

# **THE INTERNATIONAL J/24 CLASS - A FUTURE STRATEGY**

*Presented to the IJCA World Council – October 4, 2008*

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. At the last World Council meeting in 2007, it was considered timely to look a long way ahead to position the J/24 Class correctly in the World sailing scene and safeguard its future. A small team, (Jim Farmer USA, Jorge Castillo, MEX and Remco Vandenberg NED) conducted an analysis of the Class strengths and weaknesses and made a number of proposals. This draft paper now attempts to expand this work, as a basis for acceptance at the WCM 2008.

## **AIM**

2. The Aim of this paper is to ensure the long term status of the International J/24 Class as the Worlds leading Global One Design small keelboat.

## **SCOPE**

3. The paper will examine the critical factors which determine the success of any Class. Many of these are interlocking and need to be coherent. It will make recommendations which if endorsed by the WCM will be taken forward in the evolving action plan. It is assumed that the reader is an experienced J/24 sailor, also familiar with the Class Constitution, Rules, Bye Laws and Ethos.

## **FACTORS**

4. The Boat Despite its age, the boat still performs and handles well compared with many other small keel and sports boats. It is also far more versatile, looks right and seems to attract long term loyalty from its owners. Furthermore, age in itself is not an issue, as seen in many other vibrant Classes of keelboats and dinghies throughout the World. The great strengths of the J/24 are a rigid One Design policy which has kept the older boats competitive and the racing close. These must be retained. Above all, it gives great value for money and this factor could be very significant during a difficult world economy for the next 5 years at least. That said, there remains a need to make the boat more attractive to current and future sailors, and measures to achieve this are:

- Continue to lower the all up weight for racing by removing un-necessary equipment.
- Reduce the complexity of the measurement process, both initially and at regattas.
- Carefully introduce new and widely available materials, for strength, durability and cost reductions.
- Enhance the visual appearance; the new interior mould is an excellent example.

- Consider limiting the number of new sails each year.

5. Distribution of Boats. The key facts are that we have over 5400 boats built worldwide, we have recognised NJCAs in 39 countries and 50% of the boats built are racing. In strengthening the Class we need to retain our current members and active boats, re-activate the disused boats and attract new build boats. Whilst the Americas, Europe Australia and Japan all have experienced structures to help achieve this, the obvious regions for Class growth, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific Rim and Africa, all need varying forms of assistance to develop their potentials.

6. Location of Boats. The first objective must be to find out where our boats actually are. The Executive Director is still finding boats in various places that the Class did not know existed. Recent examples include Grenada, the Dominican Republic Venezuela and South Korea. Even in England the Class still finds “lost boats” and has been successful in resurrecting several. It is proposed that every NJCA makes a big effort to track down and motivate lost boats, and that where national experience and support are not available, strong and established regional NJCAs should provide assistance. For example, if Japan and Australia could work together to assist China, South Korea and Singapore, this could lead the way to the first and successful Asian J/24 Continental Championships. Similarly, Mexico might provide the leadership for the Caribbean area.

7. Follow up Action. Once we have tracked down our boats, we will be able to offer advice and expertise, both technical and in sailing as mentioned in paragraph 16 below. Each case will have differing needs, but tangible support from the IJCA and NJCAs will be appreciated and motivating.

8. Builders. There are 3 builders in the world, 2 in the Americas and 1 in Europe. Each is only building a small number annually and profit margins are low. The fact that the older boats are still competitive, and that there are often plenty available, does not help. It is suggested that there needs to be a much more joint approach to Marketing the J/24, that is the Class and Builders working together rather than in isolation which has always been the case. In particular, there needs to be a serious discussion between the parties involved to try and promote the Class in the Middle and Far East Areas, examining the possibility of starting a manufacturing process there too, with perhaps the Class helping with the cost of a new mould..

9. Programming and Events Current activities provide a reasonable range of sailing and social events for the membership, but there is a need to widen the scope by providing more options. For instance, the Women’s Open is now established in North America, but a regatta of this nature is now needed in Europe and elsewhere. Other activities which could be developed are:

- A World Youth Championship

- A World Masters Championship
- An Asian Continental Championship
- A Caribbean Championship
- A “Mixed Doubles “ Regatta ( 2 Male, 2 female, Blade only and Crew max wt 280 Kg)
- A World Team Racing Event ( 3 boats per nation, held at the weekend after the Worlds )
- Match Racing (Whether successful in our Olympic bid or not)

10. Discussion It should be noted from the above that in no way should we interfere with the “Gold Standard” of our Class, that is a 400 Kg crew with a Genoa sailing in the Worlds in a selected and highly competitive fleet. However, given the adaptability of the boat, its wide appeal and an imaginative use of the NOR and SIs, events can be tailored to suit what people may want as their age, circumstances and aspirations change. In creating such events, a sizeable fleet in a particular location is needed and the USA is the obvious place to start. Furthermore, special events could be combined. As a thought, have a Youth Regatta at the weekend, a Masters on Tuesday to Thursday (retired people can sail mid week) and a Women’s event on the next weekend. This might be good news for a Yacht Club which would enjoy some continuity without the pressure of a full on World event. This combination type of event might also be attractive to sponsors, and we must not forget the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event in Newport Rhode Island which was outstanding. Overall, The Class needs to examine these ideas further and a leader from the WCM or EC is required to do this.

11. Member Co-operation. Given the reduction in personal time, the cost and length of time towing our boats and the need to consider the environment, the time may be right to promote further boat sharing programmes. In Europe for example, sailors from Sweden and England joined up in Crete and raced in a regatta there in a borrowed boat. In the USA, again some crew from a boat in Davis Island could go to Newport and team up for an event there, then return the favour for the MidWinters. This does require sound friendships, but is good socially, can help to overcome crew shortages and saves the long haul up the I 95 highway. This theme could also be promoted at Fleet Captain level, where fleets could arrange to loan boats for specific regattas. Another long-range example is the GBR boat whose helm was unavailable for the Worlds teaming up with a CAN helm whose crew was not able to attend. The result, everyone who could sail sailed, and the CAN helm did not have to charter or export a boat. In summary, there is certainly scope for members and Fleet captains to work together and plan more sailing with less logistics.

## CLASS ORGANISATION

12. Structure The Class Organisation and structure has remained essentially the same for many years. It meets the bare necessities of the Class but to achieve our aim there need to be several adjustments. The first is to examine the role of the Executive Director. If we wish him to do more, then we will need to fund more hours and refine his terms of reference. If we do not wish to do that, then we will need to strengthen the volunteer effort. This is particularly true in finding “lost” boats and communicating with the membership.

13. Marketing and Promotion (M and P) This is another key area. We now have a Marketing Specialist in the team, who has provided an excellent docket with which to brief potential sponsors. However, support is needed from every nation to utilise these dockets effectively. If we cannot get this volunteer support, then we should be prepared to contract a commercial sponsorship agency to do this for us on an incentive basis. However this may evolve, it is suggested that each NJCA provides a Marketing and Promotion person to work with that group’s Chair. A Global network is needed if we are to bring onboard a Global sponsor and retain that sponsor for some years. Similarly, for every event, large or small, we must ensure that it is reported quickly and highly visibly in the appropriate Media and Class Web sites. The 2007 Worlds in Mexico was a brilliant example of the Class, Organising Authority and Sponsors being brought together to create a long-lasting message on the success of our Class. By contrast, it was disappointing to note, for example, that the 2008 World Championship results did not reach our International Web site for nearly 2 weeks and that after prompting. That said, an excellent video of the event was produced by the host Club, and this in itself is a great advertisement for the class and should be given a wide distribution. Just like the M and P effort, it is believed that each NJCA should appoint a reporter to ensure the right visibility in all elements of the media. In conclusion, it is believed that the Class is still reticent in capitalising on its success and a more aggressive overall approach to Marketing and Promotion by the whole class is required.

14. Youth Development At present there are some good initiatives which are bringing young people into the Class. In the UK for instance, the UKJCA has underwritten the purchase of 2 J/24s for Colleges and these boats are now racing. UK Class members have also assisted in providing seasoned but serviceable equipment for the boats. It is believed that some of the older boats in other countries which may be under utilised could be re-generated in the same way. It is known that this has also been achieved in the USA where tax benefits can be a bonus too.

15. Technical. The Class is currently blessed with a strong ITC which now has well established procedures for supporting the Class both in Measurement processes and Rule Change procedures. Nonetheless, the workload is borne by a few individuals and they cannot reasonably be expected to maintain the present level of commitment. There exists a need for more and younger volunteers to come forward, particularly from the

developing J/24 nations, so that they can gain experience and knowledge of technical matters. We also need to bring forward the technical leaders of the future. If the additional volunteers can be found, then it will also offer more scope to support some of our newer owners world wide.

16. Training. The Class has no formal nor centralised training organisation, and this is probably correct. Some NJCAs have Coaches or Instructors, some with formal qualifications and some without. It is believed that NJCAs should have their individual training schemes, but the IJCA should be prepared to provide support and advice on a global basis. This is most important technically, but there are several highly skilled Sailing Coaches in the Class who could be invited to conduct training and a list of these and their availability should be held by the Executive Director.

17. Finance In recent years the Class has achieved a fairly stable global financial position, based on a level membership number, good housekeeping and the income realised from sail royalties. The cost of Class membership has been kept low and is good value, this needs to continue. Looking in more general terms, greater Class activity means more income, but more specifically, if we can create better events and attract more people, we may then attract more sponsors. In turn, this helps to sustain momentum and this is the sort of cycle we need to generate. The result could be greater financial resources to aid youth and training programmes. As mentioned in the introduction above, many of the elements in a successful class are interlocking and need to be managed in a coherent way, but all activities and initiatives must be underpinned by a strong financial base.

## CONCLUSIONS

18. The J/24 boat must evolve in a way which does not prejudice its core qualities.
19. The Class needs to find non-active boats and owners and re-motivate them.
20. The Class and the Builders should work together to promote more new boats.
21. Programming and events should be tailored to exploit the J/24s versatility.
22. Co-operation between members should be fostered for better participation.
23. The Class Organisation should be examined to better support Class activities.
24. A more aggressive approach to Marketing and Promotion Worldwide is required.
25. Further active measures should be taken to encourage Youth participation.
26. A larger pool of technically qualified members is required.

27. A formal training cell should be established to support the Class Globally.
28. The firm financial base should be strengthened.
29. Leaders and potential Leaders need to be recruited to implement initiatives.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

30. The ITC study measures to update the boat in an attractive and practical way.
31. A leader to be nominated to re-activate “lost” boats.
32. A nominated Class representative and Builders create a new build initiative.
33. A Review of Programmes and Events be undertaken to enhance utilisation.
34. All NJCAs should encourage beneficial member co-operation.
35. The Executive Committee and Executive Director examine the IJCA Organisation.
36. A plan for Global Marketing and Promotion of the Class to be developed.
37. A Leader to be appointed to Develop Youth Activities.
38. NJCAs to be invited to increase their technically qualified membership.
39. A Leader to be appointed to form a Global Training Cell.
40. The Finance Chair devise a Strategy to support WCM endorsed initiatives.
41. NJCAs recruit members to lead the implementation of agreed Class Policies.
42. The World Council should endorse this paper as a policy for the Class to adopt.
43. Recommendations which are accepted to be implemented within agreed timescales.
44. This paper be reviewed, amended and re-endorsed at each WCM.

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