

Modern News.

This is the second informal newsletter regarding progress with the Modern Fleet. The Modern Six Metre really emerged from 1979 onward, and in all we know of around 120 of these boats were built, largely in the America's Cup years of 79 through to 87, although a few were built in the 1990's.

Since then I am only aware of 2 new boats built to the rule, neither of which is currently seen on the racing circuit. The class has reached something of an existential dilemma, with the question being asked, is there something wrong with the Rule that means new boats are not being commissioned. Other articles in this magazine will address this question.

In the meantime I am pleased to report that the death of the Modern Six Metre Class is, it would appear, exaggerated. Although the Worlds held in Flensburg this year only saw 12 boats entered, as against a long term average of around 15 to 20 I am pleased and delighted to report that although the entry was not huge the standard of the racing was both high and very close. Typically at the windward mark 5 seconds was separating the leading boats and it was very unusual for an race winner to have a lead of more than 30 seconds. So the boats still provide some of the most closely matched keel boat racing available.

The real encouragement comes from the fact that several of the boats have now been upgraded, new masts have been installed, systems re-rigged and the average age of the competitors, particularly the owners, have fallen very significantly from the last 2 championships.

A willingness on the part of some owners to look at the way the boats operate has meant significant new solutions being adopted, with 21st century technology being applied to problems that historically had been addressed with 1980's solutions. For example some boats have abandoned the uber-powerful but heavy hydraulic systems used to move the mast fore and aft and replaced them with the latest free flowing cascading pulley systems. Not only is the weight saving significant but it also considerably safer, quicker and easier to use than the hydraulic systems. It also avoids the rather alarming noise of masts being pumped noisily forward on the rounding of the windward mark. Similarly the latest winches from Harken to name but one, are not only lighter but significantly more powerful than their similar sized predecessors, making the whole boat more manageable and pleasurable to sail.

We have found on my boat Valhalla that by questioning the role of all manner of historic systems we have managed to lose, we would estimate, around 150 kilos in weight, (equivalent after all to a particularly well fed human) which has not only brought the boat back to her original floatation lines, but might even allow the introduction of a little extra lead low down, either in the hull or on the keel. And perhaps most significantly the adoption of technology such as roller furling has meant the whole boat is much easier and more pleasurable to sail.

More generally in terms of ownership boats are now beginning to sell again and find new owners, and of a type and kind who promise to bring great enthusiasm and commitment to the class. For example I understand Rainer Muller in Canada has now bought 2 Moderns to add to his fleet of classics and this bodes well for the future of the Canadian Modern Fleet. In all Falmouth, the venue for the Europeans it is confidentially anticipated there will be

rather more than 15 Moderns on the start line, several of which will have been extensively refurbished. It promises to be the most competitive fleet since Cowes in 2007.

Speaking from my own experience these boats, given their size and sheer beauty still represent really good value for money, and whilst moving them is not cheap, with the right carrier, equally it seems to work quite smoothly. Overall it should be possible to acquire a race winning modern, complete with good quality sails and modern systems for around £40k all in. This compares with, for example a new Dragon (competitive life expectancy around 5 years) or a J 109 with a price tag well north of £100k. Encouragingly in the Moderns some of the oldest boats, dating back to 1980 are as competitive as later iterations, meaning choice of boat is usually far less important than the thought that goes into upgrading the systems, and that hardy old perennial, the quality of the team work!

So I think there is real reason to be optimistic about the Modern fleet and as always, if anyone wishes to seek advice from my experience of up grading Valhalla over the last few years I am more than happy to share some hard earned lessons. And of course the beauty of these boats is there is no monopoly on wisdom, whatever works within the rules is wholly legitimate and this gives considerable choice.

Paul Smith
October 2013
07887501441