

A Drheam story!

The Drheam-Cup is a class act from start to finish with interesting and testing courses designed for different types of boats – including a rapidly growing IRC fleet – and a festival atmosphere at both ends

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Few offshore races rise to prominence as quickly as the Drheam-Cup, which is now a key feature of the French offshore racing calendar. The fourth edition notched up 134 entries in 2022, with IRC classes representing 50 per cent of the fleet. The event organisers are now looking to the next level, with an enthusiasm to grow the IRC classes further.

As well as top-class competition on interesting and testing courses, competitors benefit from the buzz festival atmosphere in the start and finish ports associated with any large French event that includes all the important offshore classes: IRC, Figaro 3s, Class40s, Ocean Fiftys, Multi 2000s, Open Large Monohull, Imoca 60s and Ultime trimarans.

At the outset founder Jacques Civilise had a vision for three separate races that all start together on the same line off Cherbourg-en-Cotentin, then all finish around the same time at La Trinité-sur-Mer in south Brittany. That's why there's a 600-mile course for IRC rated yachts, the Multi 2000s class for smaller and mostly older multihulls, Figaro 3s, SunFast 30 and Classic Yachts. The Mini 650 class has also been invited for the next edition in 2024 and will race the 600-mile course. The 1000-mile course is for Class 40s, Ocean Fifty trimarans, Open Large Monohulls and Imoca 60s, while the longest course at 1,500 miles is for the Ultims.

All fleets initially head west from

Cherbourg, then across the English Channel to the Shambles east of Portland Bill. From here they sail west along the south coast of England to Wolf Rock, where the different courses split. The Ultims go north to the Isle of Man, then the Fastnet Rock and down to a mark off Bilbao. The 1,000-mile course heads straight to Fastnet Rock while the remainder immediately turn south, outside the Ushant traffic separation scheme, round a turning mark in the Bay of Biscay and on to the finish.

It's a format that immediately proved successful and the race quickly built a strong following. All the courses test competitors over a wide variety of conditions, wind angles and strengths and have tactically demanding sections. Winners are therefore always teams that are strong across a wide range of conditions.

The event takes place in even years when there's no Rolex Fastnet Race and is timed to be a logical extension of the La Trinité-Cowes and Cowes-Dinard-St Malo races. These are both part of the RORC overall season's points and this year also constitute the IRC two-handed European championship. Together the three races make a trilogy of events that can be completed in a three-week summer tour, with a bit of time off for those who need to catch up with work or want to spend time with their families.

The start is in mid-July, typically

All of the key offshore classes are represented at the popular Drheam-Cup, from Figaro 3s (above) to Imocas (top right) and an increasingly large IRC fleet (right), plus Ocean Fiftys and Ultims. The start line is split into sections to keep the fleets apart

just after the Bastille Day celebrations that mark the start of the long French summer holidays. This is important context: the main focus, of course, is in providing top-notch racing for some of the best offshore teams in the world. Yet a key reason for the event's rapid rise to success is that it also recognises the importance of sharing the experiences and pleasures of offshore racing.

Civilise conceived the race, the full name of which is now 'La Drheam-Cup / Grand Prix de France de Course au Large' as an inclusive event for all the important offshore classes, from production 30-footers to Ultims, that will be a lot of fun for everyone on land and at sea. Jean-Luc Denechau, president of FF Voile, the national governing body for sailing in France, has already recognised it as a legendary event that sits in the international landscape alongside the better-known classic events such as the Rolex Fastnet, Middle Sea, Sydney Hobart and Caribbean 600 races.

The last edition of the Drheam-Cup was already on the RORC programme, though it didn't count towards the series points. It's hoped that will change for the 2024 event and Civilise is already in conversation with the RORC racing department.

This is part of a move towards encouraging broader participation in the Drheam-Cup, particularly among the IRC fleet. The race has already

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done well in this respect, with competitors including Franco Niggeler's very well-known Italian Cookson 50 *Kuka 3* coming from as far afield as the Mediterranean.

However, Civilise believes there's scope for many more: 'We would be very pleased to have more English teams next time – we hope to have a big flotilla of them and of other foreign boats from further north.'

Despite France's frequent domination of offshore race results, other teams have a long history of success in the Drheam-Cup. The 2020 race, for instance, saw Sam Goodchild's first major Figaro 3 victory, while the IRC two-handed podium was an entirely foreign affair comprising Belgian JPK 1030 *Expresso* and two British Sun Fast 3300s, *Gentoo* and *Leyton*. Sam Davies won her first ever solo race in the Imoca class in 2018.

Last year Goodchild took victory again, but this time with his Ocean 50 *Leyton*. 'What a fight with Seb (Rogues) and Erwan (Le Roux),' he told reporters at the finish. 'Each one had their little moment in front, but fortunately I was the one who got it at the finish. I don't know what state the others are in, but I'm not fresh at all. What is certain is that I didn't let go of anything. I'm proud of myself with what I gave. Even on a Figaro stage, I've never slept so little.'

Franco Niggeler's Cookson 50 *Kuka 3* won the IRC division, fresh from a victory in the Round Ireland

Right: the fleets all start together but sail different courses from Wolf Rock to La Trinité: 600 miles for IRC and most other classes; 1,000 miles for Class40s, Ocean Fiftys, Imoca 60s and maxi monohulls; 1,500 miles for Ultims



race. 'This was a very interesting race,' Niggeler said. 'We had both little and a lot of wind, especially last night when in the storms we had 35 knots. It was a real Mediterranean climate, very pleasant, but always with wind and a lot of downwind. It's a wonderful regatta. The weather was great, the race was beautiful, the organisation was great. What more could you ask for! We really want to come back.'

Next year, classic yachts are also welcome and will race using the IRC vintage rating system. 'We can give them a separate class with their own ranking,' says Civilise, 'and we are hoping to see some beautiful big boats in the fleet.'

How big could the event become? The only brake on expansion is the ability of the two ports to host the fleet. That's not a problem in Cherbourg, where there's plenty of room. La Trinité is more restricted for the very biggest boats, but is able to accommodate so many typical IRC size racing yachts that there will not be pressure to cap entry numbers in the foreseeable future.

Another important element, alongside Civilise's desire to

continue developing the event to attract more boats and a top-quality fleet is the prologue, called the 'Drheam-Trophy', support for the 'Reve de Large' opération (Dream of Offshore). This two-hour race before the main event is designed to inspire local children from Cherbourg, who will race on board about 25 boats selected from among the whole fleet. This is clearly a part of the project that's close to Civilise's heart as it's the city where he learnt to sail himself as a teenager.

In 2024 the start of the main race is scheduled on 15 July. However, competitors are welcome earlier and entry fees will include four or five days of berthing in Cherbourg, thanks to the city whose mayor Benoît Arrivé is a big supporter of the event. The prize giving takes place in La Trinité-sur-Mer on Sunday 21 July, where mayor Yves Normand is a keen IRC competitor. Entry fees also include free berthing here until Sunday 21 July, encouraging teams to enjoy the port's wonderful ambience and swap stories of their races.

For more information about the event and how to enter, visit en.drheam-cup.com