

**(At last) a proper scandal**

A second measurement protest has been filed in the aftermath of the controversial events at the ORC European Championship in Greece – with things turning ugly amid allegations of misconduct. Not for some years has a serious case been brought forth to support such allegations in areas of measurement, but this one is based upon strong evidence and bears examination to ensure that ORC rules have the robustness to stand up to this level of pressure.

The Maurizio Cossutti-designed NM 38S *Scugnizza* has been a perennial champion in recent years in ORC events, including winning Class B in the 2013 world championships in Ancona. The team's strengths had appeared to lie in professional preparation, training and well-optimised sailing performances; so it was not a complete surprise to see them at the top of the leaderboard in the Europeans this year. But while two well-sailed rivals had been pressing *Scugnizza*'s Napoli crew hard on the water, they had made little impression on the scorecard on corrected time.

As per ORC policy, *Scugnizza* was inspected after racing during the event to ensure compliance with her certificate, and everything checked out fine within the measurement tolerances (2mm in freeboards, or 50kg in displacement). But prompting noisy speculation was an obvious stern-down, bow-up measurement trim which looked quite different to the boat's trim when racing.

Even accounting for crew weight, weight of sails and any portable equipment not aboard for measurement, something seemed well 'off' in the way that the boat's certificate displacement of 6,236kg was being distributed.

So calculations were run on the trim change based upon the boat's previous certificate, with the same hull shape file but using the previous displacement of 4,918kg (1,318kg less). These calculations indicated that a massive addition of weight would be needed in the stern of the boat (and elsewhere) to achieve the measured trim in Greece. A measurement protest followed.

Event measurers inspected the boat again but were unable to find evidence of additional ballast beyond the 125kg already listed on the certificate. And yet to reach the stern-down, bow-up trim required of *Scugnizza* to meet the certificate under which she raced in Greece would require 4-500kg added in the stern plus more weight added in the centre of the boat.

While the latter could (perhaps) be accounted for by adding lead into windows in the keel, the former could not be found. And everyone agreed that a lead rudder was unlikely... With no evidence, the protest was dismissed.

However... a few short weeks later at the Italian championships in Palermo, and *Scugnizza* was presented floating higher again, on or close to her original pre-Europeans trim. A new certificate was submitted the day before racing began and the 38-footer was indeed back to 4,918kg measured displacement... along with a GPH rating a whopping 17sec/mi faster. Compared with winning the 2016 European title, things went slow in Palermo, the sailors from Naples finishing 12th in a class of 40 largely local entries.

**Rabbit and hat**

A new measurers' report has since been compiled but nothing has so far been disclosed. Suspicions revolved around indications of interior bulkheads recently removed in the stern of the boat, beneath the deck in the dark recesses adjacent to the wheel well.

The plumbing for the wheel-well drain also became a popular topic of discussion... There is certainly enough volume available in these areas, in addition to the area below the cockpit liferaft locker, to accommodate a volume of water that in theory could deliver the trim observed in Greece at the Europeans...

These suspicions elevated the matter to a new level of concern, one that has triggered another protest with the matter being returned to a panel convened by the Nautical Club of Thessaloniki, organizers of the Europeans, to consider further action under RRS 69 under allegations of gross misconduct and a breach of fair sailing.

'To have the results of one of our hard-fought events put into question, when there is so much effort made in good faith by the organizers, sponsors and sailors to achieve and celebrate excellence in the sport we love, is both abhorrent and absolutely unacceptable to the ORC,' says the organisation's chair Bruno Finzi.

'We will completely and unequivocally support all the fact-finding necessary to resolve this disturbing matter so that it is made clear that breaches of our rules and the rules of the sport itself will not be tolerated.

'And while we regret this unfortunate situation, we are proud that our system gives all our competitors the online tools they need (ORC Sailor Services) to access certificates and cross-check the trim, set-up and ratings of their rivals.

'We will do everything necessary to protect the continued integrity of the ORC system.

'Now let's allow the process to run its course to provide answers, as well as lessons that can help us to discourage further attempts to win our regattas by any means other than fair sailing.' □



LA TALPA

We apologise for the picture quality but judge these shots at the ORC Europeans on their content not their quality (there are also a couple of 'fun' shots taken inside the 38-footer *Scugnizza* but our budget did not stretch that far). These shots are of the same boat under the same ORCi certificate at the same regatta. The trim in which she raced is seen right, the trim in which she was presented for measurement checks is seen left. Note the amount of daylight beneath the stem (*left*) and the dramatic stern-down attitude which prompted sarcastic observations about her fitness for sea. Weeks later she was re-certificated with a 'measured' displacement nearly 1.4-tonnes (sic) lighter, slipping from her European Championship winning 'pace' to being an also-ran at a domestic Italian regatta