by *Cheminées Poujoulat*, after *Virbac-Paprec* was disqualified for accepting outside assistance. IRC Two-Handed was also introduced, with the now-familiar name of Loison and *Night And Day* (see 2013) prevailing. The race also saw a reunion of Simon Le Bon and the *Drum* crew, 'celebrating' the 20th anniversary of their famous keel loss.

The battle for line honours was an antipodean maxi affair between *Skandia Wild Thing* and *ICAP Maximus*, comfortably won by the latter also picking up IRC Super Zero, while the first VO70 *movistar* nipped at their heels. Meanwhile, the much-touted battle of the 50-footers *Patches* and *Aera* for IRC handicap victory was won by the former. The race was a light, slow one, ultimately victory going to one of the smallest - the Nicholson 33 *Iromiguy* (below) - the first time in 30 years that a sub-40ft yacht had claimed the top prize.



2003

245 starters
Overall: *Nokia Connecting People* - Charles Dunstone
Line honours: *Alfa Romeo* - Neville Crichton

This was a rare occasion when the race began with a magnificent spinnaker start in moderate conditions, with the IMOCA *Ecover* leading out of the Solent followed by *Nokia*, among a maxi fleet that included *Alfa Romeo* and *Zephyrus V*. Relatively light conditions favoured the big boats with this trio of Reichel/Pugh designs filling the IRC Overall podium, *Nokia* (below) prevailing.

The wind swung west but ended up back in the east and built to 10-18 knots - the most solid of the race - making for a beat back to Plymouth for the tailenders. Given the conditions there were just 20 retirements. So began a successful 12 months for *Nokia*, subsequently winning the Rolex Middle Sea Race, then the Giraglia Rolex Cup the following year.



2007

272 starters
Overall: *Chieftain* - Ger O'Rourke
Line honours: *ICAP Leopard 3* - Mike Slade - 1d 20h 18m

For the first time, the Club set an entry limit of 300 boats. However this race was better known for being the only occasion when the start has been delayed. With a forecast predicting possible gale to storm force winds on the Tuesday, Race Director Janet Grosvenor made the tough decision to postpone by 25 hours. It was wise, but even so competitors saw 40 knots on the first night and there were a huge number of retirements with just 51 finishing.

The big conditions favoured the maxis, *ICAP Leopard 3* setting a new monohull record, followed just 45 minutes later by *Rambler*. However overall victory went to the Irish

Cookson 50 *Chieftain*, despite having entered late and sat on the waiting list until 48 hours before the start. Their success was partly due to a favourable 180° wind shift at the Fastnet Rock that saw them average 19 knots back to Bishop Rock.

Meanwhile Britain's top amateur shorthanded sailor Simon Curwen, sailing with Paul Peggs, inspirationally won IRC Two-Handed - one of just two finishers from 24 starters.





2009

300 starters
Overall: Rán 2 - Niklas Zennström
Line honours: ICAP Leopard 3 - Mike Slade

Retaining the 300-boat entry limit, entries came from as far as Chile and Australia. The finish moved out of an overly cramped Queen Anne's Battery to the heart of Plymouth, in Sutton Harbour.

For the first time the Class40s were provided with their own start, attracting 19 boats with Tanguy de Lamotte's *Initiatives Saveurs - Novedia Group* prevailing. Among the 11 IMOCAs *BT* won with a Sam Davies-skipped *Artemis Ocean Racing* in second.

Light conditions at the start and finish, combined with powerful spring tides, made for a tactically challenging and long race. On the first night only the fastest made it past Portland Bill before the tide turned, forcing many to attempt deep water kedging.

While *Leopard 3* (left) again secured line honours, comfortably first home ahead of the Farr 80 *Beau Geste*, it was the Maxi 72 *Rán 2* that claimed the Fastnet Challenge Cup, despite stiff competition from the STP65s *Luna Rossa* and *Rosebud/Team DYT*.

2011

314 starters
Overall: Rán 2 - Niklas Zennström
Line honours and records (mono): Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing - Ian Walker - 1d 18h 35m;
(multi): Banque Populaire V - Loick Peyron - 1d 8h 48m



A big boat race starting with strong winds before high pressure moved in, this race had the largest fleet since the disastrous 1979 race. As the fleet contained the V070s set to race the 2011-12 Volvo Ocean Race, the world was watching avidly as both monohull and multihull records were broken and *Rán 2* (right) became the first boat since *Carina II* (1955-57) to win consecutive races.

However there was near tragedy too when race favourite *Rambler 100* lost her keel (above right) and capsized just after rounding the Fastnet Rock. With most of her crew safe on her upturned hull, five - including owner George David and his partner Wendy Touton - started drifting away, finally rescued after 2.5 hours in the water, and just as dusk was arriving, by the Baltimore Lifeboat. With light conditions at the end of the race there were several restarts close to the finish line. In one two-hour period, 105 boats crossed the line.

2013

337 starters
Overall: Night And Day - Pascal and Alexis Loison
Line honours (mono): Esimit Europa II - Igor Simčić;
(multi) Spindrift 2 - Yann Guichard/Dona Bertarelli

History was made when father and pro Figaro sailor son, Pascal and Alexis Loison (right) on their JPK 10.10 *Night And Day*, became the first doublehanded team to win the race overall, also leading France's massive result of five IRC class wins.

Competitors observing TSSes as course obstacles for the first time, the race was largely upwind to the Fastnet, featuring an unhelpful shift to the northwest in the Celtic Sea and subsequent light patches. This favoured smaller boats which could reach to and from the Rock, staying in breeze to the finish. Adding to the drama, a wind shutdown short of Plymouth saw maxi trimaran *Banque Populaire* close to just half a mile of line honours winner *Spindrift 2*. Likewise 24 hours later, *Esimit Europa 2* edged ahead of the diverse array of V070 *Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing*, *ICAP Leopard*, IMOCA 60 winner *MACIF* and the lead Maxi 72 *Bella Mente*, just short of the line.



2015

356 starters
Overall: Courrier Du Léon - Géry Trentesaux
Line honours: (mono) Comanche - Jim and Kristy Heinz-Clarke; (multi) Spindrift 2 - Yann Guichard/Dona Bertarelli

On his 13th attempt since his first in 1977 Géry Trentesaux won the race overall on the JPK 10.80 *Courrier Du Léon* (left), this despite being OCS and taking 40 minutes to recross. It was a very light race for the record fleet, with high pressure over the Celtic Sea for 36 hours causing restarts and kedging. The top nine were the only boats to get through ahead of the ridge, with tough line honours battles between the *Spindrift 2* and *Prince de Bretagne* trimarans, while 100ft maxi monohull *Comanche* finished mere minutes ahead of *Rambler 88*. Behind it was a stark cut off; trimaran *Paradox* covering just 15 miles in 10 hours, 130 miles astern of IRC Zero winner *Momo*.

It was another French whitewash, managing a near clean sweep of class wins. Making a return were two past winners from the 1930s, *Dorade* and *Stormy Weather* - not just competing, but match racing!



2017

362 starters
Overall: Lann Ael 2 - Didier Gaudoux
Line honours (mono): Rambler 88 - George David;
(multi) Concise 10 - Ned Collier Wakefield



Another record-sized fleet, another French overall winner and another results table shining with *La Tricolore*: Of 11 prizes, France won all but three.

A classic Fastnet, with a beat to the Rock, meant conditions favoured the mid-fleet which put up with 30 knot headwinds followed by a sleighride back to Bishop Rock. The scratch MOD70 *Concise 10* faced no competition for multihull line honours, while George David's *Rambler 88* made easy meat of *CQS* and the superyacht *Nikata* for monohull honours.

The race doubled as 'leg zero' of the Volvo Ocean Race, won by *Dongfeng Race Team* less than a minute ahead of *MAPFRE*. Among the IRC fleet, conditions favoured IRC Zero and One with the winner of the latter, *Lann Ael 2* (above), prevailing after a spectacular 20+ knot run back from the Rock. The Loisons' *Night And Day* won both IRC Four and Two-Handed ahead of their fully crewed JPK 10.10 sistership *Foggy Dew*.

2019

388 starters
Overall: Wizard - David and Peter Askew
Line honours (mono): Rambler 88 - George David; (multi and record) Maxi Edmond de Rothschild - Charles Caudrelier/ Franck Cammas - 1d 4h 2m 26s

With yet another record entry, this time 388, France again dominated the results, however their run of overall wins finished. On this occasion the Fastnet Challenge Cup was claimed by American Askew brothers David and Peter on their V070 *Wizard* (left), continuing an impressive winning streak that included the RORC Caribbean 600 and NYCC Transatlantic Race.

Unusual conditions saw the race start in a light southeasterly, the wind going no further right than 270°, ensuring fast crossings of the Celtic Sea. The lead IMOCAs put in a long leg to the north Breton coast to make use of the wind shifts and tidal benefits.

There was a photo finish for the Ultimes; *Maxi Edmond de Rothschild* pipping *MACIF* to the post by less than a minute, setting a new race record. Class wins featured familiar faces: Géry Trentesaux's *Courrier Recommandé* in IRC Two while Alexis Loison and Jean-Pierre Kelbert on board the latter's new JPK 10.30 *Léon* won both IRC Three and IRC Two-Handed and Noel Racine's *Foggy Dew* claimed IRC Four. The end result was a 'big boat race': six of the top 10 overall were from IRC Zero.



PASTURES NEW

2021

337 starters

Overall: *Sunrise* - Tom Kneen

Line honours (mono): *Skorpios* - Dmitry Rybolovlev - 2d 8h 33m 55s;

(multi) *Groupe Edmond de Rothschild* - Cammas/Caudrelier - 1d 9h 14m 54s

After 96 years, 48 editions and with a regular fleet of 350+ yachts now competing, the Rolex Fastnet Race had outgrown Plymouth, so the finish moved across the Channel to Cherbourg-en-Cotentin in France. Not only could Cherbourg accommodate the fleet but in recent editions France had dominated the results. Also, no other nation has as many professional offshore sailing teams and skippers who are national sports stars. The move came thanks to the city of Cherbourg-en-Cotentin, the Communauté d'agglomération du Cotentin, the Conseil départemental de la Manche and Région Normandie.

The change lengthened the course by 90 miles to 695, adding a significant final hurdle in the Alderney Race.

While the entry list at one point exceeded 450, pandemic-related travel restrictions, plus a severe forecast, resulted in 337 starters. These ranged from Ultime trimarans and the new ClubSwan 125 *Skorpios* to the significant non-IRC fleet such as the IMOCA's and Class40s. The huge IRC fleet was divided into five classes and included past winners such as Didier Gaudoux's *JND 39 Lann Ael II*.

The race set off in strong WSW headwinds and lumpy wind-against-tide seas causing retirements. This included Vendée Globe winner Yannick Bestaven's IMOCA *Maître CoQ*, while *Pintia* collided with Ed Bell's *JPK*

11.80 *Dawn Treader* causing the latter to dismast.

James Neville's HH42 *Ino XXX* won the two horse race for the lead in IRC One against Swede Jonas Granders' Elliot 44 CR *Matador*, with Neville at one point looking strong to become the first serving RORC Commodore to win overall since Captain J.H. Illingworth with *Myth of Malham* in 1949. In the end however, Tom Kneen's *JPK 11.80 Sunrise* in IRC Two outperformed everyone. 1 hour 12 minutes ahead under IRC at the Fastnet, key to their success was staying ahead of a ridge that formed over the Scilly Isles and engulfed those trailing. Ultimately *Sunrise* finished 15 hours 38 minutes ahead of second-placed in class *Scarlet Oyster*, beating *Ino XXX* by almost two hours in IRC Overall. Kneen was the first British overall winner since Charles Dunstone and *Nokia* in 2003.

Among the pro fleets the 32m Ultime trimaran *Maxi Edmond de Rothschild* romped around the course ahead of *Actual* and *Sodebo Ultim 3*, reaching Cherbourg in 1 day 9 hours 14 minutes 54 seconds, having briefly hit 40 knots passing Bishop Rock.

Among the IMOCA's, *Apivia's* result was exceptional, having gained great tidal benefit crossing most of the way to France on the first night. She finished six hours nine minutes ahead of second-placed *Charal*.

In the IRC fleet, *Skorpios* established a monohull benchmark time for the new course of 2 days 8 hours 33 minutes 55 seconds, but compression at the Scilly Isles allowed David Collins' Botin 52 *Tala* to top the IRC Zero podium, her time correcting out to 1 hour 34 minutes ahead of the Carkeek 47 *Störtebeker*, skippered by 22-year-old German Katrina Westphal.

The 35-boat Class40 fleet enjoyed several lead changes and a tense finish as the wind turned patchy short of the line. The new scow bow Mach 40.4s prevailed with Antoine Magre's *Palanad 3* edging ahead on the way back from the Bishop Rock, overhauling Luke Berry's Mach 40.3 *Lamotte - Module Création* and hanging on to the line, with *Banque Du Leman* slipping into second.

IRC Three partly reflected the IRC Two-Handed results. Here local heroes and defending champions, Alexis Loison and Guillaume Pirouelle's *JPK 10.30 Léon*, managed to overcome Henry Bomby and Shirley Robertson's Sun Fast 3300 *Swell*, which had benefitted from the virtual restart at the Scillies, to defend both class titles.

In a most welcome development, with the success of *Tala*, *Ino XXX* and *Sunrise*, the Anglo-Saxon fleet finally made a comeback against the dominant France, although the latter still claimed seven of the 12 available prizes.



Tom Kneen and the crew of *Sunrise* celebrate their exceptional result.
Photo: RORC/Paul Wyeth/pwpictures.com

THE 50TH EDITION

2023

Photo: RORC/Paul Wyeth/pwpictures.com



The 50th edition of the Rolex Fastnet Race represents a significant landmark for the Club's premier event. This will be the first of two bumper editions of the race, with the second in 2025 celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Royal Ocean Racing Club.

As in 2021, the 2023 race will follow the new longer course to Cherbourg-en-Cotentin. While the finish in Plymouth always came with the potential for the wind shutting down just short of the finish line, the major final hurdle approaching Cherbourg is the Alderney Race (Raz Blanchard) and its powerful tides.

As in 2019, the 50th edition will take place before Cowes Week, starting on Saturday 22 July, allowing time for competitors to finish and comfortably return to compete at Cowes Week in August. A benefit of this is the better availability of berthing and accommodation prior to the start in Cowes for visiting yachts and their crews. Similarly, now that COVID-19 is hopefully behind us, competitors are encouraged to berth in Cherbourg at the finish, to enjoy the exceptional hospitality laid on by our hosts there.

Registration for the 50th Rolex Fastnet Race will open on 11 January at 10:00 UTC and its limited spaces in the IRC fleet are likely to sell out within minutes, as they have done in all recent editions.

Winning the special 50th Rolex Fastnet Race would be a major achievement and several individuals and teams are putting in extra effort, with new boats being constructed especially, while others have been acquired with the race as a prime objective.

One of the hottest contenders will be the new Shaun Carkeek-designed 52-footer for Niklas and Catherine Zennström, the back-to-back overall IRC winners of the Rolex Fastnet Race in 2009 and 2011. *Rán 8* is the second CF-520 from the drawing board of Shaun Carkeek and follows the hugely successful FAST40+ *Rán 7* design, also from Carkeek. The new boat is built by Fibre Mechanics in Lymington at the same factory, and with many of the same workforce, as those that built Zennström's Fastnet-winning *Rán 2*. *Rán 8* comes from the same moulds as Richard Matthew's *Oystercatcher XXXV*. Like the FAST40+ it features an electric propulsion system, but also has water ballast.

Having been deprived of the overall prize in 2021, RORC Commodore James Neville is building a replacement to his much-modified HH42 *Ino XXX*. This is a state of the art C45 design by Shaun Carkeek, being built by Carrington Yachts. It is a development of the CF-520, a little shorter albeit with comparable performance, and designed to win offshore. It

too has twin rudders and water ballast while below is a tack-able nav station.

Peter Morton is a name long associated with the renaissance of Quarter Ton racing and his more recent passion, the 5.5mR class. However, to celebrate his 70th birthday Morton has acquired the Maxi 72 *Caol Ila R* in which he intends to venture offshore. This boat has all the winning potential that the Maxi 72 *Rán 2* had more than a decade ago. Designed by Mark Mills, in the hands of original owner Alex Schaerer she was Rolex Maxi 72 World Champion in 2014 and won the Rolex Giraglia outright in 2019.

While winning the Roschier Baltic Sea Race in his native Finland is top of the list on Arto Linnervuo's agenda, a close second is winning the Fastnet Challenge Trophy. For this job will be his Infiniti 52 *Tulikettu*, a larger, newer version of the successful Infiniti 46 *Maverick*, also equipped with a retractable DSS lateral board to provide added righting moment and thus the ability to hold sail when powered up, providing the performance of a yacht substantially bigger.

At this stage all bets are off for how many entries the 50th edition of the Rolex Fastnet Race will attract but all evidence indicates another record turn-out and 400 boats being exceeded.