

## **REVIEW 2007 – International J/24 Magazine**

### **INTERNATIONAL J/24 ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND**

After two busy seasons, Ireland's J/24s had a quieter one in 2007, with highlights the successes by young sailors in All Ireland keelboat, J/24 National, and J/24 Match Racing Championships.

A couple of Corkmen featured. Young Stephan Hyde, Royal Cork YC, won the Student World Keelboat event, became Irish National J/24 Champion at Lough Neagh SC in September, was nominated, and went on to become the All Ireland Champion keelboat helm a few weeks later. This annual event, only for selected top helmsmen, is organised by the Irish Sailing Association. Evidence of its high standards include that the runner up, Maurice O'Connell - also RCYC - was one of several Olympic hopefuls competing, and had been 2002 National J/24 Champion.

The other more mature Corkman, Flor O'Driscoll, the National runner-up, later won October's J/24 Autumn Championship at Lough Erne YC. Taking this trophy, a fine cased full model of a J/24, concluded a good season for Flor, who bought Hard on Port in late 2006. His other victories included September's Midland J/24 Championship at Lough Ree YC, and first in the J/24 fleet at July's Dunlaoghaire regatta on Dublin Bay. Stuart Harrison, LNSC, in Marcus Isherwood's Jadore, LEYC, won April's Spring Championship at Carrickfergus SC on Belfast Lough, and David Taylor in Taz, CSC, took J/24 honours in the Royal Alfred YC's Baily Bowl event in May.

### **National and All Ireland Championships**

Lough Neagh SC hosted Ireland's 28<sup>th</sup> National J/24 Championship, on the largest lake in the British Isles with excellent courses set for top class racing by Robin Gray, a highly regarded race officer from Ballyholme YC. These non-tidal open waters, with easy depths for setting buoys, are well suited to keelboat events. Stefan Hyde's victory was hard fought, with the finally decisive place changes happening only in the very last beat of the tenth of ten tight races over three days.

Stefan's earlier helm honours included World Student Keelboat Champion. The J/24 Association nomination him as National Champion to ISA for selection to a place in the All Ireland contest among the island's very best helms. Stefan commented that the J/24 national championship had been the most competitive and best managed that he had recently experienced. But, both event and race officer were in Northern Ireland, thus to standards set by the UK's governing body, the Royal Yachting Association. The Republic's ISA found difficulties in recognising the status of the J/24 event and its race officer for top All Ireland selection. The J/24 Association, an all Ireland organisation, suggested to ISA an escape from ISA's difficulties. ISA accepted the nomination as a 'gesture to the sailors in the J/24 class'. Stefan went on to win, a triple win-win-win outcome for him, J/24s and ISA, whose gains included another excellent race officer for its national panel.

### **J/24 Match Racing**

RCYC hosted the 2006 ISAF Nations Cup match racing final in Irish J/24s loaned by owners in eight other clubs across the island, from Northern Ireland and in the Republic. That Nations Cup, highest-level international event in Ireland for a decade, was a huge success, and demonstrated that J/24s are excellent match racing boats at world level. At local level too, as was shown by 2006's first Irish J/24 Match Racing Championship, won on Carlingford Lough by Mary O'Loughlin's women team that later represented Ireland at the Nations Cup on Cork Harbour.

Again in 2007, the second Irish J/24 Match Racing Championship, was another great success for Carlingford SC on a sea lough between Mourne and Cooley Mountains. Popular winners were a home crew from Carlingford Sail Training Centre, which teaches keelboat skills in J/24s. Graeme Grant, senior instructor, with a crew of young keen trainees, took championship honours defeating experienced teams that came from around Ireland, Kilkee to Carrickfergus.

## **Activity Statistics**

2007's total of J/24s in Ireland remained 68, with a third in Northern Ireland, and two-thirds in the Republic, coastal and inland. International J/24s are notably widespread across Ireland, as they are worldwide. Robin Eagleson represented Ireland at 2007 J/24 World Council in a club on Lake Garda, where Italy well matched Irish hospitality at the 2006 Council in Lough Erne YC and organised by Robin for delegates from Japan, Australia, North and South America and Europe.

Ten clubs are associated with the J/24 class, that is have hosted J/24 Championships in recent years. Some J/24s are based at ten other clubs, most recently Malahide YC, Western YC on the Shannon Estuary, Clifden SC on the Connemara coast, and, in August, on Lough Derg, inland.

Fewer attended J/24 events in 2007, perhaps a programme with dates too close in early and late season, and perhaps also that ebb and flow of involvement that affects all human activity.

## **Westerly and New Owners**

In August, an enthusiastic crew, Anne Barrington achieved an ambition to own a J/24. She and Paul O'Brien bought Simon McGibney's J/24, as he was moving to England. Renamed JeJoon - based on French jejeune meaning novice - this Italian built J/24 is the first on Lough Derg, a large lake near Limerick along Ireland's longest river, the Shannon. As J/24s are wont to do for over a quarter century past, JeJoon has been turning heads in the Derg's autumn keelboat racing fleet.

Another achievement worth a mention came in October. All season, work pressures kept Stephen Bradshaw (Jibberish) and Shaun Sowden away from J/24 weekend events. But they got there for the season's final event, the Autumn Championship, hosted by Lough Erne YC and sponsored by Waterways Ireland, the cross-border body for Ireland's inland waters – third time for this sponsorship, indicating the importance and status of J/24 events on the lakes of Ireland.

With Stephen helming and a new recruit to J/24s on the foredeck, Mark De Fleury, they took Shaun Sowden's Jorvik to win the special prize for older Westerly built boats. Top Champions are important in any class, but so too, and perhaps the more so, are those scores of ordinary J/24 owners and crew like these whose enjoyments and achievements rank elsewhere in the fleet.

## **President's Swan Song**

Due to family health difficulties, for the past couple of years I have been shedding commitments, in sailing and in other interests. Reluctantly, these must include the post of President of the J/24 Association of Ireland. In the best interests of the Association, 2007 must be my final year as President. I seriously lack the resources of time and commitment needed to do this job properly.

Highlights over almost ten years include a threefold increase in Ireland's J/24 fleet and the building of an enjoyable, competitive six event annual circuit, the Silver Anniversary 25<sup>th</sup> Irish National Championship, the 2002 European Championship, where young Anne Marie Shewfelt helming, with Sandra Dillon, Judy Anderson, Olivia Cosgrove, and me as owner-ballast, took Jeriatrix to win the Westerly cup, and the Women's prize at the 2002 European Championship.

There was also the key part played by Ireland's J/24s in the highest level sailing event in these islands in over a decade, ISAF's 2006 Nations Cup grand match racing final. I am both proud and humble to have been the leader of the best bunch of social and sailing people in Ireland.

I thank them all, and look forward to many more seasons in Jeriatrix on homewaters, Lough Erne, and away at J/24 events, for sailing and social fun as an ordinary class member.

END

Michael Clarke, President J/24 Association of Ireland 2007