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America's Cup

MUMBAI TO GOA OCEAN RACE?

Ocean racing is the pinnacle of deepwater or ocean sailing. It is the ultimate test of man and machine in an arena that can be extremely hostile and may sometimes endanger life at sea. Why would one voluntarily get exposed to this?

People go ocean racing for the same reason people climb mountains, run marathons, race to the North Pole or expose themselves to other outdoor extremities.

Ocean racing is complex because of its many variables. Firstly a suitable yacht is required and secondly a specialist crew needs to be selected to race it. How do you get started?

Some people state that in yacht racing the main difference in campaigning a one design racing yacht like a J24 or a 70ft maxi is the scale of the exercise. Leadership, planning, team qualities and good seamanship are essential ingredients in either campaign. Sailing skills will ultimately determine the level of success. True but not true.

Ocean Racing is a highly technical sport which makes it substantially different from one design racing. The yacht itself is subject to a wide variety of technical challenges ranging from exotic construction methods, to various options for

the configuration and construction of the rig. Operating her (yachts are referred to “her” and “she” in nautical jargon) involves intelligent electronics, sophisticated weather forecasting, navigation and racing tactics.

Because of the elements in the open ocean and the very limited chance of someone coming for your assistance, safety gear and survival equipment become mandatory on racing yachts participating in offshore events.

The Royal Ocean Racing Club (RORC), widely accepted as a leading light, has institutionalized specific categories for different types of offshore racing and each category requires specific, mandatory safety gear as well as required number of crew with current licenses to operate such equipment.

Crew needs to be equipped for the elements they face and it requires a choice of optimal technical gear and clothing. Last but definitely not the least people must be fed and



fed well if they are expected to deliver high output under difficult circumstances.

As you may see, today's skipper has no hope to master all these subjects and he must rely on specialist team members to complement his knowledge and to raise the skill level of the team. In days gone by, a good racing skipper would almost by definition be a prima donna, today you would find him (or her as the case may be) more of a primus inter pares.

It is understandable that with the variety of tasks ahead, crew selection is of utmost importance. Sailing skills are still the primary requirement to win races, but the candidate must also have a balanced character that fits in a team as well as possess the physique to be able to meet the extremities that will occur under way.

How do you create a winning formula?

A successful campaign starts long before the starting gun of the race. Preparation in all aspects of the challenge is the key to winning.

Because the yacht chosen will make a difference, using a design office who has designed proven race winners



can prove of tremendous value. Their ability to optimize a design for specific weather patterns and sea conditions will pay off in a big way.

A reputable shipyard with a proven track record of building ocean racing yachts will further enhance the depth of your campaign. The integrity and sophistication of the construction will determine the speed potential of the racing yacht and their experience in building ocean racing yachts may give you the leading edge when the going

RIDE THE WAVE

gets tough and the less well built yachts suffer early gear failure. Whilst yacht designers like to build as light as possible, experienced yacht builders know where not to compromise for the risk of failure.

Watertight bulkheads, hull reinforcements to take the load of rig and keel even in the worst circumstances, efficient and easy use of bilge pumps, correctly located safety gear are only some of the issues that come to mind as no brainers, but are often found to have been inadequately addressed when building the yacht.

Because the motor of your ocean racing yacht is the wind, your sailmaker is a key player in the success of the yacht and your campaign. Sailmakers sail on a variety of different yachts and learn all the go fast techniques in different yachts. They provide the horsepower that gives the yacht the 'umph'.

On the circuit, the experienced crews usually win over the novice crews even though the latter may have the bigger budgets. Experienced crews often know what works under a variety of different circumstances and are in a better position to handle problems like gear failure or sudden bad weather. The game does improve with experience but unfortunately this also creates rock stars and prima donnas who do not always guarantee your team wins and usually spoil the atmosphere for the rest of the team with their egos.

Teams are not created on paper. Crew selection is the deciding factor between winning and losing an offshore race. The wet, restricted and often cold space on an ocean racing can destroy morale, lines of command and any chances of success. Efficient teamwork can only be achieved by practice and crew compatibility. Good crews

make mistakes like any other crew (as could be seen in the last America's Cup!) but it is the skill level to correct these mistakes under difficult circumstances that distinguishes the men from the boys!

And whilst we see more and more professional teams racing in sponsored events, ocean racing is still predominantly an amateur and Corinthian sport! What is next?

Having found your pedigree ocean racer, having selected a winning team and having honed your offshore skills at club racing level, the question begs what race you should go for. My immediate suggestion would be to pick a classic ocean race close to the area you regularly sail, although that may not always be easy. The Classics are spread around the world. The Fastnet Race is the ultimate Ocean Race in the Northern European waters. The Transpac is a wild down-wind sleigh ride in the Pacific Ocean. The Sydney Hobart keeps the antipodean sailors on their feet. The Bermuda race is the challenge for the US East Coast yachties and the China Sea Race tests the emerging skills of the Asian offshore sailors. It is usually not too difficult to charter yachts in these areas that are prepared for such races and allow you to step on and go!

Whilst there are other offshore races, these are true classics, each with a different challenge. The ultimate one? That is a hard call because these races are so different in their make up. Fact is that they attract annual fleets of both Corinthian and Professional sailors in a wide variety of yachts.

I like to put the challenge to you and ask you where in India an international offshore sailing race should be initiated, Mumbai to Goa??

Go for it, you will not regret it! **IB**

Author

Bart Kimman

is a yachtsman by passion. He grew up in a yachting environment and developed his sailing skills from a very young age. He sees the emerging yachting scene in Asia as a great challenge and is keen to assist the new boaters to get on the water!

