

Sailing

CHARTER CRUISING ISSUE

The Beauty of Sail

FASTNET

Racing to the rock

October 2015

Slow, slow Fastnet

With a nasty reputation for stormy seas and blustery winds, the Fastnet Race has thrown it all at ocean racers for 90 years. But this year, the sailors aboard the record number of 356 boats drifted across the starting line in front of Royal Yacht Squadron and spent the first 24 hours floating on the rare calm waters of the Solent.

The Rolex Fastnet Race, organized by the Royal Ocean Racing Club, sends racers on a 603-nautical-mile trek from the start off Cowes, down the English Channel, passing the famous landmarks of The Needles, The Lizard and Land's End, before heading out across the Celtic Sea to the turning mark of Fastnet Rock, and long return leg to the finish in Plymouth.

When the breeze did arrive it was accompanied by driving rain, mist and drizzle. Called mizzle by locals, it's a cold soaking precipitation common in the southwest reaches of the United Kingdom. The race eventually became true to form, with a classic beat to Fastnet and run back to the finish off Plymouth.

First to cross the finish line was the trimaran *Spindrift 2*, with a time of 2 days, 10 hours, 57 minutes and 41 seconds, more than a day outside the race record she set in 2011. It would take four more days for the final boat to cross the finish line, with the Dehler 32 *Picolini* claiming the pickle boat honors.

The battle for line honors in the monohull fleet between the 100-footers *Comanche* and *Leopard* and the 88-foot *Rambler* came down to the wire, with *Comanche* crossing the Plymouth breakwater a mere four and a half minutes ahead *Rambler*.

"It was honestly one of the most bizarre races I've ever been in my life, starts and stops and people being left behind for dead and then all of a sudden they are sailing around you—it was phenomenal," said Ken Read, *Comanche's* skipper.

Comanche's elapsed time of 2 days, 15 hours, 42 minutes and 26 seconds was nearly a day off record pace.



Mike Slade's 100-foot maxi *Leopard* slowly makes the turn around Fastnet Rock off the Irish coast in August. The wind fills in by the time the classic S&S 53-foot yawl *Stormy Weather* of Cowes reaches the rock, and she powers through the waves, below. Rolex/Kurt Arrigo photos

"It was a light air race. It took us forever to get around the rock," said *Rambler's* owner George David. "For us to be within a few minutes of *Comanche* is remarkable."

Taking overall honors was the JPK 10.80 *Courrier du Leon* from France, skippered by Géry Trentesaux.

"The Fastnet is an endurance race, like the 24 Heures du Mans. It is not important how you start, but how you finish," Trentesaux said.

It wasn't just the new racing machines that had all the fun, as evidenced by the battle between the classic S&S-designed yawls, Matt Brooks' 52-foot *Dorade* and Christopher Spray's 53-foot *Stormy Weather* of Cowes. *Dorade* won back to back Fastnet Races in 1931 and 1933 and *Stormy Weather* won the race in 1935. This year, the two boats rounded Fastnet Rock together and match raced all the way to the finish, with *Dorade* crossing the line 18 minutes ahead of *Stormy Weather*, and both boats corrected out to second and fourth in IRC 4 and seventh and 11th overall respectively.

"It was give and take, great competition and proper match racing," Brook said. "Second in class for a boat that is 85 years old is a great result, considering that the boat was last here in 1933."



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