



ROLEX FASTNET RACE FEATURE – JANUARY 2023

Upping the ante for the 50th Rolex Fastnet Race

James Boyd reviews some of the latest hardware built or acquired especially for this year's historic race

Winning the world's largest offshore yacht race comes with huge prestige. Names on the Fastnet Challenge Cup, presented to the overall corrected time winner of the Rolex Fastnet Race since its first edition in 1925, include Jolie Brise, Dorade, Myth of Malham, Carina II, Pen Duick III, Condor, Nicorette, Morning Glory, Nokia, Rán 2, and more recently from France; Night and Day, Courier Du Leon and Lann Ael 2, plus the American VO70 Wizard and the defending British champion, Sunrise. Today the Fastnet Challenge Cup is presented to the corrected time winner in IRC Overall.

However, this July's Rolex Fastnet Race will be the 50th edition of the Royal Ocean Racing Club's premier event. For this special historic event, several are building or acquiring yachts with the specific aim of getting their name on the trophy.

Ino Noir - Carkeek 45 - James Neville

Leading this charge is Commodore of the RORC James Neville who is replacing his highly successful Ino XXX with a new 45ft Carkeek design currently being built by Jason Carrington's team near Southampton.

The new Ino Noir is a development of his present HH42, which the Commodore has raced both inshore, in the FAST40+ class, and offshore, winning many races and notably finishing second to Sunrise in IRC Overall in the 2021 Rolex Fastnet Race. The aim of the new boat is to be competitive in the ever-growing international portfolio of 600 mile offshore races. Neville explains his approach: "Looking at how all the developments in the FAST40+ - hull shapes, appendages, rigs, sails etc – have come on, we wanted to capture that learning, just as the PAC52s have taken all the learning from the Super Series 52s, and applied that to an offshore boat."

At 45ft the new Ino Noir will be slightly longer as Neville wants to continue racing with his same crew of 10. The boat features the typical Carkeek heavily chamfered foredeck, reverse sheer bow, twin rudders, wheel steering and water ballast tanks (480kg per side).

Rán 8 - CF520 - Niklas Zennström

In the same vein, but already racing, is Niklas Zennström's Rán 8. This CF520 is again a Carkeek design, but was built by Fibre Mechanics in Lymington from the tooling of Richard Matthew's Oystercatcher XXXV. Already in 2022 she enjoyed considerable success, finishing second to Ino XXX in the RORC's Myth of Malham Race and winning the Channel Race, before coming fourth overall in last autumn's Rolex Middle Sea Race.

With their all-conquering Maxi 72 Rán 2, Zennström's team claimed the Fastnet Challenge Cup in the 2009 and 2011 (the first back-to-back winner since Carina II in 1955-57), but was unable to make it a hattrick in 2013. Zennström returns with his enthusiastic offshore racer wife Catherine for another attempt in 2023.

"The first goal when we built the boat was for the 2023 Rolex Fastnet Race - the 50th anniversary, so obviously a big race," explains Rán skipper Tim Powell. "Everything we are doing is leading up to that. We were quite happy that the Rolex Middle Sea Race was a light air race, because if the boat had a weakness then it would be in that, so we were pleased the boat performed pretty well. Now we are off to do the RORC Caribbean 600 which we assume will be in the boat's more natural conditions, so more big learning for us."

As to why the new Rán 8 is a 52 rather than another Maxi 72, the team has familiarity with that size having campaigned several TP52s and it is generally more manageable. Compared to a TP52, it has twin rudders, a more powerful hull shape and so is able to carry more sail area, but has a similar overall displacement, and carries 550kg water ballast tanks. It is much more offshore orientated, drier below with less through-deck systems and a more usable and comfortable living space. "This boat is a big boat downstairs," continues Powell. "I am 6ft 2in and I can stand up."

Notorious - Maxi 72 - Peter Morton

While Zennström may not be fielding a Maxi 72, his FAST40+ rival Peter Morton is, having acquired the former Caol Ila R, now renamed Notorious.

Although better known for having breathed life back into the Quarter Ton class, campaigning a FAST40+ and more recently a 5.5mR, Morton grew up competing in the Admiral's Cup. He explains: "2023 is a big year for me: I did my first Fastnet in 1973, so it will be 50 years on from that. This will be the 50th Fastnet. Plus I won the Fastnet in 1993, 30 years ago on Indulgence and again in 2003 on Enigma. So this also has a '3' in it. Plus I will be 70, so the stars are aligned. They say you need a foot for every year you are old...especially to go offshore. We'll do the RORC races as warm up and then have a go at the Fastnet."

Morton also has a long association with Notorious' designer Mark Mills, dating back to the beginnings of IRC when he commissioned the IRM 50 Mandrake from him. As Caol Ila R, Notorious has a strong pedigree: she won the Rolex Maxi 72 World Championship in 2014 and had an exceptional 2019 season winning, among others, the prestigious Rolex Giraglia offshore race from St Tropez to Monaco overall under IRC.

Despite her size, the Maxi 72 is a wet boat, but Morton says he will attempt to rectify this for his 2023 programme. Otherwise Notorious is ready to go. This will be Morton's first Rolex Fastnet Race since winning on Charles Dunstone's maxi in 2003.

Tulikettu - Infiniti 52 - Arto Linnervuo

Launched in 2022 and another to watch will be Arto Linnervuo's Infiniti 52 Tulikettu, which has a programme principally focussing on the world's 600 mile offshore races. This includes the Rolex Fastnet Race, but also the RORC's Roschier Baltic Sea Race, which starts and finishes in Helsinki in Linnervuo's native Finland; a race which his company supports. Tulikettu is the first example of the Hugh Welbourn-designed Infiniti 52 and is equipped with a lateral, sliding Dynamic Stability Systems (DSS) foil, which when deployed provides added righting moment to leeward. Tulikettu recently sailed her first race, the RORC Transatlantic Race and is entered in the RORC Caribbean 600 too.

Seahorse - Pogo S4 - Andrew Hurst

Meanwhile another icon of British sailing, Andrew Hurst, a leading sailor and now editor of Seahorse magazine, has bought a new Class40 with the aim of competing in the Rolex Fastnet Race and then the doublehanded Transat Jacques Vabre.

"It started when I went out to watch the last Fastnet start in 35 knots in my RIB," Hurst explains. "Charlie Dalin (on the IMOCA Apivia) went past and gave me a big wave and I found myself thinking 'I would like to do this again'. Then all the 40s started flying past - not as much fun, but still pretty good... It has been long enough that I have forgotten how horrible it can be!"

Hurst will be working with Joe Lacey to get his new Guillaume Verdier-designed Pogo S4, Seahorse, due for delivery in March.

From the mid-1980s, Hurst regularly competed in the Admiral's Cup, his last having been on the British team's ILC 40 Group 4 Seahorse Astro in 1995. He was attracted to the Class40 because of the quality of the boats, the calibre of the competitors, that today includes the cream of the Figaro fleet, but mostly because of the tight racing. Today he mostly races J/80s and his Finn dinghy, and while the Class40 is not a one design, it is a box rule, so close.

Entry for the 50th Rolex Fastnet Race opened on 11 January 2023 and now stands at 489 in number.

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ENDS/... James Boyd/RORC