



The talented Thomas Ruyant

Thomas Ruyant, winner of the last Mini Transat, came to the Class 40 affair at the beginning of 2010. He chartered *Dunkerque Plaisance*, a nice Verdier design built by François Robert in Lorient. He entered several Class 40 events and won them all except for the Mondial regatta in Spain, sailed in some tricky winds.

In Biscay the situation was tricky again for the Class 40 because the high pressure was drifting east and there was no easy way around it. Thomas – and several others – stayed north to begin with. At that point round-the-world hero Bernard Stamm was leading but he was soon stopped with steering problems on his Rogers design *Cheminées Poujoulat*. 'The only way I can carry on is by making the helm fast and balancing the sails. I can't go upwind at all... that explains my course,' he said sadly.

Meanwhile, to the south of the Azores about a dozen Class 40s were heading their own way. Leader of this group was Nicolas Troussel, a brilliant Figaro 2 skipper, who is well known for his audacious routeing options. After 10 days at sea his choice looked neither good nor bad... Nicolas was lying fifth behind four 'northerners', but at the time of writing there is still nearly half of the Atlantic to go and many things can happen. But in my humble opinion 29-year-old Thomas Ruyant has made a perfect race so far.

Note that the Mini sailors are well in the game. Behind Thomas, Sam Manuard, Damien Grimont and Jorg Riechers from Germany are all heroes of the 6.50 Mini Transat race.

Last but not least is the Rhum Division, a dozen mixed multihulls and monohulls, ineligible for the other classes. As I write, class leader Italian Andrea Mura sailing a Felci 50-footer is 1,720 miles from the finish. Also today Franck Cammas will be flying back to France to press on with his next challenge, the Volvo Ocean Race.

And, if you are interested, Franck's big green and rather fast trimaran is now for sale...

Patrice Carpentier

the flow of water... eventually retiring a few days later. Shortly afterwards Le Blevec reported problems with the rear beam. 'During the night the seas had built, the wind was only blowing maybe 22-23kt but I was slamming into some steep waves. It started with an electrical blackout... then there was a loud bang and I could see the aft beam had cracked.

'Then the pilot failed and we veered wildly off course. I got back on course but there were loud sounds coming from behind and I could see the back beam was now flexing – a lot.'

With the leaders out, perhaps Lionel Lemonchois, sailing the Irens-Cabaret Multi 50 *Prince de Bretagne* can capture the Route du Rhum – just as he did four years ago on his Orma 60 *Gitana XII*!

Prof Desjoyeaux's mistake

To sum up the first 10 days in the Imoca 60 division:

1) Two of the nine 60-footers went south, the new *Foncia* and *Akena* (ex-PRB)... and it appears to be a very bad option. On Day 4 the iconic Michel Desjoyeaux, skipper of *Foncia*, diplomatically admitted: 'Hello, trade winds! For half an hour now I have been under spinnaker and going 20kt. Maybe it's not so bad here...

'No, actually this is not a good place to be. I have lost a lot of time and it is still "complicated". For those in the north it will happen, that is now for sure. But we've got a few days in front of us like this with shifty light winds to deal with. It won't be easy...'

Five days later Michel was 450 miles behind the leaders who had 660 miles left to the finish. The game was over.

2) One boat has to retire. It was *Groupe Bel*, helmed by Kito De Pavant, who had to retire the day after the start of the Vendée Globe with a broken mast and more recently broke a rudder on his Figaro 2 in the Transat AG2R. This time his VPLP-Verdier design suffered a failure of the steel keel ram. De Pavant has deployed the back-up system which locks the keel in the centred position and was heading to the Azores.

3) As the six boats in the north slogged it out, there was no clear distinction in performance between the older boats and their new rivals. On Day 10 the two boats leading the game were Roland Jourdain on *Veolia Environnement* (the ex-Farr design *BT*), and Armel Le Cléac'h with *Brit Air*, a Groupe Finot design also from the last Vendée. Both these guys were doing a superb job on their 'oldies'.

NEW ZEALAND

Having been in the boatbuilding business for 37 years and having owned a veritable fleet of racing and cruising yachts, including two former America's Cuppers, Richard Matthews is in no danger of exaggeration when he describes himself, rather ruefully, as a 'habitual boat collector'.

Reluctantly sitting indoors to escape a shrieking gale in Wellington, Matthews would have preferred to be out sailing his latest *Oystercatcher* rather than talking about her ashore. As it was, his trip to New Zealand for the launch of his 28th yacht of that name had been frustrating from a sailing point of view. In the time available Wellington had lived up to its boisterous reputation, so only one sortie on the harbour had been attempted. And, in winds gusting over 40kt, that was rather more boisterous than ideal for a maiden outing.

'It was pretty wild,' smiled Matthews. 'I could sense there was some tension on the dock because conditions were hardly ideal, but I felt I just had to get out for a sail.'

As a taste of things to come, the boat had just nosed out into the harbour when the cups on the masthead anemometer blew off. Under mainsail only, the yacht charged off at 14kt. With the addition of a no4 jib, but unable to tension the vang, the 54-footer was soon reaching at 19.8kt. But all the time the wind was building and, after some quick helicopter photographs by Matthews' partner Denette Wilkinson, the mission was abandoned.

'It was still a successful outing,' said Matthews. 'A great test for the boat! In race conditions with a proper crew the boat would have flown. It felt very good. It was planing like a dinghy, or a supersize Melges 24. The bow was always up and it felt balanced. I have no doubt we will see some very big numbers.'

After 28 boats Matthews is experienced enough to know not to make early claims. 'Every boat feels fast when it is sailing on its own. In my experience about one in three raceboats is successful. I certainly hope this will be one of them.'

The latest *Oystercatcher* is a Tom Humphreys IRC 54-footer, built by Hakes Marine. What Matthews can say with conviction and with all that weight of experience behind him is that he is delighted with the outcome. 'The build quality is exquisite. The detailing and



The latest in Richard Matthews' long line of Oystercatchers is this speedy-looking 54ft IRC design from Tom Humphreys, who also drew Matthews' previous light-displacement IRC 42 – that has been tearing up the Caribbean for several years now as well as scoring well on longer races in the UK. Designed to keep a nose in front of tweaked TP52s, the new boat will debut at Key West next month

internal finish are exemplary. I do not think I have seen better. This has been a great experience and I am very excited about it.'

After a long association with Rob Humphreys, Matthews gave the next generation, Tom, his first break by commissioning a 42-footer which was launched in 2007. 'Following on from that, Richard was looking for a bigger, all-out raceboat,' says Tom. 'He looked at TP52s, but there were certain constraints. One was that he wanted to moor his boat at his home on the east coast, which limited the draft to 2.5m thus requiring a lifting keel. Also, he wanted a wholesome offshore boat and with a few more creature comforts than you'd find on an inshore-oriented TP52.'

'The goal was to have a boat slightly bigger than the IRC-rated TP52s to hopefully find clear lanes out of the start box, but with a similar rating. With a predominantly amateur crew, bolstered by a few professionals, the aim was also to create a boat that was easy to sail. For example, the foils are a touch more grippy and forgiving and the raised freeboard and hull volume forward will enable the boat to be driven hard offshore without life becoming too uncomfortable.'

The outcome is slightly heavier than a TP52 in relative terms, but with around 20m² more upwind sail area and 40m² more downwind. 'We are a shade lower in terms of the sail area: displacement ratio, but a bit better in terms of sail area:wetted area (The actual comparisons are as follows: UpSA/Vol^{2/3} = 39 vs IRC converted TP52 approx 40; DnSA/Vol^{2/3} = 86 vs IRC converted TP52 approx 88; UpSA/WSA = 3.8 vs IRC converted TP52 approx 3.6; DnSA/WSA = 8.2 vs IRC converted TP52 approx 7.9).'

'Proportionately we have more draft and more bulb weight, contributing to a righting moment that is about 20 per cent higher than an IRC-ed TP52,' adds Tom.

Design work included running 30 computer simulations through

the Humphreys Yacht Design in-house FS Flow panel code program and VPP. 'We looked at a range of TP52 shapes. We investigated volume distribution, chines, appendage placements and even looked at twin rudders. We also used the twisted flow wind tunnel in Auckland to update our VPP aero models for various sail combinations and to investigate the performance against rating effects of square-top mains versus pintops,' he said.

In the end, chines and twin rudders were rejected but the square-top main was adopted. The hull is a very smooth, relatively high-freeboard shape, wide at the stern but balanced by good volume in the bow. 'The philosophy has been to aim for an all-rounder with emphasis on VMG angles up and downwind,' says Tom Humphreys. 'Upwind performance was important. If we are in a fleet of TP52s ideally we would hope to use our slight length and power advantage to keep clear.'

But, while round-the-buoys performance is important, this yacht is also geared towards offshore events. The original plan was to compete in the 2010 Sydney-Hobart, but that has been shelved to get the boat to Key West in time for race week. But offshore events on the schedule include the Caribbean 600, the Fastnet and the Middle Sea Race, among others.

Consequently, considerable attention has been paid to the cockpit layout and ergonomics, the sailing systems and also to some interior comfort... Balancing the relatively high freeboard is a low-slung cabin top with beautiful detailing in the chamfered hull-deck join and the transitions from bow to coachroof and coachroof to cockpit. Most lines lead below the decks, keeping surfaces clear of obstruction.

The Southern Spars mast, finished in oyster white along with the exterior and interior surfaces, is typically clean and aerodynamic and supported by EC6 carbon rigging. With an all A-sail programme

DENETTE WILKINSON



deployed from a fixed 2m bowsprit, the absence of a spinnaker pole helps keep the foredeck clean. The mast also features one of Southern Spar's deflector systems, which allows staysails to be flown from two positions with a single halyard.

The all-Harken deck and cockpit package includes two big MX pedestals driving mainsheet, primary and utility winches, while the twin wheels from Composite Performance are set wide apart for viewing and to allow easy crew movement forward and back.

To accommodate the requirement for shallow-draft mooring, the T-bulb keel operates on a hydraulic lift system powered by the engine, reducing the draft from 3.65m to 2.5m. Having installed a powerful Harken hydraulic package to cope with the keel, full use has been made of the system to assist in sail and mast controls as well. Available to the headsail trimmers are hydraulic headstay tensions, jib tack, jib in/out and up/down controls. The mast jack, vang, Cunningham and outhaul are also hydraulically managed.

In terms of creature comforts, the concessions include a fridge, stereo with on-deck speakers and even a composite swim ladder. Hardly enough to corrupt the 16-person crew to a sybaritic stupor, but enough to make a difference. The big concession is really in the finish and detailing of the interior, which has been executed to an extremely high standard.

The all-white surfaces create a bright, airy interior with cleanly radiused edges, individual crew cubby holes and gear lockers, a concealed galley and even a head with a modicum of privacy. Considering that the winch drive units, hydraulics, halyards and sheets have been routed below decks, great effort has gone into concealing all the 'plumbing', but without losing ease of access for maintenance.

'Working with the designers, we have gone to great lengths to conceal much of the working elements and make the interior attractive,' says Paul Hakes. 'This is quite definitely a race yacht, but, by thinking things through, we have achieved a very nice feel and atmosphere to the inside of the boat.'

For offshore safety there is a watertight bulkhead forward with a modest crash-bow. The foredeck hatch and companionway can be pneumatically sealed.

The Hakes team have turned out a full carbon pre-preg foam core construction from female hull and deck moulds, engineered by Pure Design & Engineering. Deck and internal structures use Nomex honeycomb cores and the whole project from design to finished product testifies to the efforts of all concerned to achieve a quality outcome.

One suspects that, with his extensive experience in the business, Matthews does not dispense praise idly, which makes his unbridled enthusiasm for his latest acquisition all the more valued by those involved.

Ivor Wilkins

SPAIN

The 15 Imoca Open 60 entries for the next Barcelona World Race will be carrying a pretty unusual mix of sailors! The 30 people currently preparing for a non-stop round-the-world race include some very different personalities and also some very 'big' characters. You can easily distinguish the 'stars' group from the Imoca rookies and younger talents. Some of the newer skippers certainly have impressive international records of their own, but compared with Desjoyeaux, Le Cam, Peyron and previous winner Jean-Pierre Dick...

And, of course, there will be that Spanish Armada. Ten sailors on five all-Spanish boats and three more racing with foreign skippers. From the Volvo and other big events come Pepe Ribes, Toño Piris, Pachi Rivero, the inseparable 'Movi-Stars' Iker and Xabí, all competing for the enthusiastic local following. There will also be some interesting stories coming from their compatriot rivals Anna Corbella, Gerard Marin and Bruno García – sailing with, respectively, Dee Caffari (UK), Ludovic Aglaor (FRA) and Jean Le Cam (FRA), playing the roles of Imoca rookies while sharing the sorrows and joys of racing round the world in a foreign language.

Of 13 Spanish sailors, two are non-professional: Bruno García is a cardiologist and Jaume Mumbrú a lawyer. They each got here in a different way, but both were good amateur Mini Transat sailors. 'This will also be the first time in my life that I will not be paying for the pleasure of doing such a race!' explains a cheerful Mumbrú, enjoying being in a sponsored programme at last.

After the Vuelta España Race last summer Mumbrú and his semi-professional co-skipper Cali Sanmarti knew they had to switch boats; they began their BWR adventure chartering the obsolete *Pakea*, but have now swapped it for the veteran but more competitive *Superbijou*, the Pierre Rolland design built in 2000 by Bernard Stamm and used by him to win two previous round-the-world races.

Sanmarti and Mumbrú will be racing in what we shall call the... 'less fast' division. Their renamed *We Are Water* will race against Gerard Marin and Ludovic Aglaor's *Maritim Catala (ex-Kingfisher)*, Juan Mederiz and Juan Palació on *Lechera Asturiana* (formerly *Ecover 2*), and the Polish-French team on *Fruit* – the two-time Vendée Globe winner PRB (more recently Sam Davies's *Roxy*). These four will be fighting it out to avoid being bottom of the table.

The outlook for Bruno García is a little better perhaps. The experience of his co-skipper Le Cam allows him to be able to dream a little higher up the scoreboard. 'In order, my goals are: finish the race, enjoy the experience and... finish on the podium!'

This is certainly what Jean Le Cam will be looking for. They only concluded their charter of Mike Golding's *Ecover 3* quite recently, following a lengthy search for a modern Imoca 60. This is Golding's last Owen-Clarke design, launched for the most recent Vendée Globe which Golding led briefly before losing his mast in a Southern Ocean broach. Bruno García doesn't allow himself to think about the possibility of being the first Spanish sailor home... but, given his co-skipper's track record, it is not impossible.

Such a result would certainly be a great boost for the many talented solo sailors around the world who are not professional shorthanders; but you also have to be brutally honest and ask just how serious a threat García's more famous rivals, Iker and Xabí, *Estrella Damm's* Ribes-Pella or *Renault's* Rivero-Piris rate the chances of the underdog springing a surprise...

Carlos Pich

AUSTRALIA

'Don't knock it until you try it, or at least see it in action' is the message from Iain Murray for the naysayers who have emerged following the decision to take America's Cup 34 into the world of spectacular high-speed multihulls. One month into his role as CEO and regatta director for America's Cup Race Management (ACRM), Murray is even more certain he made the right decision when he accepted the offer to take up the role. He's now totally inspired by the new event, which he says will probably in the future come to be recognised as a turning point, for the better, in the world of international sailing.

'This is an extremely exciting project: an unparalleled opportunity for the America's Cup and the sport,' he says. 'Sailing is going to be seen like it's never been seen before by sailors and the public.'

'Thanks to the vision of Larry Ellison and Russell Coutts we have the rare opportunity, and the backing, to breathe new life into the event, and because of this we are confident the results will be embraced by the wider sailing community. I realise that there is plenty of work ahead of us if we are to deliver the goods, but that doesn't worry me. It's an exciting time for the America's Cup.'

'Anyone questioning what we are doing right now should not jump to conclusions. They should just wait to see the full package. Sure, we appreciate constructive comment, but until these people see these boats race, and watch the television that will come from the course, they can only make assumptions. America's Cup 34 starts with younger sailors, faster boats, new rig and foil technology, shorter and more challenging courses, plus simple and crisp rules that, through special umpiring and new-age digital TV technology, will create better racing and great entertainment. ▶