

2020 IRC Congress Report from Hong Kong

It has been an incredibly difficult year for Hong Kong beginning with the political protests in the summer of 2019 through to the current Coronavirus pandemic.

Whilst the protests didn't directly affect the racing scene in fact there was a strong case that "being on the water" was the best place to be. It did throw in logistical challenges of never quite knowing how or where you could move around HK and if you would encounter the confrontations between protestors and the police. At times, getting to or leaving your vessel was difficult.

That continued to rumble through to January 2020 when the current Coronavirus issue rose to the forefront. That led initially to limitations on the number of people that could gather together to ostensibly control the spread of the disease but had the dual effect of curbing protest gatherings. The limits imposed gradually increased to the point the major clubs in Hong Kong all of whom are on recreational leases for a peppercorn rent from the government were dictated to close their "sports facilities" so all racing ceased, boats stored on the hardstanding would not be launched. Unless you were lucky enough to have your boat in the water and a way to access it (clubs also stopped their ferry services) to moorings you were effectively confined to land.

We have been lucky enough that racing resumed a month ago albeit with social distancing rules applied, minimal contact between boat crews, no social functions or prizegiving's. It is hoped that it will continue.....

The planned HK IRC Nationals was successfully run in early March, luckily just before all racing ceased. The format of having each segment run by one of the 3 major clubs made the organisation challenging. However it was a worthy compromise to allow all the clubs that run IRC racing a hand in the event. Unfortunately the planned overnight race didn't receive a Marine department permit so the event consisted of day racing only. It is hoped that another event can be organised, perhaps on a biannual basis.

Talks continued with the HK Sportsboat association to encourage a rating switch from SMS to IRC that ended in a vote at their AGM, regrettably to continue with SMS. I believe the choice was made on purely on financial basis. Despite a generous offer from the RORC Rating Office on fees and support from the HK administration to ensure an easy measurement / application procedure the costs still were greater than SMS. The association is dominated by aging Magic 25's that are seen as the budget way into local sportsboat racing, they are the greater supporters of SMS (though would likely prefer one design racing if given a choice) until that dynamic changes I do not think the Sportsboats will change to IRC.

The number of IRC certificates is down on past years, though the decline has several causes the racing scene is still strong, new boats are still arriving. There are a number running trials and amendments as they seek to improve their competitiveness. As the coronavirus pandemic recedes into the past it is quite likely we will see numbers bounce back.

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