

Three custom
racer/cruiser owners
tell us why IRC is
working for them.
BY DAN DICKISON

Building For IRC

The enthusiasm with which owners of existing boats have embraced IRC is encouraging. More than 570 boats in this country were issued IRC certificates in 2006, and those vessels range in style from an Island Packet 40 to a swing-keel 86-foot maxi, to *Ticonderoga*, the classic 72-foot Herreshoff ketch.

However, the best sign the rule has gained a foothold on this side of the Atlantic is that a few owners are building, or have built, new boats specifically designed at competing under the rule.

To get a better idea of how the rule is being embraced at the grand prix level, we surveyed three owners who have either recently built a new boat or are awaiting one on order.

Larry Huntington's Ker 50 *Snow Lion* is a true IRC racer/cruiser.

Larry Huntington, of New York, N.Y., has owned his Ker 50 *Snow Lion* for less than a year, and his crew have set impres-

sive standards. Fewer than three weeks after taking delivery of the boat, they won their class in the 2006 Bermuda Race. Since then, the boat has proven competitive in various inshore contests, including the American YC Fall Regatta.

What was the boat's genesis?

We started this project with a dual-purpose boat in mind. We wanted a boat that was easy to sail with just my wife and myself on board, but would also be competitive with a full crew. Because we don't have runners or overlapping jibs, it's an easy boat to sail.

Our boat has a full cruising interior, including two enclosed heads, a proper galley with a three burner stove and oven. We also have an onboard heater, and a cabin table permanently installed. The interior is designed so that the forward head and the forward cabin can be closed off as a suite, and there are also two aft cabins

that can be partitioned as well. In the main cabin, we have settees, and the backs of those are designed to pivot and act as upper bunks. It's very comfortable down below. So, we do the competitive events with a full crew and we cruise with family and friends.

How did you feel about *Snow Lion's* performance under IRC this past season?

We're extremely pleased. The boat is very stiff. It slides through the water with no fuss, and it gets up to speed quite easily. And, it's very competitive upwind with the TP 52s. Because it has a very simple rig—no running backstays and a permanently mounted bowsprit instead of a spinnaker pole—it's a very easy boat to sail.

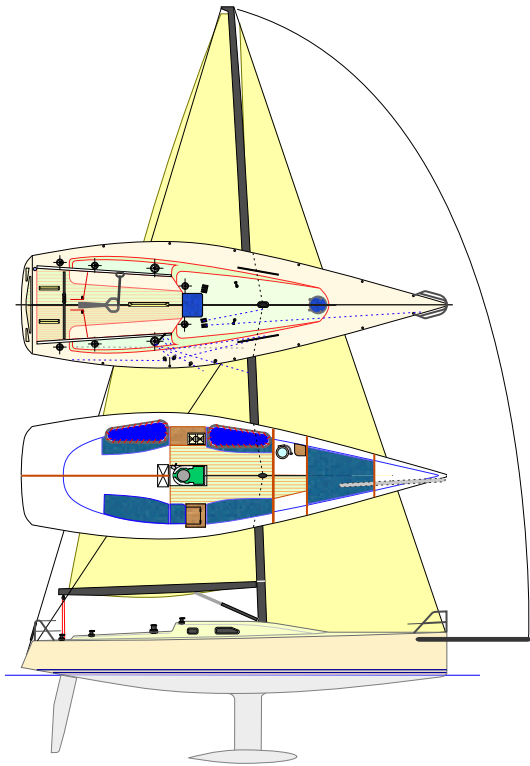
You've competed under IRC with a number of different boats. Do you feel that racing under this rule is competitive?

Yes, extremely so. There were a

number of new IRC boats this past season, but also a full fleet of competitive TP 52s, roughly the same size as our boat. We sailed competitively against both groups.

Are there refinements you'd make to IRC at this stage?

The most fundamental point to



Henry Fretz's Corby 41.5 *Wahoo*, wasn't designed specifically for IRC, but it does well under the rule.

understand about IRC is that for the first time in maybe 30 years, it is possible to have a dual-purpose boat that is competitive. For so long you either had a race boat or you went cruising, but not both. The reason I got interested in IRC is that these boats are functionally now as they were when I was a boy. When you went to a regatta back then, you stayed on the boat. The IRC brings us full circle to that concept, and I think it's truly a boon to the sport.

Look at this way, this season there will be 50 new boats racing that have been built expressly to compete under IRC. That just didn't happen under the previous rule. So, it's pretty clear the sailing public—the owners really—are saying that this

works, and we like it this way.

Have you begun to get a sense of the competitive lifespan of an IRC boat?

I don't think I could predict that. This boat is one with no extremes, so I think it should stay in the sweet spot of the rule for quite a long time.

Henry Fretz, and his son Gus, of Kent Island, Md., took delivery of their all-carbon Corby 41.5 *Wahoo* three years ago. Built by Vision Yachts in England, *Wahoo* immediately made its mark in 2004, taking class honors at Block Island Race Week (six firsts) and Annapolis Race Week (two firsts and two seconds). Despite this early success in around-the-buoys contests, *Wahoo* was created with offshore racing as the primary emphasis. Its success in short-course events, says Henry Fretz, is testimony to the boat's all-around prowess.

Why a Corby design?

A friend of mine built a Corby 41 called *Barlo Plastics*. He sails his own boats just like I do, and I liked the design of his boat. I went over to Europe and met John Corby and I liked him. Also, Vision Yachts is a really good yard. At the time, they had just gotten a cancellation in their schedule. Ultimately, the people at Vision built me a beautiful boat.

The other reason I like this design is that I'm intrigued with masthead sailboats and non-overlapping headsails. I really wonder why so many boats go to fractional rigs and give up that additional area, especially on spinnakers.

How much input did you have in the design of the boat?

John Corby did the lines and the hull shape, but how it's laid out on deck and down below is more my design. The way we laid out the interior is totally different from any-

thing he had ever done. But now we have a legitimate racer/cruiser IRC boat. Unlike most contemporary designs, we have a full cabin house, and that helps down below.

Another area where we had input was on the keel. John initially proposed a vertical fin with an L-shaped bulb. But we ran the numbers on a torpedo bulb and that seemed to work out well. So, that convinced John to include our torpedo bulb keel instead. To me, it's the best keel in the world.

Also, my son Gus, who steers our boat, moved to Cowes for five months and supervised the construction of the boat firsthand. That really makes a difference on a project as big as this.

Why does the boat have a retractable bowsprit?

Well, you have to recognize that it adds six feet to the boat going around the buoys. Also, it's on hundreds of J Boats, so it's a proven concept. But, I'm not sure that I'd do it the same way today if I were to do it again. It took some convincing, because our project was the first boat that Corby had ever done with a bowsprit. And I don't think any IRC boats had yet done that. The trick, really, is building the right asymmetric spinnaker design, and these sails have gotten better and better.

Do you prefer distance racing?

Yes. We like to do long races. The around-the-buoys competition on the Chesapeake for boats like ours has nearly faded away. We have only five or six decent boats in our size range now. But also, I just love distance racing. Events like the Mac races and other long races. Going around a course with mile-and-a-half or two-mile beats isn't fun for me.

Given your preference for offshore racing, why go with a tiller?

It's a personal preference. We

like the feel of a tiller as opposed to a wheel.

Is there a reason you prefer a boat in the 40-foot range?

To me, a 40-foot boat is an ideal size. It's just easy to manage and still comfortable offshore.

So, why chose an IRC design?

This boat wasn't designed with IRC in mind. In fact, with IRC, you don't design to it, you just design good fast boats and the rule gives you a good rating. If you make a boat with a lot of sail area and good stability, the rule will figure it out. If you make an ultra-light flyer like the Farr 36, the rule will put the boots to you because that's not what it's all about. It's a good cruiser/racer rule.

We travel a lot with our boat, so we used to end up with four or five different ratings, but now, under IRC that's not happening as much. The rule is leveling that out. It's good to know where you stand. Under PHRF, I sail in the Chesapeake with a 3, but in New England I'm a 9.

Also, the IRC offers a better situation for people like me who import their boats. Under PHRF, when you bring a boat in from another country, it's random what you'll be rated. But under IRC, that doesn't happen.

John Brim, of New York, N.Y., has competed for almost five years on board his Farr-designed Carroll Marine 60 *Rima*, which was built in 1998 and optimized in recent years to compete under IRC. Now, Brim has a new boat under construction, which he's tentatively calling *Rima*².

What is the design emphasis of the new boat?

This boat is a Reichel/Pugh 55, and it's currently under construction in China by a joint venture between McConaghy, of Australia, and JinLi Composites, of China.

It's something like a TP 52, but three feet longer, with more freeboard and more accommodations below. It will also have more righting moment than a TP 52. We're expecting the boat to arrive in Newport in mid April, and then we have a full season of regattas.

We're anticipating a blend of windward-leeward events and offshore distance races like the Block Island Race, the Halifax Race, and the Stamford-Vineyard Race, as well as the New York Yacht Club Cruise next August. Our season really doesn't stop once the boat is in the water. We really like a mixture of inshore, closed-course racing under IRC and some distance events. Essentially, I wanted a multipurpose boat, so the new boat will have a galley, a watermaker, a fridge, and a dining table—racer/cruiser.

What other considerations factored into the new boat?

We wanted to get a boat slightly smaller than the 60-footer that we've been campaigning, to simplify our lives, yet we wanted it to be large enough to go offshore anywhere. Our expectation is that this boat will have the excitement of a TP 52, with the greater righting moment and accommodations inherent in an IRC boat.

So, why an IRC boat?

I greatly admire the TP 52 class, but those boats are a little Spartan for offshore work, in my view. The TPs are really an inshore, sponsored class located primarily in the Mediterranean, with only a handful of boats campaigning here in the U.S., so we felt an IRC boat would be more appropriate for the kind of racing we do.

What were the main priorities you established when considering the design?

We asked the designers to take into account that the racing on the East Coast takes place pri-

marily in lighter breeze. Reichel/Pugh designed a near sistership called *Yendys* that's being built now for an Australian owner by the same yard, but our boat will have a slightly larger rig because of where we sail. I don't want to say too much, but the designers have tweaked the design for the requirements of an inshore and offshore boat to make it appropriate for venues along the East Coast.

One of the reasons that prompted me to lean in the direction of this new boat is my admiration for several of the larger boat programs I've come to know. There are a group of owners with boats in the 65-foot range, notably Bob Towse with *Blue Yankee*, and we greatly admire their success.

Is there anything unusual about this new boat?

One interesting aspect of our new program is that the boat is being built in China and the spars will be fabricated in Argentina. The winches are coming from Italy, the sails from Nevada, and the electronics from all over.

How successful has IRC been in your view?

As we all have become used to the scoring in IRC, and more boats have become rated, we've come to agree that it's a pretty decent rating system. It's simple to use, and allows you to know where you stand during the race. And the advantages that some boats have over others in certain wind conditions tend to even out over the course of a season. As, more boats in the U.S. have now begun to be built to the rule, I think it's producing some interesting boats. They're interesting to look at and well-performing. The boats we're beginning to see aren't stunted in their spinnakers as they were under IMS. And, they're really more aesthetic boats.