

Rules of engag

Dave Hollom has never been one to leap to the conclusion that all that glistens there surely be gold...

Dennis Conner used to say (probably still does) 'Bet on self-interest'. The recently released Protocol for the 34th America's Cup is a case in point. On the surface it looks very equitable, with challengers having what looks like a fair say on appointments to committees and so forth. But as even-handed as that is, and you would probably have to leave that to a good lawyer to pronounce upon, the underlying message of the Protocol is one of self-interest.

No matter how much say you have in the running and management of the event, if the basic rules of the competition are unfair, that influence has very little effect on the outcome. In choosing multihulls with wing sails the defender has an inbuilt advantage available to no other challenger, other than possibly Bertarelli – if he should decide to challenge. BMW Oracle have two to three years' experience of large inshore multihulls and nearly as long with large wingsails, so they would have been fools to choose anything else for the competition. They have a giant head start.

It is actually worse than that. All that talk about looking at a monohull and a multihull rule and having trials of both types was surely to put the opposition off the scent. Until the challengers know the type of boat, never mind the minutiae of the rule, they can hardly do any worthwhile research and any research they do would have to cover both types and would thus be diluted and lack focus.

The defender, on the other hand, would surely have decided immediately after the last match that, if the next event was in multihulls with wing rigs, they would have this huge inbuilt advantage and decided there and then that this would be the format for the next match. They thus have had six to seven months to do further research into multihull and wingsail performance. That is six to seven months not available to the challengers, in addition to their already mentioned two to three years' previous experience. It is also probable that, if not the final details of the rule, certainly its major points have been known to the defender for some time, so that they



Left: Larry Ellison drives as James Spithill directs onboard USA in Valencia on the way in from Race 1 at AC33. At this point the two knew the Cup was won. The big fear (right) about AC34... will one big multihull prove plain faster than its rivals, producing a high-tech but boring procession similar to the one seen last February?



could have been busy looking at alternative design paths for at least a further four months before the challengers.

If you know you are going to defend in multihulls with wing rigs you also have first pick at the available talent in these two spheres. It all sounds very fair to have a clause in the Protocol allowing designers to work for more than one challenge up to a certain date, but if you have already signed up the cream on an exclusive contract, you are not giving very much away.

The only really fair way of deciding the rule for the next event is to have a meeting of all interested parties, as was done in 1989 to formulate the International America's Cup Class rule (IACC). Then everybody at least starts from the same point.

As a matter of interest, isn't this just what Ernesto Bertarelli did last time – post-2007 – in an attempt to create a rule for a new higher-performance Cup monohull?

While much was wrong with the protocol proposed for that match, at least the formulation of the rule was fair and

democratic. Trouble was some interested parties were not allowed to attend because the rest of the protocol was unacceptable to them. This time we have the reverse of that situation with the majority of the protocol probably being acceptable to the challengers, who are now getting a pretty raw deal regarding the rule itself.

Where, one might ask, in all of this was the Challenger of Record, who is meant to look after the challengers' interests?

It would seem that if you have a Challenger of Record as compliant as Mascalzone Latino appear to be, you don't need a paper yacht club. This is meant to be a mutual consent challenge and that

'He had the calm confidence of a Christian with four aces'

Mark Twain

ement (4)



implies that a majority of the potential challengers, who the Challenger of Record is supposed to represent, consent to the terms of the Match. At least one prospective challenger claims that not only have they had no contact from Mascalzone but that their own emails are not replied to.

This lack of fairness gets worse. If you have an inbuilt advantage both in sailing experience and design time, why give the competition a chance to catch up? The clause restricting the amount of sailing you can do achieves that end. If you can't practise as much as you would like, it makes it that much more difficult to catch up.

Ostensibly this restriction is to reduce costs, but I don't see how it saves very much at all. Practising with soft sails costs money because every time you tack you wear the sails out. However, barring accidents, a hard sail will last virtually indefinitely. True, the bearings and the sheets and winches will require maintenance but in the scheme of things this is a minor cost. The big costs – the wages of

the team members, sailing, maintenance and design – will not stop because you are not sailing. So where is the big saving?

Similar cost-saving rules in Formula 1 make more sense because engines and tyres are extremely costly, have a limited life and thus require replacing or rebuilding, but perhaps more importantly you need a separate testing team of race engineers and mechanics and so on. You end up, in effect, with two racing teams, one to race and one to test; so if you ban testing, other than at Grand Prix when you can use your race team to run the car, a lot of your running costs are genuinely halved.

However, I wonder how much of even this ends up as a saving. In any competitive mechanical sport you surely spend up to your budget, which will depend on how much you can raise through sponsorship and other sources. If you save on running costs I suspect that you just spend more on R&D and computer solutions for the problems that you used to solve through physical testing. Or you are able, in the

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Fremantle 1987... the most reminiscent about sailing regatta of all time? There was no magic involved; as long as there's plenty of wind and preferably waves too, then any regatta that involves well-sailed and similar large yachts will be a spectacle

GILLES MARTIN-RAGET

case of motor racing, to sign better and so more expensive drivers.

If you have already raised your budget or are confident that you will do so, are you really going to say no to prospective additional sponsors? You will surely take their money and find a way of spending it to give you a competitive edge over your adversaries. Ferrari's budget is double that of most of their competitors and I suspect that this differential remains the case even after the so-called cost-saving measures.

To digress for a moment, the only way to have a totally fair competition in a technical sport is to have every team on a fixed budget, but that would be virtually impossible to enforce. If it were possible, however, it would allow each team to allocate its own fixed spend to wherever it considered it would do most good. For instance, one team may spend more on R&D and design and another more on operations – drivers and race engineers and so on, or, in the case of boats, crew, both shore and sailing. But their total spend would be the same. This might sound a little socialistic but bear in mind that the most successful teams would inevitably raise more money and their surplus (profit) would be greater and that is pure capitalism.

If money saving is the name of the game why is it mandatory to purchase and compete in the AC 45 class? In previous events a syndicate either owned or needed to purchase an AC boat to train on, and therefore the Acts, as they were then called, made some sense because they gave a team a chance to sail an AC boat in anger and gave sponsors greater exposure. I guess the same will apply once some new boats to the new AC 72 rule are on the water.

Now, however, no boats to the new class exist. Everybody will be busy researching and building the first of their two allowed raceboats but they have this added distraction and expense of campaigning an AC 45. Yes, it would be useful for the sailors to get some experience of multihull racing but the Extreme 40 would surely achieve this aim at much less cost.

I also happen to think that it's a mistake

not to allow shrouding when the new boats finally appear. The world loves a mystery. Tell somebody that they cannot see something and they will move heaven and earth to see it. It is all part of the build-up. It gives something for the press to talk about and build up into a story. If you knew the end of the story why would you read the book? It is called showmanship. Mind you, perhaps the most interesting bit that you would like to hide, the rig, would be almost impossible to conceal. And I suppose when you fly a hull all will be visible anyway. But only from a distance...

So the defender starts with a large inbuilt advantage. So what? There is nothing new in that. It has always been thus and probably always will be. As Harold Cudmore would say, 'Be Jesus, it's a dilemma; a real dilemma. Dat's the America's Cup for you.'

But can that advantage be overcome? Of course it can but it won't be easy, but then a competition like the America's Cup was never meant to be easy. If it was, you would probably take up golf instead; if you hadn't already done so. It's no good whingeing, you just have to get on with it and look for chinks in the defender's armour. For every disadvantage there is a corresponding advantage. It may not at first be plainly obvious but it will be there. You just have to look for it and if you look hard enough you will find it.

The first problem will be to put together a capable design team. There aren't too many multihull designers around so if there are quite a few challenges, which I doubt, they may well all be spoken for.

'Barring that natural expression of villainy which we all have, the man looked honest enough.'

Mark Twain

However, I reckon that a good monohull designer will have no problem producing a fast boat to the rule and, because he is coming to the problem from a different direction, he may well bring things to the table that the multihull designer might miss. I hasten to add that if the roles were reversed and a monohull was being designed the multihull designer may well bring things to the table that the monohull designer might not.

The design of the wingsail is probably not as difficult and daunting as it might look. It is just a model aircraft wing on a much larger scale. You would need a good structures man but the aerodynamics should not be too difficult. Handling it without damaging it will be the biggest challenge but there are ways of doing that.

In his initial AC34 presentation Russell Coutts said that this edition of the America's Cup was for the Facebook generation not the Flintstone generation. It sounds good but in truth catamarans are not remotely new. They have been around almost as long as man has gone down to the sea in boats. In 1875 Herreshoff embarrassed the members of the New York Yacht Club by roundly beating them in his catamaran *Amoryllis*. However, for a number of reasons catamarans have never proved popular, which begs the question: is it wise to try to popularise an event with a type of machine that has never been popular and probably never will be popular?

Although fast, catamarans do not look fast on a TV screen and they are by no means the state of the art in sailing. The future, if speed is the aim, and that aim is questionable, lies in foil-borne craft. Also, high-performance monohulls such as International 14s and 18ft skiffs are now as fast or faster than similar-sized multihulls and they really do look as if they are motoring, even on a TV screen.

In reality, this edition of the America's Cup is neither for the Flintstone generation nor the Facebook generation but is for a generation somewhere in between which, in itself, is probably no bad thing. To be successful it should appeal to the widest possible audience. However, in the fairness stakes, I wouldn't go as far as to say that it makes Bertarelli look like an angel, but it does make one rethink the events leading up to the last DoG match and ask just who was right and who was wrong?

Perhaps Mr Bertarelli and his advisers were not as bad as many of us tended to think at the time? 'Pot calling kettle black' springs to mind as well as 'Be careful what you wish for'. But be thankful for small mercies. At least we don't have onboard motors or canting keels.

Remember Dennis Conner: 'Bet on self-interest... it's always running.'