

IRC in France in 2018

1. Overall Market appraisal

a. Races

PropIRC notes a significant difference in IRC fleets and evolution between the South and West coasts: the championship in the Mediterranean shows sustained and constant activity on the current format while in the Channel and Atlantic, the fastest-growing racing formats in IRC are double handed and offshore races will crewed races, although maintained face competition from Osiris (French handicap system mixed with ORC Club).

IRC is perceived as 'high level' and Osiris appears as being the breeding ground for medium to small size cruising boats on coastal regattas, attracting some IRCs.

SER certificates (reduced cost IRC certificate for a single event), taken by the organization or by the owner, remains little exploited.

Still, UNCL new Atlantic championship has been a success with a good number of participants.

b. Clubs

Clubs struggle to maintain volumes of participants. They have to deal increasingly with too numerous short classes (Crew, solo, duo, IRC groups, Osiris groups) requiring more staff on the water while volunteers numbers reduce. They absolutely need a simple and attractive solution to grow the number of participants.

c. Boats

IRC continues to lose boats and certificates. There is an overall feeling that being competitive in IRC requires both financial resources (new sails every year) and high level of crew with additional complaints about the presence of professionals. These professionals can be either declared ones (Group 3) or super experienced people (i.e. Gery Trenteseaux) who can be de facto assimilated to professionals.

In Britany, Osiris continues to take market share from IRC: Reasons are both the strong support of French Sailing Federation as well as boats who never win in IRC and have more chances of success in Osiris due to the lower level of the fleet.

No identified loss of share in the Med for now.

A new trend in boat design is an increasing number of IRC boats equipped with ballasts which must be considered for the future.

Analyser les victoires entre nouveaux et anciens bateaux (Voir Ludo & Basile).

If we focus on two major events on each area:

SNIM: Archambault's designs (A40, A35, JPK (10.80, 10.10), Jeanneau's (Sunfast 3600 & 3200) are often victorious, which does not preclude older and more cruiser-oriented designs from reaching the top 10 with race wins (J133, Grand Soleil 43, First 40, Dehler 38, Imx40, Dufour 36, Elan 37, X34, Drac 10.70). On this second type of boat it is more the regularity of the crew that is lacking compared to the leaders.

SPI OUEST France: IRC 1 class is very racer oriented, which is not the case in the 3 other classes: 1 First 40 wins in IRC 2, a Sun Odyssey 40 finishes second at 1 point of the JPK winner in IRC 3, an X332 wins in IRC 4 in front of two half and in the top 10 of this class: Surprise, Feeling 10.40, Elan 333,

Dufour 34 which are old design racers (Surprise) and cruisers. These boats are well manned, prepared for the race (neat bottoms) but with mostly dacron sails.

Conclusion: Competition remains very open for all types of boats. UI fact, IRC has an elite image that does not correspond to reality.

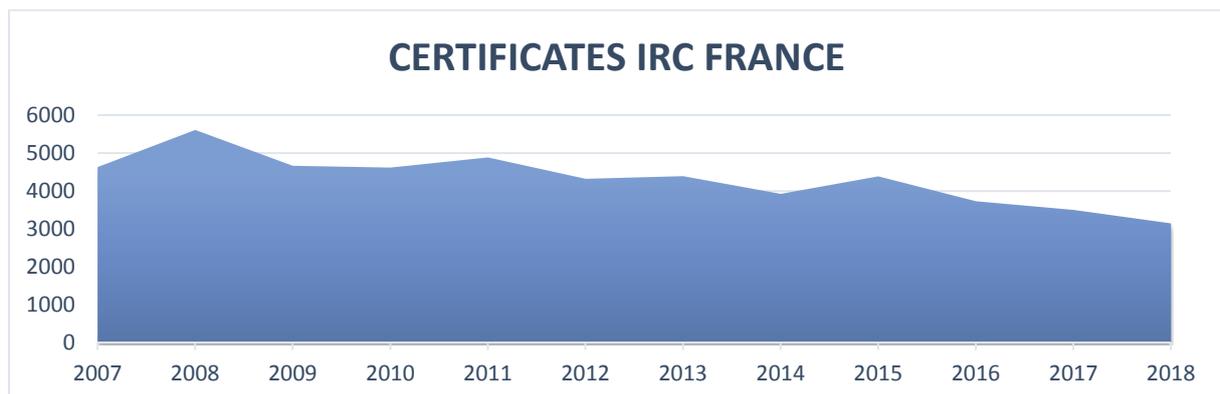
There are different levels in practice depending on the region, South or West:

Generally speaking, mid-September 2018, 670 French owners participated to IRC UNCL championship races. This is a small improvement in the trend, compared to 580 boats in 2017 (+16 %).

Crewed races:

- Mediterranean
235 boats took part in the 13 races on the programme (7 inshore and 6 offshore). The fleet is divided into 5 classes since the introduction of a Class 0 in 2017 and to date, perspectives for 2019 is to move a bit the limit between IRC 2 and IRC3.
- Atlantic
Spi Ouest France and mostly Armen Race have again been successful. The race from La Trinité sur Mer to Cowes in July didn't have enough wind but is a good race to bring southern Atlantic boats to Cowes-Dinard. The new biannual pro-am race, Drheam Cup, selective for Route du Rhum has been successful with a mixed fleet of IRC, Imoca, Class 40 and Multi 50 which fought across the Channel between La Trinité and Cherbourg. UNCL has been pivotal to the birth of this race which is planned to happen in 2020 again 2019 will see the birth of a French coastal and offshore championship in Atlantic & Channel, bringing new dynamics to IRC in France. Depending on boats location, in order to avoid long and costly deliveries, there will be a choice of races, including some RORC races.

2. IRC Certificates issued:



Number of IRC certificates on 21/09/2018: 658 versus 665 at the end of last September so a stable number of certificates year to year. Note that it includes some boats with 2 certificates for crew and shorthanded.

There has been 90' new French owned IRC boats in 2018 representing (13% of the IRC fleet 2018), excluding Short Handed certificates and SER certificates (60 SER certificates average, same as 2017)

3. IRC UNCL organisation

UNCL service has significantly improved in 2018, proven by the reduction of number of complaints. This due both to a better organisation with Ludovic ABOLLIVIER becoming the general Manager of UNCL IRC Centre de Calcul and the efficient support of Basile DESPRES on the field as well as in communication.

4. Efficient communication

UNCL has made significant efforts and investments, coordinated with PropIRC one. 2018 has seen a big improvement of UNCL website for the IRC part: Information has been updated and polished, services are much clearer and the look and feel is far more attractive.

Over 800 publications per year have been done, supported by UNCL which has pushed races' information before the event, offering almost real-time coverage and results, easing regional championships tracking.

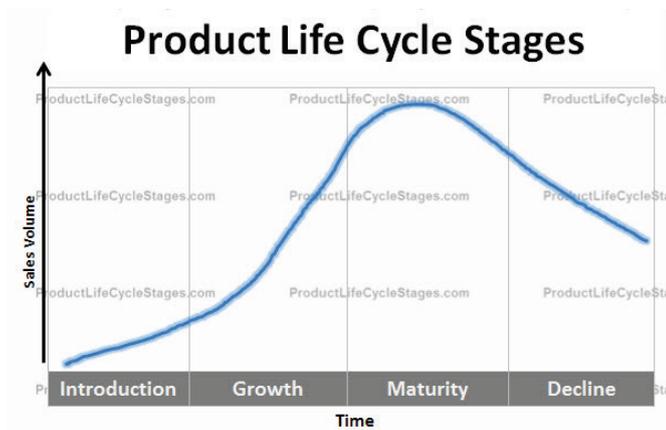
PROP-IRC has changed its Facebook name to a much simpler address, IRC Club House.

As a result of all this, traffic has improved as well as number of subscribers up to 2287 members, growing at + 11% versus last year.

5. Strategic analysais

As seen above, IRC is gradually losing its influence in France and we belied they are ways to revert the trend.

Through history, every rating rule has followed the same path from growth to disappearance on a Gauss curve similar to any product of any business sector as shown on the graph below:



Applied to the world of sailing, here are the 4 stages

a. Introduction

A number of boat owners gather in a pub and decide to launch a new system, believing that it will provide fairer results than the previous system at a lower cost and easier to use. As they are a homogeneous group, it works and attracts others.

b. Growth

Once others arrive, there is a migration from the previous system and enthusiasm prevails. This trend pushed clubs to use this new rule and it is a win/win situation for all.

c. Maturity

At some point, some owners start to argue that the rule is not fair enough and should be improved. They tend to blame the rule which is a minor point compared to the contribution of the competitiveness of the boat and crew to the winning results. In fact, at the same time, others have started to invest more than others to improve the competitiveness of their boat and to be sure to succeed, they hire better crews, eventually professionals. Any research of a solution for the return of cruisers and Corinthians should be a key factor in all IRC political and technical works (see point 6 below).

d. Decline

Out of this population, a group of owners want to start another system, leaving the current rule which gradually decline.

Where do IRC stand at the moment on this diagram?

Definitely at the maturity stage but with a significant difference from the diagram above which is that its maturity is far longer than any other one before. And there is a good reason for this: IRC has continuously adapted to changes appearing in boats' design, construction and equipment. We sincerely we thank all those who have contributed to this.

One of the reasons why some corporations or brands have disappeared (i.e. Kodak) is a mix of established habits and positions, fear and reluctance to change.

In fact, it is a matter of risk management: Is it safer to stay as we are and fine tune eventually or do we face a significant paradigm shift requiring a complete reassessment of our beliefs and principles? IRC is facing this alternative right now and there are different perceptions within the IRC organization about this.

6. Proposal for next year

To get out of this situation, we believe that IRC must consider 2 different factors:

- Grow the number of boats by recovering lost market share
- Seriously consider current evolution of boat designs

Number of boats

Recovering market means gaining back boats currently racing primarily in ORC Club, namely Osiris in France.

Although we agree that IRC must remain as one single rule, it must be easier to use by clubs and Corinthian owners willing to compete but so far feeling that there is no room for them under the current IRC.

PropIRC has asked to UNCL Rating office to propose a solution for 2019 and is willing to do a national test in France next year.

This question will be discussed in a national IRC seminar in Marseilles early November, focussing on finding a solution which would involve clubs. It should offer them a solution which would not require any action from those owners who would simply be given a simple TCC.

Any solution must avoid to publish simplified certificates to avoid any confusion with a real IRC certificate and make sure that IRC certificate owners will not compete in the Corinthian class to avoid cannibalization form high end to lower end.

We believe that ti could be of interest with a lot of clubs both those using IRC and willing to bring new Corinthian boats as well as clubs not currently using IRC.

Results will be shared at 2019 IRC congress which will then be in a position to decide whether it has some future for the entire IRC world or not.

Design evolution

Considering the design evolution of the most competitive boats, the critical factor is the change on composition of the apparent wind of some new fast boats in which the proportion of speed versus true wind is far much bigger than before, impacting strongly on foresails shapes and sizes. Alike in multihulls, there is less and less downwind tacks, sheets being tucked much more to suit with smaller angles. These changes are linked with hull designs as well as appearance of foils and ballasts mainly. IRC must be fun and fair. Speed is attractive to younger generations and IRC must consider this trend, but not at expense of fairness of the rule,

7. Conclusion

PropIRC believes that IRC, although still the best rule available, has room to improve, by reinforcing its creativity and reactivity – not at expense of its reliability and cost - in times when digital make change happen much faster than ever before, requiring to change our pace.

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