

## **RYA Press Release**

11 June 2009



**John Merricks II in action. Credit Paul Wyeth/RYA**

### **Sailors gear up for *John Merricks II* Fastnet challenge**

It is a big weekend for the crew of the RYA-run TP52 *John Merricks II* as the sailors make a final bid to land their place on the boat for this year's Rolex Fastnet Race.

As *John Merricks II* takes to the line for the 24-hour RORC De Guingand Bowl on Saturday (13 June), the RYA Keelboat Programme sailors on board know this will be their last chance to stake their claim to be selected for the famous Fastnet offshore.

*John Merricks II* has enjoyed a fruitful season so far, taking line honours and winning the IRC Super Zero class at the Cervantes Trophy and also securing line honours in the Myth of Malham race a fortnight ago, this time finishing third overall and second in class. She also took second in class at the Red Funnel Easter Regatta.

But with the 608-mile Fastnet, which gets underway on 9 August, the primary event of the boat's season no-one will want to miss out.

John Derbyshire, RYA Racing Manager, said: "We had two aims for the boat at the start of the season; a strong performance in the Fastnet and to win the new RORC Under 28 Championship trophy.

"The sailors, led by skipper Luke McCarthy, have made a very pleasing start to the season but now all attentions are switching to the Fastnet preparations and this weekend gives us one last chance to assess sailor suitability before announcing our Fastnet crew.

“Offshore sailing is so demanding in so many ways that we have to make sure the sailors we select are as equipped and as prepared as they can possibly be across the board.

“They have all been involved ISAF Offshore safety training that covers things like life rafts, flares, heavy weather sailing and medical considerations. But there are also a number of other factors we will be taking into consideration before deciding the final Fastnet crew.”

Among the selection criteria for the young crew will be their performances in *John Merricks II*'s offshore outings over the past two seasons, how they cope with sailing offshore for long periods of time in terms of tiredness and seasickness for example, how involved the individuals have been in the upkeep and maintenance of the boat and physical fitness.

Between 13–16 sailors will be chosen for the Fastnet crew and the team is set to be announced in the week commencing 22 June.

Two years ago the TP52's predecessor, the Farr 45 *John Merricks*, tackled one of the toughest Fastnets in living memory with an average crew age of 21. In challenging conditions, just 51 of the 300 boats that entered the 2007 race made it across the finish line while some opted not to even start the race because of rough seas and appalling weather forecasts for the Irish Sea.

Although *John Merricks* was one of those eventually forced to succumb to the conditions a number of the 2007 veterans, including Henry Foster, Nick Cherry and Scott Millar, will be looking to set the record straight this year if selected for the TP52 crew.

McCarthy added: “Many of the sailors have now had three or four years experience sailing in offshores on either the Farr 45 or for the past two seasons on the TP52, and we also have a really strong group of new sailors this year who will be looking to learn as much as possible from the more experienced guys.

“However, the Fastnet is so condition dependant, you are just as likely to finish 10<sup>th</sup> as you are 200<sup>th</sup> and we will be selecting a crew that we feel can best perform across the full range of conditions.”

## **Ends**

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