

Q&A - US SAILING ON RATINGS SYSTEMS

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What are Ratings Systems, why do we use them? Why do boats need to be rated?

As we know, not all boats are created equal. However we do know that during a race the objective is the same, each boat/team wants to get to the finish as fast as possible. Since some boats are faster than others, the fastest may get to the finish first, however the fastest boat may not have sailed as well as some of the slower boats that finished behind them. While the answer of who reached the finish first is obvious, the question of who sailed the best race remains. The solution to figure out who sailed the best is some form of handicap system.

Can you comment on the rating system that the Marion Bermuda Race uses?

For the Marion to Bermuda race the principal handicap system is ORR. ORR is the next evolution of AMERICAP. It is a Velocity Performance Prediction Rule. At US Sailing we maintain a file for each boat that includes a 3D representation of the hull keel and rudder, measurements of the rig and sails, and we also use sister ship, declared and or measured data to provide us with the stability for each boat. With this information we can calculate things like Displacement, Sail Area, Wetted Surface Area, etc. With this information we run a set of algorithms, the end result predicts the performance for each boat, at every wind speed and wind angle. The race organizers working with us develop a set of anticipated wind speeds and directions for the race, from this we develop a single number that is used as the handicap. A key thing to remember about ORR is that it is an entirely objective rule; there are no dials, knobs or factors to adjust when a boat is "too fast" or "too slow."

The Notice of Race for the Marion to Bermuda race also states that if more than 6 boats sign up with a valid IRC rating, a separate scoring division will be available. IRC is another rating rule, that uses measured and or declared data to develop a rating. IRC is used in many countries around the world and is administered by the Royal Ocean Racing Club of Great Britain. US Sailing works with the boat owners and measurers by acting as the hub for all data, questions and concerns on the way to RORC where the actual rating is calculated. US Sailing also keeps detailed paper files on each boat that are updated with any change a boat has made to its configuration. On an IRC certificate there is only one handicap number. This number stays the same if the boat is racing around the buoys or sailing a distance race such as the Marion to Bermuda. (Provided the boats configuration stays the same). The single number is easy to understand, and is about as simple as a rating can get.

Ratings can be a very hotly debated topic, one thing that is a rating certainty is that someone will always be unhappy with how their boat is rated. This is one reason to offer different classes/scoring divisions in any one given race. Offering more than one rating division also means it gives each boat a chance to win more trophies, which is always a good thing.

For anyone interested in learning more about sailboat ratings and the services provided by the US Sailing Offshore Office, please visit offshore.ussailing.org . For any questions regarding IRC that are not answered on the website, an email sent to IRC@ussailing.org will receive prompt attention. For ORR inquires an email sent to Offshore@ussailing.org will also receive prompt attention.

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