

Rolex Commodores' Cup

by Bob Fisher



Germany Red won the Rolex Commodores' Cup comfortably. The team which comprised Norbert Plambeck's Judel/Vrolijk 45, 'Hexe', Thomas Jungblut's Farr-designed First 40.7, 'Sequana', and Harald Bruning's ILC-30, 'Topas', increased its lead with every race to win by 25 points, and with most of the races scoring only half points, this was a formidable margin.

Photo - Jon Nash

In second and third places were Netherlands Red and Netherlands Green, separated by just half a point, but in turn well clear of Germany Green, almost 19 points astern. England Red was fifth, holding off a spirited late challenge from Spain with a trio of boats from X-Yachts, a 482, a 442, and a 332.

'Sequana' was undoubtedly the boat of the series, winning eight of her nine races and placing second in the other. Jungblut and his crew had speed to burn with this production boat which regularly held off the challenge of the Mark Mills-designed, 'Quokka' of Peter Rutter (England Red),

which had a string of Solent wins already to her credit. 'Sequana' had time given to her by 'Quokka', but regularly finished in front on the water.

It had seemed that one of the 'golden oldies' of this IMS fleet would emulate 'Sequana', as 'Cisne', the Swan 43 of Koert Jansen scored five successive wins, but when the wind went light, she had a fifth and two thirds. 'Cisne' came back on the final day, when the wind was back up to 18 knots with some even heavier gusts, to top her class by two and a half minutes over the 11.5 mile course. Her final win was over the 1971 Admiral's



The victorious Germany Red team – photo Kos.

Cup top scorer, Tony Cox's 'Prospect of Whitby' (England Red).

With nine three-boat teams competing, the Rolex Commodores' Cup, the off-year alternative to the Admiral's Cup became an essentially European event this year. With the IMS held in dubious standing in some countries, the future of the event remained in doubt until the final day when the Royal Ocean Racing Club's Rear-Commodore, Richard Matthews, introduced the IR2000 Rule, and announced that the Measured version of it will make a major change to the event's format for 2000.

There were two German teams, as well as two from Holland and England, plus single teams from Spain, Belgium and

Scandinavia. Several had entered 'golden oldies', boats with a previous racing history and which are again favoured by the IMS. England had two, one in each of the teams, notably 'Prospect of Whitby' from the design office of Sparkman & Stephens. The other, even older, was the Laurent Giles 1957 design 'Cetawayo', formerly 'Zulu'; both were in the 'small boat' division where they dwarfed the other competitors, which also included a Jean Berret half-tonner, 'General Tapioca', sailing for Belgium.

It was the production boats and golden oldies which opened with perfect three-win scorelines after three races. Thomas Jungblut did this for Germany Red with his Farr-designed Beneteau First 40.7,

'Sequana', as did Koerdt Jansen's Swan 43, 'Cisne', for Netherlands Green. 'Sequana' even managed to perform a 360 degree penalty absolution for touching a mark without losing control of the race. The sight of 'Cisne' duking it out to windward with 'Prospect of Whitby' took observers back a quarter of a century in the wind whipped waters of the Solent.

It didn't find favour, however, with Jungblut and others who felt that an age limit ought to be imposed so that the racing was between boats of similar design philosophies, and not ones which are given the benefits which IMS grants to older boats. Cox, on the other hand was adamant that the older boats were just as much part of the racing scene as their

Germany Red:

Norbert Plambeck – 'Hexe'



Thomas Jungblut – 'Sequana'



Dr. Harald Bruning – 'Topas'



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younger counterparts. 'It demonstrates to me that the IMS is a marvellous handicap [system],' he said. 'What matters is how boats are sailed, not whether they are state-of-the-art racing machines – a really well built oldie can still race competitively.'

The first two days' racing were held in

the Eastern Solent, with two essentially windward/leeward races per day, and were followed the next day when the 27 Cup boats joined the RORC fleet for the 28-hour Channel Race, when the wind was lighter than the 15-25 knots of the first two days. Then there were two short

course Solent races before the short (24-hour) offshore race the next day. The series was completed with the Rolex Trophy Race in the Solent. Half points were awarded for the six short races in the Solent, full points for the Rolex Trophy Race and there were multiplying factors of 2 and 1.5 for the long and short offshore races.

The Germany Red team had the Judel/Vrolijk 45, 'Hexe', of Norbert Plambeck, as its big boat and the Fontana/Maletto ILC-30, 'Topas', along with 'Sequana'. 'Topas' liked the rough going of the third race, finishing two minutes ahead of 'Cisne', but could not hold a candle to the Swan 43 on corrected time. Another of the small boats which did well was the Dehler 29 of Jan Scholten in the Netherlands Red team, which was lying seventh on points overall after three races. The Dehler 29's teammates, who were lying second, were the



(left) Tony de Mulder 'Vitric 5' and (right) Bouwe Bekking 'Reckless' – photos Bob Fisher.

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Photo - Jan Nash

IMX-38 'Salty Dog', of Hans Hout lying fourth overall, and Peter de Ridder's Bashford 41, 'Checkmate', in seventh overall. The team that was expected to win, however, was Netherlands Green, with Simon Dierdorp's Mean Marine 41, 'Reckless', under the command of Bouwe Bekking, and the IMX-38 'Kind of Magic' of Dip van der Slikke joining 'Cisne', particularly if the winds had remained brisk.

The second day showed some of the weaknesses of the two British teams – it was all too easy to see that this was a case of what might have been. In the fresh going, with her current handicap, 'Prospect of Whitby' is a force to be reckoned with, but too many opportunities went begging as seconds were lost. Tony Cox and his crew tried hard, and offshore they overcame the difficulties they had around the cans, but late spinnaker hoists and early take-downs are not acceptable at this level of racing. They lost valuable seconds with these, and more in the third



Photo - Ken

race, by heading for the wrong mark.

The short seas provided handling problems on the downwind legs and the Farr 40, 'Victric 5' gave a display of what one second's inattention can do. She went from a wipe-out broach into a Chinese gybe without a pause and let the other two Farr 40s, 'Hurricane' (Ken Bruneflod – Scandinavia) and 'Dune' (Jacques Mignom – Belgium) go past after she had led them to the weather mark.

It was even worse for David Murrin's 'Cetawayo'. She hooked a lobster pot five minutes into the start of race three. The pot buoy became jammed between the rudder and the prop-shaft, and Murrin had to anchor so that a crewman, David Sawdon could dive over the side to free the buoy and tackle from the boat. Murrin explained that there was so much white water about that no one saw the white buoy.

The second half of the series began with the 150-mile Channel Race. It was held over one of RORC Sailing Director, Alan Green's, now famous flexi-courses. Aimed to make the mid-sized boats sail for 28 hours, it was held in light westerly breezes, and was shortened by 20 miles. The Germans dominated the big-boat class with 'Hexe' beating Wolfgang Schaefer's Judel/Vrolijk 44, 'Struntje Light' (ex-'Rubin'), for Germany Green, by 15 minutes with Tony de Mulder's Farr 40, 'Victric 5' third. 'Sequana' won the mid-size class from the Netherlands Red's 'Salty Dog', an IMX-38 of Hans Hout, while 'Cisne' beat 'Prospect of Whitby' in the small-boat class.

Strong tidal currents and light winds made this a trying race and when 'Cetawayo' could not make progress

towards an inflatable buoy set to the south east of the Isle of Wight at the start of the ebb, David Murrin gave up. The Dehler 29 of Jan Scholten and Paul Pilate's 'General Tapioca' stuck it out, finishing almost 24 hours after the leaders. It had begun in light winds, but at least a fair tide to take the boats out of the Solent, and in the tricky conditions, Ben Vines and Hamish Calder, the two helmsmen of 'Victric 5' in the absence of Tony de Mulder, took the Farr 40 to the front on the way westwards. It was an advantage on which they were able to capitalise and achieved a creditable third in the big boat class.

Races six and seven were windward/leeward events in the Solent and saw 'Sequana' yield for the first and only time. Hans Weidling's IMX-38, 'Xenia', for Germany Green, took a zephyr from the start line to establish a lead that was never in doubt as the wind built. A similar quirky breeze took Jose-Luis Ribed's 'Bilbao Congress City', an X-332 for Spain, to the front of the small-boat class, and the Swan 43 was fifth. Bouwe Bekking, calling the shots on 'Reckless' for Netherlands Green, placed her correctly to win the big-boat class from 'Hexe'. In the next, the breeze was more stable, but it was a double win day in the small boats for 'Bilbao Congress City', this time 10 seconds ahead of 'Topas' with 'Cisne' third. 'Sequana' won her class easily, and 'Struntje Light' was home first and held her time to win the big-boat class by 10 seconds from 'Reckless'.

Another flexi-course, for 24 hours was set for the short offshore race, but this

one went the whole 130 miles. For the third time in a row, the Spanish small-boat won her class, again with 'Topas' second. 'Sequana', it goes without saying, won the mid-sized class from 'Salty Dog', and the X-482, 'Guggenheim Bilbao' of Ignacio Jauregui gave Spain a boost by winning the big-boat class from Peter De Ridder's Bashford 41, 'Checkmate 3'.

It was a race which started in a half decent breeze, although a strong flood tide made the exit from the Solent difficult. 'Quokka' spent 20 minutes on the mud off the entrance to Beaulieu River and 'Struntje Light' went aground at Hurst, cutting it too close. But these were minor compared to the fate of Matti Harkonen's 'Brilliant Biohit' (Scandinavia). Tacking along the shore, the crew had reduced the time of their tacks by keeping the leeward runner fairly tight, but it worked against them when they had to bear away to dip 'Prospect of Whitby'. They simply didn't make it and while the 'old lady' was only slightly shaken by the collision, it was the end of 'Biohit's' racing as her bow was split open.

The final day saw the boats battling a decent breeze and a strong Solent flood tide on a traditional course around fixed marks. Germany Red had only to finish out of last place in two classes to be sure of the Cup, but with 'Hexe' second to 'Reckless', 'Sequana' winning from 'Quokka', and 'Topas' fourth, the Rolex Commodores' Cup went to their team by a comfortable margin. It also collected the Kindberg Cup for the best combined performance in the offshore races, the Seahorse Trophy for the combined inshore races, and the Rolex Trophy for being the winning team in the final race.

It was the last Rolex Commodores' Cup under the IMS, and while that may not find favour in those countries which have accepted the complexity of the System, it will give this event considerable clout. It will become a training ground for the Champagne Mumm Admiral's Cup, which almost certainly will also adopt the Measured version of IR2000 in 2001, and this was one of the RORC objects in starting the event in the first place. Other European countries will be able to use the Commodores' Cup to test new boats built with IRM in mind and it could promote a much needed grand prix racing rule, which the IMS has always professed not to be. The changes are necessary and should be welcomed.

Tony Cox at the helm of 'Prospect of Whitby' – photo Christel clear.



Overall results:

1st Germany Red 'Sequana', 'Hexe', 'Topas', 2nd Netherlands Red 'Salty Dog', 'Checkmate 3', 'Dehler 29', 3rd Netherlands Green 'Cisne', 'Reckless', 'Kind of Magic', 4th Germany Green 'Xenia', 'Struntje Light', 'Chaca', 5th England Red 'Prospect of Whitby', 'Quokka', 'Victric 5', 6th Spain 'Bilbao Congress City', 'Guggenheim Bilbao', 'Port of Bilbao', 7th Scandinavia 'Burana', 'Brilliant Biohit', 'Hurricane 3', 8th England Green 'Dawn Raid', 'Auto Desk', 'Cetawayo', 9th Belgium 'General Tapioca', 'Dune', 'Ace'.