

# Bob FISHER

## Good things to come...

'I CAN'T WAIT for the IRM,' said Morty, at the end of a tirade about the idiocy of the IMS. He was speaking after tackling the problems surrounding the Farr 50 which he and Keith McCullagh are building at 2HO for the British Admiral's Cup team. And it did seem that he had a point or two which would have led him to hope for a new rule, and quickly. 'Can you imagine,' he said with some vehemence, 'McLaren or Ferrari paying good money to slow their cars? Because,' he went on, 'that is precisely what we are having to do.'

The crew were out training the previous weekend aboard 'Russe Noire', Peter Harrison's Farr 50, which earlier had been 'The Full Monty', and Morty was saying that they had been going upwind at 8.2-8.4 knots, a relatively healthy speed for a 50-footer, but that the target speeds for the new boat in the same wind speed would be almost a knot slower. 'We are going to have a boat costing the best part of a million dollars which is only marginally quicker than a Corel 45! And all because of the ridiculous demands of the IMS.'

It turns out that the bottom metre of the keel is to be glassfibre, and that there will be 2,400kg of lead in 36kg ingots inside

the hull. Remember that Uffa Fox remarked that weight only has value in a steamroller. The lead is there because to rate well, and certainly this Farr 50 will rate better under IMS than a Corel 45, it has to be 'tippy'. 'We have an RMC (righting moment factor) of 304,' he said, 'That is 100 less than the old IOR 50s, and you can remember what cranky boats they were. Just think what we will have.'

I learned that the moveable (not while racing) ingots cannot be of a greater weight than 36kg because of an EEC regulation that limits them to what a man can be expected to be able to carry. But, if one could imagine the effect of the 2,400kg placed at the bottom of the keel (or even as water ballast) – the performance would be electrifying and certainly a knot faster upwind in addition to making the boat a great deal safer. Without the effect of the Admiral's Cup, one wonders whether there would be any new boats built to the IMS this year. No wonder Morty, and, I understand, many others can't wait for the IRM.

On that basis, I went to see David Murrin, who one might think is the most unlikely person to be a campaigner for IRM. David is the owner of the Laurent Giles-designed 'Cetawayo', which was one of the British team in the

Commodores' Cup last year. A boat which was certainly not in its first flush of youth and for which, maybe, he should have additionally asked for a wooden mast allowance (not something for which IMS has given consideration), but a boat which raised a few eyebrows. We met aboard 'Cetawayo', in the mahogany magnificence of a boat built 40 years ago, over an early morning cup of tea. I put it to David that he was possibly the last person in the world I would have considered talking to about IRM before it got underway, and asked him why he was interested.

He replied, 'We raced in CHS with "Cetawayo", and we have found it a highly successful system for the boat, particularly in Class 3, where the competition has been hot. There are a dozen or so boats that are wonderful to sail against and to win you have to eke seconds.'

'We have been building up for four or five years to do as well as we have. We want to move on a step, and although we have already done the Commodores' Cup, we got a bit of a rude shock when it came to international sailing. We sail locally and believe that Hamble is one of the best sailing centres in the country, the competition is good. But the truth is, we have no chance, under our home-based



(above) 'Morty' – Peter Morton  
– photo Bab Fisher. (right) 'Russe Nair' –  
photo Christel clear.





'Cetawayo' during the 1998 Commodores' Cup—photo Ocean Images

rules, to race internationally on our home waters – to have people from other countries race against us.

'We found in the Commodores' Cup that we had to up the stakes, and although that event was under IMS, we felt we had to have something different. The idea of IRM, which is totally transparent and produces fast, exciting, attractive boats is very appealing. Some people think that there is something of a 'Sunstone' syndrome about 'Cetawayo', so that the crew and I want to do something different to show that we can perform well.'

That, naturally enough, triggered a question on what he proposed to do about it. I was happily surprised by his genuine positivity. 'Our first proposal,' he said, 'is to build an IRM boat, assuming that although IRM looks to be a great handicap system, the infrastructure around IRM needs a great deal of work and receives it. It makes building a boat, unless others do so, a risky move, but assuming all those problems are overcome, we would like to build a 40 foot IRM boat – sponsored. And that [sponsorship] is really important. One of the reasons I believe sailing suffered in this country, is that the money slowed up because the projects were not adventurous enough; everywhere else, it has become a commercial proposition. It can be in this country, and it doesn't mean that the whole atmosphere has to change, but it does mean that we have to inject new life into our system. IRM offers a wonderful opportunity, if we grasp it by the horns. If we don't, it could be just another wonderful British invention where no one

says; "we can capitalise on that." So, the big question remains as to whether there is going to be sufficient infrastructure for IRM to take off. It needs a lot of work and no complacency. The people in Lymington have come up with a very good rule system which could be very exciting.'

This led on to how he thought we should go about interesting people into IRM, because it is going to be hard, initially, to persuade people to build boats. David had obviously thought that out. 'You have to start with the whole yachting fraternity,' he said, 'And it may mean looking at yachting slightly differently. CHS has been successful with rating cruising and racing boats and the racing has been good. However, other countries don't use it, so it is another means for us to attack people who wish to race internationally. IMS didn't take off in this country and there is every indication that it is having problems in other countries. It looks like there is a marvellous opportunity for IRM. We have it first, and if we do it right, we can make our fleets faster and better before the rest. Then, if we do it properly, we can enter international competition on different terms to the way we have had to before. To do that, we have to encourage people into IRM to make it worthwhile. We need the commitment of the yachting authorities with a racing circuit, and, perhaps, significant prizes.

'Owners need a stimulus,' he continued. 'They need boats which are exciting to sail. They need competition that is close; they need venues where the

racing is well run and it is, perhaps, part of something bigger. The Winter Series here is successful because it is for eight weeks and every time you go out, it is part of something bigger. We need sponsors for the circuits and a sponsor for the rule.'

I pointed out that he was almost proposing a Solent Points Series. Enthusiastically, he replied, 'I am. I believe we need something more than one or two events together. What the British do so well, and the IRM is an instance of it, is to provide the innovation. We have great creativeness, and

that is what has produced this rule. Now we need to act commercially on this innovation, rather than give it to other countries to act upon. In this case we must say: "We have something that is different, we are going to make this work, and to do that we must support each other, not to go out as a set of individuals, but to build a core of boat owners that become very competitive. Then, when the other countries start introducing IRM, we will be there first. We will then have a chance to influence the way international yachting is run.'

I came away from that refreshed and hoped that he might be one of those who the RORC Rating Office will find bidding for their own sail number. That august office down by the river at Lymington has proved that it isn't as black hearted as some would make it to be (more of which later), but it has come up with a fund raising scheme to support its own development which should have more than a modicum of success. It has announced an auction of some premium sail numbers. Old hands might have noticed that the RORC sail numbers began with 101 – 'Bloodhound', I believe – and that the only one of the first 100 that was issued was 100, to Rothmans for the Whitbread entry in the company's centenary year. The other 99, GBR 1R to GBR 99R inclusive, are available and will be the subject of a sealed bid auction.

Necessarily, the reserve price on GBR 1R is considerably higher, at £1,000, than the rest, at £200, but it is expected that there will be somebody willing to pay