

AUDI J70 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP: LETTER FROM VINCENZO ONORATO

Porto Cervo (OT), 13rd settembre 2017

The J70 Worlds is undoubtedly the finest event in the world sailing season. After a long family discussion, I managed to convince my son Achille, who usually races on Melges 20s, to race on a J70 as well so we could have some fun together and maybe in the evening take the mickey out of each other over a good glass of wine (red, of course).

Achille has never raced in the J70 class, he bought a brand-new boat and sent it to one of the yards of reference to fix some problems with the keel, as the class rules (C.8.1.C) stipulate. Then the boat, which I repeat had never been in the water before, was taken for its first rating which, as agreed between the seller and the international class, would be assigned during the initial checks. During these measurements a nonconformity was found in the keel, but the rating officer said that for him all that was needed to obtain the rating was to re-present the yacht with a new, conforming keel. Once we had the go-ahead from the rating officer, we purchased from an Italian supplier the keel of a new boat that was regularly certified by its French builder.

At this point the yacht was again brought before the rating officer within the time laid down by the Notice of Race, passed all the controls and obtained all the rating documents which made no mention of problems. All this happened, and the yacht was awarded its rating, at midday on Sunday, September 10. The timing too is important, but I'll come back to that later.

On September 11, after the skippers' briefing, well after the rating formalities were over and the fleet split into groups, my sons boat was in the Red group. The organising committee, at 7 PM, posted a notice that rejected the entries of seven boats because the Technical Committee had reported that these yachts had modified their keels, breaking class rule C.8.1. This is what happened. Incidentally, it's right and proper that appendages cannot be modified, but apparently last year at the San Francisco Worlds some participants were allowed to do work on keels that had been found not to conform, thus making it possible for them to race. I could also add that rating controls were rightly scrupulous for some boats but rather less zealous for others, but as Andreotti said, "you apply the law to your enemies but interpret it for your friends..."

I spoke of timing earlier, and it is to say the least singular that the organising committee, in other words the Yacht Club Costa Smeralda, took such a grave decision and announced it only hours before the first race.

Several weeks ago the Yacht Club Costa Smeralda had already refused an entry from my friend Pietro Manunta from Olbia, one of the founders of Mascalzone Latino, because it arrived after July 3, the final date, although the Yacht Club had the option of accepting it on payment of a penalty.

What was singular was that they persisted in their refusal even when we were told by friends taking part that they had withdrawn from the race leaving room for us.

At this point I presented to the organisation a formal request to allow my son to replace me at the helm of my boat, whose entry had been accepted. I did this because I wanted my son Achille to race in this magnificent class, where I will never withdraw my modest logistical support in transport. My request was rejected by the Yacht Club Costa Smeralda, the organisation, without giving any reason whatever.

It's a wonderful World Championship, but it started badly on dry land with seven competitive teams excluded, five of whom had put their boats in order (San Francisco docet), and arbitrarily excluding others who would have liked to take part: what's the point of writing in the Notice of Race that entries can be accepted after July 3 if you pay an extra €250? Perhaps because there would have been a third Mascalzone Latino racing?

It was organised dangerously badly on the water as well, with the ridiculous idea of having just one course for 180 yachts. It was certainly a decision taken with an eye to saving money, since it's well known that the Yacht Club is short of cash.

So we packed up our boats and left, even mine which could have taken part, but sailing is about fun, not just passion, and what happened was politics, only politics and nothing but politics. I have the honour to have been a member of the Yacht Club Costa Smeralda for some decades, and the great honour of being awarded the Club's golden pennant. But those were different times with different men. The Club was governed by the sadly missed Commodore Gianfranco Alberini, a true seaman and a true Commander. I left the club after his unfortunate death when he was replaced by a Milanese accountant whose only contact with the sea was the blue of the sealing wax blazer that he always wore like the shell of a snail. He very rarely went out on the water, but his outings were memorable for those who had the delight of seeing him in action. Once he tried helming a Farr40, succeeding masterfully in broaching her every time he tacked – and notice I say when he tacked, I didn't say gybed.

It would be amusing if Bonadeo, to dispel all this climate of tension and conspiracy, delighted us by taking the helm of a J70. I'll lend you mine, laddie, she's properly entered, you only need to wear your blazer!

Well, we threw away a load of money not to take part. The story will be continued in actions for damages in the civil and sporting courts. Isn't that what lawyers and accountants are for? To stop you sailing, and not the contrary.

Vincenzo Onorato