



WIRTH M. MUNROE

MIAMI TO PALM BEACH
YACHT RACE



When a Tack Away from Convention Pays Off: A Revamped Wirth M. Munroe Ocean Race Surpasses Decade-Old Entry Levels

PALM BEACH, FL – (November 25, 2019) – Two years ago, the Sailfish Club of Florida’s Yachting Committee took a calculated risk. In an effort to revitalize interest in the club’s racing crown jewel, the Wirth M. Munroe Ocean Race, they decided to break with six decades of tradition and offer a two-course format rather than a single track. The revamped coastal favorite would give skippers the option of racing a 60-mile Classic course from Miami to Palm Beach or a 40-mile Sprint course from Fort Lauderdale to Palm Beach. Having already formed a partnership with the Storm Trysail Club and strengthened existing relationships with the SORC and the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club, the Sailfish Club was poised to innovate. After all, to build profile for the new-style race and manage the logistics of a two-start format at a high level, a significant team effort was in order. Fortunately, key Race Committee members, including Storm Trysail Club Vice Commodore Ed Cesare, the SORC’s Carol Ewing, and long-time Sailfish Club members Paul Gingras, John Brim and David Vietor all supported the move. The stronger partnerships also positioned the Wirth Munroe more prominently in the SORC’s Islands in the Stream Series.

The gambit has paid off. With two weeks left before the start of the 63rd edition of the Wirth Munroe on December 6, there are presently 36 boats entered. The last time race organizers saw that level of participation was in 2009. What’s more, the entry mix spans a broad spectrum of boats, from offshore race machines to cruiser racers to cruisers – there are even four of the hot new Melges IC37 one-designs entered, the class’

first offshore test. We sat down with Tom Bowler, the chair of both the Sailfish Club's Yachting Committee and Wirth Munroe Race Committee, to get his perspective on this year's race and the tack away from convention two years ago that appears to be paying off.

Q. You're making a little history this year, having surpassed 30 entries for the first time in a decade -- and still climbing. To what do you attribute the strong fleet?

A. We are delighted with the turnout so far and there's still time to enter. I think there are several factors at work in generating so many entries. We believe our decision two years ago to offer two courses -- the 60-miles Classic from Miami and the 40-mile Sprint from Fort Lauderdale -- has been key to generating participation. Feedback from skippers shows people like more choice. Our strong partnerships with Storm Trysail Club, SORC and Biscayne Bay Yacht Club have also been important in spreading the word, building the profile of the race, and raising the bar in terms of race management. And the Wirth Munroe's role as one of the marquis events in the Islands in Stream Series has put us in very good company.

Q. The fleet is looking diverse across a broad spectrum of boats -- from grand prix machines to racer-cruisers and cruisers. There are boats from several states and even one international entry. Tell us about the mix.

A. We think the diversity of the entries reflects our efforts to offer skippers course options, and that's a plus. There really is something for everyone. We are delighted to see the big line-honors hopefuls choose to start their southern swing with the Classic course of the Wirth Munroe. At the same time, we are excited by the debut of the Melges IC37 one-design fleet, the growing ORC entries and the continued strong PHRF fleet. And of course, we are happy to see our local friends in the ECRCA join us again this year. It's a great fleet across the board.

Q. You mentioned the new Melges IC37 one-design racers. They are generating a lot of excitement. Tell us about how that fleet is shaping up.

A. So far we have five IC37s entered, which is very exciting. They will be racing together under the IRC rating rule. This will be the first offshore event for the new class, so we are delighted to be making some history with them, too. We certainly expect to see tight racing among the new boats.

Q. The biggest growth in participation appears to be in the ORC fleet. What is happening there?

A. The boom in ORC entries is remarkable. So far we have 13 boats entered in the ORC class. Two years ago, we had virtually no one racing ORC. I think the ORC rule has appealed to skippers because it takes into account performance factors across a broad spectrum and rewards boats' overall performance. I expect to see this fleet continue to grow.

Q. Multihull participation seems to be softer than usual this year. Hasn't the race typically attracted a healthy number of multihulls?

A. Multihull participation has ebbed and flowed over the years. Last year we had four entered, including the spectacular ARGO, Jason Carroll's MOD 70, which smashed the elapsed time record for the race. We are always happy to see the multihulls enjoy our race, and were very pleased to see Tim Britton's Sea Cart 30 trimaran, "Tobiko" enter on the Classic course in the last few days. Here's hoping a few more multihulls jump on board quickly.

Q. Logistically, how does the Sailfish Club manage a fleet this size at its docks, with so many sailors all eager to enjoy the hospitality of the club's legendary buffet dinner and awards ceremony?

A. Our waterfront staff is the best in the business. Captain Vaughn Vanderwel, our Dock Master, and his crew have been working for weeks to relocate members' boats so we have open slips for visiting race boats. It is an enormous task that requires superb choreography, and we are grateful to our waterfront guys and our fellow members for making this happen.

Q. With 30-plus boats, how many people are you expecting for dinner?

A. We expect to see over 300 people for dinner. Our club staff, under General Manager John Newman is expert at these types of events. The food, the spirits – and the stories – will be top-drawer.

Q. Any last-minute words for the skippers and their crews?

A. Two things: First, please complete your ratings submission on YachtScoring.com immediately. We really need to see how our growing fleet is going to sort out and need

your ratings completed quickly to determine the splits. Second, sail fast, be safe and we look forward to seeing you at the buffet.

Please enter the race by signing up online at www.YachtScoring.com

For more information, please contact Sarah Gay at (561) 844-0206 or [Email](#)