



News Around the World

'The boat plunged deeper and deeper into the water. Romain was already in the liferaft. I took the Epirb and the waterproof portable VHF and jumped into the water. Only five minutes later the boat sank.

'Between the time I saw the flooding in the bottom and the boat sinking was a quarter of an hour at most. The rate of ingress of water was considerable throughout. Reflecting later, I think the water came in at the engine compartment, either because of the rupture of a seawater inlet valve or perhaps the saildrive ripping out?

'Help arrived very quickly and we got onto the lifeboat without any particular difficulty. Happy to be alive, thanks to the salvage, but a bit concerned because we just put a new carbon mast on the boat two months before...'

As for the Imoca class... Charlie Dalin wins again and sets a new monohull record. Two years after his victory aboard *Apivia* Dalin achieves the feat again, but this time racing a brand new boat.

The new *Macif* was launched just two weeks before the Fastnet Race so already shows incredible potential. During these two days of racing *Macif* played for a long time behind *Arkéa Paprec*, sailed by Yoann Richomme and Yann Eliès. The victory was only decided in the last few hours, to the west of the Pointe de La Hague. It was only then that Charlie Dalin and Pascal Bidégory managed to grab the advantage and keep it until the finish. Sam Goodchild onboard *For The Planet* completes the podium. From the fleet of 29 Imocas sailing two-handed there are only two retirements. For Charlie the



RICK TOMLINSON

At 21 *Chilli Pepper* co-skipper Ellie Driver has plenty of time to get completely Vendée Globe ready without cutting any corners. Current British VG skippers Sam Davies and Pip Hare were into their 30s and 40s respectively when they first set out from Les Sables d'Olonne in earnest and no doubt neither would consider any of those years leading up to the big day were wasted. More time also means a chance to develop longterm sponsorship and so avoid the big financial pressure each winter – something that Alex Thomson would probably be first to admit is a huge bonus

race was very informative, as it was for all of his opponents, including the two retirees Ruyant/Lagravière (*For People*, structural problem) and Shawyer/Strömberg (*Canada Ocean Racing*, halyard problem).

These boats made for rounding the world showed solid reliability sailing through the Channel and the Celtic Sea in bad weather.

Macif Santé Prévoyance crossed the finish line a mere 4m 6s ahead of *Arkéa Paprec* with a late compression in the fleet meaning the first six Imocas arrived within 45 minutes. Both the lead Imocas beat Bryon Ehrhart's 88ft *Lucky* (ex-*Rambler 88*).

Thus *Macif* won monohull line honours, the first time an Imoca has ever done so. Her elapsed time of 2d 7h 16m also established a new race record to Cherbourg, beating the ClubSwan 125 *Skorpios'* 2021 time of 2d 8h 33m: an improvement of 1h 17m 29s!
Patrice Carpentier

GREAT BRITAIN

Worth a fiver

The pathway to the offshore pro ranks is, more often than not, a grind mixed with determination to secure a sponsor and deliver a return. It's not easy, and for every Pip Hare, Dee Caffari or Sam Davies there are plenty who fall by the wayside as the reality, the expense and the

dedication required prove North-Face-of-the-Eiger hard to overcome.

So who and where will the next generation come from? One answer was clear at the Fastnet press conference in Cowes ahead of the 50th edition where the refreshing demeanour of 21-year-old Ellie Driver was something of a sensation as well as an inspiration.

Ellie has come through the doublehanded ranks with a burning ambition to be the next British Vendée Globe star and, as the youngest ever skipper to complete the Sevenstar Round Britain & Ireland Race, as well as scooping the Morgan Cup in 2022, is putting in the miles and attracting attention. Studying for a Master's degree in marine engineering at Southampton University, all the building blocks are there for an emerging talent to shine on the world stage.

The pandemic was the catalyst for Ellie's two-handed exploits. Having initially learnt to sail at Trearddur Bay Sailing Club in north Wales, she then went through the traditional RYA pathway of Optimists and 420s, only to find that her final 420 season was pretty much cancelled as the world went into lockdown. Her father Jim, a former Army Offshore Team member, convinced mother (and maker of the world's finest sausage rolls and banana bread) Lesley Driver that the double-handed world beckoned, and before long father and daughter were trialling a J/99 and a Sun Fast 3300.

They picked the latter, called it *Chilli Pepper* and in 2020 started a journey that began with the Round the Island Race four days after purchase and culminated in the 2023 Fastnet Race. Describing how they approached that race and the sea-change difference to racing today, Ellie commented: 'Two years ago we measured success by crossing the finish line, this year we were focused on the result and pushing as hard as we could throughout...'

'Since the 2021 Fastnet I have completed around 4,500 race miles, which has provided lots of opportunity to gain the experience to make decisions under pressure when you are tired – and have confidence in your boat handling. This is particularly useful when you are faced with conditions like the start of this Fastnet, being able to have confidence in your ability removes the anxiety of "can I do this?" and allows you to focus on the "how do I do this?"; so your approach is more positive which brings confidence to your decisions.'

The 2022 season saw the *Chilli Pepper* team get more competitive, as Ellie describes: '2022 was the first time we began to feel we were becoming genuinely competitive in the Double Handed fleet. At the time Dee and Shirley Robertson were racing *Rockit*, a near-identical boat. We had a number of very close races, but the Morgan Cup was the most memorable where we finished just under a minute ahead on corrected time and won IRC overall.'

'It was a race that played to the strengths of the boat with a predominately offwind course, but which we were careful to make the most of pushing hard towards the end having ensured we were prepared for a fast finish.'

The Sevenstar Round Britain & Ireland Race secured Ellie the Pantanus Sailor of the Year award the same year, and set her on a completely different trajectory: 'That was a spectacular race. Initially the idea of competing in the race was a joking comment from Dad... but once the challenge had been suggested it began to gain momentum as a "good idea". It was going to be one of the toughest races I had done to date. The longest race I had done before then was the 2021 Fastnet; this was four Fastnets in distance. But the sense of accomplishment when we finished the race was amazing.'

'After that our focus turned to the 2023 Fastnet. One of the key areas we have worked on is weather routing and understanding the weather systems much better. Another was sail set-up, particularly trying to steadily improve our target polars for various wind and sea states – plus better sail trim using staysails.'

'Double-handed sailing is all about maximising the resources onboard and trying to do things efficiently. We spent time this year practising peeling between the Code Zero and spinnaker as we recognised an opportunity to maintain better boatspeed and also reduce the effort involved by changing to the jib. We have also done a lot of work on the boat to improve systems.'

'North Sails have been a fantastic partner, Ronan Grealish has also been very generous with his time in helping us set the rig up. ▶



GRAEME SALMON



Unlike the later ACC designs which were abandoned in their former bases in Valencia when the teams flew home in 2007, Farr's bold America's Cup skiff of 1992 did not get chopped up by the local authorities and taken to landfill... well, not yet at least. Ironically while it was the tandem keel that first drew everyone's attention in San Diego in 1992, it was actually the short bowsprit that would prove her undoing after being protested by Il Moro di Venezia in the Louis Vuitton final. Of course the tandem keel was far from new, early examples are recorded in the 1800s, but Farr was the first to have a go at it properly on a modern racer (the late Warwick Collins beat him to the punch by several years with a string of pretty racer-cruisers). In the grand scheme NZL-20's failure to reach the Match was of little consequence – she would have been annihilated by Buddy Melges and Bill Koch and the faster and higher-pointing *America*²

The jibs have been the newest addition to our inventory with the Helix designs allowing more control over shape. The light/medium we added in 2022 transformed the light-air performance of the boat which had been an Achilles' heel in the first season.'

But it hasn't always been plain sailing, with a rig failure early in 2023: 'We had an unfortunate incident when the runner failed and we lost the rig. Although you discuss things like recovering a broken rig in the sea survival course, having to do it for real was pretty instructive; it also reinforces the need to carry sufficient tools and really understand how all the safety equipment works.'

'We were lucky, it was daylight we were four-up and a couple of miles east of No Man's Land Fort so the recovery was easy. I am sure the boats that lost rigs on the first night of the Fastnet this year had a very different experience.'

With the Fastnet 2023 seeing a windy opening 24 hours and some very rough seas straight out of the Solent, *Chilli Pepper* played it safe: 'We had a conservative start but settled into the beat to Hurst quite quickly, picking off boats. We then opted for the gentler north channel as opposed to the Needles which will have cost us around 15 minutes but was a much easier exit.'

'The first night was always going to be tough, but we were prepared and knew that the wind would drop quite quickly around 02.30 as the front went through and the rain stopped. By morning we had great conditions and were flying down the coast. We chose the north channel around the Scilly Isles TSS, then the second front hit us as we were exiting the TSS zone with winds into the mid-30s and a confused breaking sea. Our routeing was now encouraging us to keep north of the rhumbline, which was a good move and helped later as the wind came round and allowed us to tack for the Rock.'

'We switched to the Code Zero once we were clear of the Fastnet TSS and were making good inroads into a couple of key competitors a few miles ahead until the Code Zero ripped. Luckily once clear of the Scillies it was now a run towards Cherbourg with a building breeze.'

'Finally, as the breeze topped 25kt around 19.30 we dropped the spinnaker and switched to J2 plus staysail. For the last 12 hours boat-speed rarely dropped below 15kt with significant stretches over 20kt.'

'The last stage into the finish north of Alderney was in a big, confused sea with a particularly dark night where you couldn't even see the front of the boat. Adding to the fun, our relative speeds compared to the container ships around us made for some interesting radio communication as they tried to move north through a fleet attempting to keep south where everyone is going at a similar speed.'

'The final 20nm were brilliant. Dawn was very welcome and with it an opportunity to drive the boat harder now the waves could be anticipated. Still with full main and J2 we had a real speed advantage over much larger boats as the miles disappeared behind us.'

Remember the name: Ellie Driver.

Magnus Wheatley

NEW ZEALAND

Old soldiers, so the refrain goes, never die; they simply fade away. Old America's Cup yachts tend to follow the same route to oblivion, but two old-stagers from New Zealand's 1992 campaign have been hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons. Most recently NZL-20, the Farr-designed IACC yacht that became dubbed 'the skiff on steroids', occupied the news pages when it went aground on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula north of Auckland.

The yacht was distinctive and controversial in 1992 because of its unusual 'tuning fork' keel, which featured a 9-ton bulb slung beneath two articulating vertical struts. There was no rudder. Against the trend towards long, narrow hulls, NZL-20 was short, very light, with dramatically flaring topsides and a short bowsprit – hence the skiff reference. That bowsprit became the subject of prolonged protest hearings during the Louis Vuitton Cup final.

It is not a boat remembered with much affection by those who campaigned her. Rod Davis was the principal helmsman and describes it as 'an interesting little beast'. Sailing it, he says, was like trying to control a supermarket trolley where all the wheels go in different directions and you end up crashing into the soup cans. 'It took a hell of a long time to learn how to sail it,' he adds. 'Although it was actually such a challenge to figure it out that it made it fun.'

The boat did not like to pivot like a conventional keel and rudder yacht – a distinct handicap during pre-start duels. However, off the startline it had an astonishing ability to crab to windward in short applications of what was dubbed 'negative leeway' mode. 'It wasn't great in terms of VMG,' says Davis, 'but you could survive off the weather hip of the other boat for a long time.'

'It was also useful in other ways. The Cup boats had to negotiate a lot of kelp in San Diego. We couldn't steer around it like a conventional boat, so we just made the boat go sideways to avoid it.'

These reminiscences took place as Davis strolled along the waterfront in Newport, Rhode Island, where he was coaching the Freedom crew in the July 12 Metre World Championships. 'This is where the America's Cup all started for me in 1977,' he recalls of his time with Lowell North's Enterprise campaign.

While Davis was clearly enjoying the nostalgia of racing 12 Metres again, the 1992 episode rekindled memories of a bad ending. Up against the Italian Il Moro di Venezia team, the Kiwis started well and established a 4-1 lead. Match point and just one more win would see them through to the America's Cup.

With their backs to the wall, however, the Italians launched a barrage of protests against the use of the bowsprit, which ended with a ruling against the Kiwis, who were docked a point and ordered to change their spinnaker-handling technique. The bowsprit saga sucked momentum out of the Kiwi campaign which never won another race. When *Il Moro di Venezia* drew level at 3-3, Davis was relieved of the helm and Russell Coutts was given command. But it was to