

HISTORY INTRODUCTI ON

THE INTERNATIONAL
RULE - 100 YEARS OF
8-METRES

In May 1908 Major Heckstall Smith, secretary of the IYRU wrote: "The rules of yacht racing are now the same in all the countries of Europe. A few years ago a state of hopeless chaos reigned everywhere. Different systems of measurement and classification and different codes of sailing rules prevailed, and the average yachtsman was quite unable to master them all. If he was accustomed to race in England he was very much at sea when he visited Germany, and, similarly, he was apt to find himself high and dry on the coast of France. It was very disheartening, and the situation discouraged not a few from attempting to race beyond their own waters. Now this has been rectified. In 1906, at two conferences in London, a uniform Measurement Rule was agreed to. In the same year, in Berlin, the details of this rule were completed. The yachtsmen who had conferred in London were enthusiastic at their success, and determined to meet in Paris and agree upon uniform racing rules. Accordingly, in October, 1907, the sailing rules were adopted, and the International Yacht Racing Union was formed comprising all the maritime nations of Europe interested in yachting."

As Heckstall Smith wrote these words in 1908, I don't think anyone at the time could or would have expected that the International Rule would continue to produce some of the world's technically most refined yachts for the century to come. As naval architects learned more and more about the infinite number of variables that make yachts go fast, the International Rule yachts remained at the forefront of development, the complexity of the rule presenting an intellectual challenge that only the very best naval architects were able to master. Although the typical downwind speeds of modern yachts are higher, the metre boats are usually able to hold off most modern yachts when driving to windward. Uncountable yacht designs and classes have been launched in the past 100 years enjoying a typical life span of some 10 to maybe 30 years to then fade away in obscurity. So what is that something that kept the metre boats together and made them outlast all other rating rules in the history of yachting? Appearance helped, the yachts of the international Rule were generally agreed to be the most beautiful of all racing yachts, if she lost her racing edge then her pleasing lines would come to rescue and ensure a new lease on life as a pretty and fast cruising yacht.

Looks may have saved the old boats but that doesn't help much in the understanding why new boats were built. Was the magic attraction the unsolved mystery of the rule itself? What other explanation could be given for the fact that after some 500 individual 8-Metre designs by the world's best naval architects, that ultimate shape to beat all others has yet to be found?

I often wonder, if the perfect shape has not derived after a century of attacks and plots by the world's greatest naval masterminds, then isn't it fair to assume that no-one has ever fully mastered the infinite number of variables that shaped these yachts? So who am I to think I could explain something no-one ever truly mastered? It's probably better, or say, more elegantly closer to the truth, that the complexity of the formula is not indicated by the formula itself but in the infinite variables which influence the shape deriving from it. What was a fast and winning boat in 1908, wasn't capable of making that same impression 3 years on. Did that make the 1908 design a bad one? Boats were designed and built with the knowledge and instincts at the time, not years ahead. The secret of a great Rating Rule like the International Rule is that it worked like a puzzle, the only known quantity was the physical size but the number of pieces was unknown or known to be infinite.

What differed the International Rule from earlier as well as later rules? I believe Lloyd's had a lot to do with it, for sure no other rule before or after had these specific scantling rules included. Lloyd's specified construction methods, panel weights and materials. These seemingly static rules and numbers did however result in boats that lasted, avoided freak constructions and most importantly, shapes rather than materials employed have been, and still are dominant in the performance of the boats.

Knowing that my story is one of today, I have the luxury of being able to look back and start all over again. I'll try to navigate through a century of Metre boats, inevitably we need to pick an occasional buoy for a short brake to stop and stare at some of the technical intimacy, but I will try to keep these interruptions as brief as possible realising I am at risk of losing your attention. The Metre boats have been defined by the First, Second and Third International Rule in which the two most important factors remained the same: waterline length and sail area. The guiding principle was simple, longer boats are faster than short ones and, boats with more sail are faster

than those with less canvass. Knowing this the playing field is levelled by making the sum of length and sail area a constant. If you wanted to increase length then sail area had to be decreased, and if the thought was to go for maximum sail area then you had to pay for that by decreasing the length. If only it was that simple...., a great number more variables and measurements come into play.

1907 - 1919 The First International Rule

It all started with the launch of the first Metre boats in 1907 under what is today known as the First International Rule. Arguably these are the most exquisite beauties of our class. For example, a typical 1912 8-Metre displaces some 6.000kg and carries 120m² sail to windward placed on a narrow and easy driven hull with long overhangs. These boats still hold the ultimate recipe to make the hearts of the classic yachtsman jump. Right from the start the racing was most exciting and many prestigious trophies would be donated for racing these boats, most notably the Coppa d'Italia, La Coupe de France, The Kattegat Cup and The Canada's Cup and later for the Twelves, the America's Cup. The 8-Metre Class received Olympic status in 1908 and would remain the largest and most prestigious Olympic class until 1936.

Originally the anticipated shapes were such that, for instance an 8-Metre, would have a waterline of 8-metre but the formula was soon to be explored well beyond the expected limits. Length and beam counted equal in the First Rule so the first opening was an obvious one; reduce the beam and add the difference to the length. In hindsight the weight of sail area in the rule was too light and by tweaking girth measurements "cheap" sail area became available. No-one knew how far this could be carried but with every boat launched, the limits of extremities were stretched a little further. The game was a popular one, and within the first eight years over 140 8-Metre boats would be launched.

The pace in which designs followed each other was such that it seemed like a full scale tank testing. The Royal Norwegian Yacht Club at one point held a fleet of 120 Metre boats in one place, the majority coming from the hand of Johan Anker.

Ideas were tested full scale, some based on science, some pure gamble, some paid off, some didn't. The window of opportunity for some pretty extreme yachts was larger than

expected and the great success of the First Rule was probably therefore due more to the facilitation of good international racing rather than a ridged framework for yacht design. In the first seven years the boats grew some 10-15% in length, lost 20% of their beam and received some 40% extra sail area! Seaworthiness was the forgotten factor and the financial expense was staggering. What proved to work in those early years was mandatory Lloyd's plan approval and building survey, they ensured the yachts would be built to exceed their competitive life span and would serve as cruising boats after thus retaining some resale value. The flaw was obviously that factors less dominant to performance were treated equal to those that did which resulted in freak like trade offs which resulted in extreme designs. Positive technical developments came from Norway where Johan Anker pioneered the Marconi rig. Gaffs would quickly disappear from the podium and Anker soon realised that this type of rig was so efficient that he could trade sail area for again more length. Controlling the tall and thin spars was the next challenge to address as rigs would drop over the side regularly for the next 15 to 20 years. The hull shapes had stabilised at narrow over-canvassed boats, a far cry from the original intent. Time for change or to say goodbye, luckily the call for change prevailed and the Second International Rule took shape.

Second International Rule 1919-1933

As early as 1914, forums were held to find solutions to secure the future of the Rule but before anything could happen, priorities changed as the Great War intervened. In between 1917 and 1919 the Yacht Racing Union headed by Heckstall-Smith worked on developing the formula to something that would produce more wholesome yachts. This would result in the most radical change in the history of the rule as the beam would be discarded from the formula and replaced by a minimum of one foot per metre rating. (A pretty unique combination of the metric and imperial measurement systems as the minimum beam for an 8-Metre would be 8 feet, a 12-Metre, 12ft and so on.) Girth penalties were raised significantly and sail area was penalised much more severely. As the rule was young and only few boats had been built, the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp competed in two groups, the old and the new rule boats. The development in the first four years was again frantic with ideas tested to the extreme. The 1924

Olympics in Le Havre displayed the earliest wholesome 8-Metres the most successful being, Bera by Johan Anker, Emily by William Fife and BlueRed by Charles Nicholson. The shapes developed further with more emphasis on length and less on sail area with more draft and displacement to the shapes of the famous Aile VI and Hollandia who were the best boats at the 1928 Olympics. Naval architects now sought their advantage in the extreme ends as boats were stretched to gain sail area by reducing bow and stern girth measurements. The rigs developed, mast scantlings were developed and the maximum hoist of the jib was fixed at 82.5% of rig height. In 1927 the overlapping genoa was introduced taking full advantage of the unmeasured thus free headsail area aft of the mast. The rule was good and produced exceedingly fine boats and enjoyed tremendous popularity. The only agreed serious flaw remaining was the 1/4G measurement which resulted in insufficient keel depth and tender boats. Johan Anker's Silja and William Fife's Saskia are the best examples of how that was addressed by designing boats with more beam thus adding more form stability. In 1928 North America finally accepted the International Rule for the 6, 8, 12 Metres

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improvements could
was addressed.

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Third International Rule 1933-Today

As expected the 1/4G or midship chain girth measurement was dropped from the rule and the bow and stern overhang measurement instructions were changed to no longer measure from the covering board. The divider in the formula was reduced from 2,5 to 2,34 which deliberately did not fully compensate for the changes made. The consequence was that third rule boats became more seaworthy boats while the good second rule boats would remain competitive under light to moderate conditions. Without going in to the fine detail, the second rule boats have less righting moment but generally also have less wetted surface. In light to moderate conditions this allows them to stay with the fleet, especially down wind low wetted surface really makes a difference. In case of the top boats such as Silja and Vision, they remained fully competitive

under almost any conditions. The one thing that never really changed throughout the years was the cost, Metre boats would remain out of reach for most sailors and at the top level it remained very much the game of the rich and famous.

For them they were not the largest boat they could wisely afford, they were simply the boat they enjoyed to build, sail and race. Men like Baron Krupp in Germany and Marcus Wallenberg jr. in Sweden would order new 8-Metres every other year and the fierce competition for trophies such as the Coppa d'Italia, La Coupe de France and the Canada's Cup would result in new and often very fast designs. To name some of those top performers: Bagietto's Bona in Italy, Tore Holm's Ilderim in Sweden, Henry Rasmussen Germania III in Germany, Olin Stephens Iskareen and Arthur Shuman Venture in North America and Camatte's France in France. The Third Rule would produce almost 80 Eights in the seven years before World War II broke out. Within that small world of metre boat sailors, the crews would migrate between the 6, 8 and 12-Metres, that's how it was a hundred years ago, that's how it is today.

The Post war years

After the war, the available money was spent on rebuilding Europe and the heavy 8-Metres became a terrifically expensive boat to build. A new generation of boats, much lighter and with proportionally less sail area emerged. Somehow the Eights survived, no new boats were built but the old ones proved to be great for club racing. In Scotland a large fleet was actively raced on the Clyde and of course the Scandinavians, French and the Lake Ontario fleets remained active racing, although most of them ran on a shoe string budget. Eugene van Voorhis was the first to build a new 8-Metre in 1967, the awe inspiring Iroquois designed by Olin Stephens. She was to race for the Canada's Cup but due to a change of rules she never did. The result was that Eugene decided to sell one of his other 8-Metres, Iskareen, and shipped her to Scotland. This would be one of the most significant turning points in the history of our class. The story goes that one night at the Royal Northern Yacht Club, Eugene challenged the Scots for a race, not just a boat race but a battle between the old and the new world. Supported by a generous flow of whiskey the race was to be the 8-Metre World Cup, no-one expected it to be more than tremendous fun but as it happened it is now our oldest trophy

in modern times.

The trophy was to be a challenge cup and raced for, if possible once a year with a minimum of 3 nations competing. And so it happened that in 1970 a group of 8-Metres gathered on the Clyde to race for a trophy which was to become a new tradition in the class. Scotland gave Eugene a special welcome. Leaning against a furious gale and torrential rain, Eugene walked across the lawn of the Royal Northern assuming all would stay inside. He was greeted by his hosts with "Fine day for a boat race Gene". Shortly after six boats crossed the line; Silja, Christina (ex and now again Ilderim), Iskareen, Severn, Turid (ex Froya) and If. In great friendship the boats were raced hard with the Johan Anker designed Silja, owned by the Scotsman Dr. Weir, winning the first World Cup and Eugene van Voorhis making a close second. Both yachts were sold to Scandinavia and the World Cup would see them back as yachts to always be reckoned with.

In 1975, the next World Cup was at Sandhamn and again it was Silja who showed no mercy and took the gold. Finally in 1978 at the NJK in Helsinki it was Iskareen's turn to inscribe her name on the 8-Metre World Cup. She was the last classic 8-Metre to ever win the World Cup as in 1982 Eugene felt the time had come to ship his now 14 year old Iroquois across the pond to enter the World Cup in Sweden. With Eugene at the tiller, Iroquois brought the World Cup to the Rochester Yacht Club with a clean sweep. The following year the World Cup was hosted by the Royal Norwegian Yacht Club and again Iroquois successfully defended the World Cup. Of great importance to the class was the participation of King Olav V of Norway with his 8-Metre Sira. As IEMA President of Honour, King Olav of Norway recognised that the new breed of Eights could threaten the competition among the old boats and he gracefully donated the Sira Cup to be awarded to the 8-Metre built prior to 1960 with the best overall score in the 8-Metre World Cup. This trophy secured the interest of the classic Eights to enter the World Cup. The Sira Cup is still very much alive and has greatly contributed to the strength of the class today.

Meanwhile Joni Hertell, Eugene van Voorhis and Robin Clark took on the project for our class to regain its international status within the IYRU. The class rules were updated, an inventory of the fleets was made and a strong lobby started in London. It took some convincing to have our then 75 year old Class reinstated but with the support of Tony Watts and the

legendary Beppe Croce, the International Eight Metre Class was reinstated. We should never forget the tremendous effort made by our IEMA officers in those days which I believe has been instrumental to the following growth and success of our class as we see it today.

Meanwhile on the water, the two victories of Eugene van Voorhis and his Iroquois again provoked the class and new modern Eights were commissioned. In Sweden two new Eights were commissioned by Per Wermelin. The first one named Mr. E, was supported by the telecom company Ericson. She was designed by Pelle Petterson. Per soon sold her to Ron Palm and immediately commissioned the next Eight named Dolphin (now named Yquem) also from the board of Pelle Peterson. Claes Henningson had Golden Feather designed by Peter Norlin, she was more experimental taking a freeboard penalty and turned out to be a real light air flyer. In Canada the initiative was countered by Elwin Catheart who commissioned Octavia designed by Bruce Kirby while in France, Gaston Schmaltz commissioned Gaulois designed by Jacques Fauroux.

The latest victory of Iroquois in the Norwegian waters brought the 8-Metre World Cup to North America where in 1984, at the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, it was Octavia that brought the Cup to Canada. History repeated itself as Octavia was again a scaled down version of an unbeatable 12-Metre, this time Australia II showed the direction our class would go. And so, again, we enter a new era of the class and in the years to follow new modern Eight Metres were constructed including designs by Jacques Fauroux, Ed Dubois and Pelle Petterson.

Gaston Schmaltz's Gaulois designed by Jacques Fauroux triggered a further series of new modern Eights built in aluminium. The Rothschild family has a long tradition in 8-Metre sailing and as early as 1924, this famous family of bankers and fine wine, was racing the Eights with great success. Following the tradition in his family Baron Edmond de Rothschild commissioned the second Fauroux 8-Metre Gitana Sixty as his 60th birthday gift and immediately won the World Cup in Cannes 1986.

In 1988, the most spectacular entry to the class was commissioned by professor Sigfrid Svensson from Sweden. Based on Bruce Farr's 12-Metre Kiwi Magic, his Gefion was the brain child of the British America's Cup crack Philip Crebbin who persuaded Sigge to ask Ed Dubois to design a winner for

the 1988 World Cup in Sweden. Philip Crebbin was hired as project engineer and a star was born. In the hands of Philip Crebbin Gefion turned out to be unbeatable and he drove her to victory with a clean sweep at her first World Cup. Gefion continued her magical victory tour on both sides of the Atlantic and took the honours at another six World Cups, a record that still stands today. In 1989 and in 1990 Ed Dubois designed another 2 Eights that would win the World Cup; Sarissa and The Natural.

For some time a dark cloud had been hanging over the class as the modern Aluminium boats had not fulfilled the requirements by Lloyd's. The dispute came to a dramatic climax when in 1994 Jacques Mazet won the World Cup in Cannes with his Lafayette and Sigge Svenson filing a successful technical protest on grounds of non-compliance to Lloyd's. Lafayette had sailed an excellent series beating Gefion on the water but the outcome of the protest and the later appeal with the IYRU meant that Jacques Mazet could not take the Cup home. The result was that the Class not only lost Lafayette but indeed all aluminium boats, if the matter would not be resolved. Supported by TC Chairman Ralph Reimann and class measurer Guy-Roland Perrin, this was my first major challenge as an IEMA secretary and it would take until 1998 to have all boats, including other apparent doubtful cases back in the class.

The nineteenth edition of the 8-Metre World Cup in 1998 at the Société Nautique de Genève, was a turning point in the class. All aluminium Eights participated again. With an amazing drive and energy, Fred Meyer headed the organizing committee and was able to attract 28 boats to the waters of Lake Geneva including the brand new modern 8-Metre Spazzo, designed by the young German naval architect Juliane Hempel. Her Spazzo was built by Josef Martin on the shores of Lake Constance. He used the finest cold moulded mahogany and the best available materials in the true tradition of first class German yacht building. When building a new Metre yacht one seldom knows if a step forward has been made, only after her first series the potential of the new yacht will be clear. Spazzo held a promise but due to lack of preparation she was defeated by some of the older moderns. One thing Josef Martin surely and most importantly did was inspire the class. Rather than talk he did what many thought was no longer done, he initiated the next generation of modern Eights.

It was again Gaston Schmalz who took up the challenge and commissioned his close friend Jacques Fauroux to design Fleur de Lys. The result was a departure from the typical U-sections, Fleur had a mild V-shaped section forward and a beautiful clean exit, no bustle, no creases, she was the slickest modern boat I had ever seen. And Fleur was fast, dominantly fast, trashing the 38 strong fleet in Helsinki in every race and every day. Fleur de Lys repeated her performance at the World Cup in La Trinite sur Mer but by then she started to get competition again. Yquem owned by Jean Fabre was completely rebuilt with a new keel designed by Van Oosanen in Holland and Lafayette owned by Jos Fruytier as well as Aluette, owned by Peter Groh had fitted a new Ian Howlett designed wing keel under the boats which proved to be very fast. Neither had the sail area of Fleur but in Geneva Lafayette was able to win the World Cup, win without winning a single race but with a very consistent result. Next, Jos Fruytier was joined by Ruud van Hilst and together they commissioned Doug Peterson & Ian Howlett to design their new boat to defend the World Cup. This was Hollandia and she was the first boat that would prove equally fast to Fleur de Lys. In her first season she won the European Championships in Flensburg as well as the World Cup in Toronto. In Toronto the regatta was dominated by Fleur and Hollandia and it ended in a tie on the water with a protest in the final race deciding the championships in favour of Hollandia. The 2005 European Championships also introduced Aun to the class. She is a brand new classic 8-Metre, built to the original 1940 design by Johan Anker. Yutaka Kobayashi from Japan was faced by the clear shortage of good classic 8-Metres available on the market and decided his best option to join the class was to build from scratch. Absolut Restorations in Portugal built his Aun in classic mahogany on steam bent oak frames. In order to avoid controversy, the use of epoxy was banned from the project and the 1924-1949 Lloyd's scantling Rules were observed in every respect. Even when the specified copper rivets proved impossible to find the yard refused to resort to stainless steel. They opted to make their own copper rivets and so they did. With Tokiko Kobayashi at the tiller the reward for this amazing project was victory in Flensburg as they won the Neptune Trophy, awarded to the vintage 8-Metres. The 2005 World Championship in Toronto would also see Pleione, a brand new type of Eight on the water. In Europe we call this a Spirit of Tradition. Bruce and Leanne Dyson had the vision and courage to build this new modern classic. Above the waterline she is the prettiest classic that money can buy, under water she is modern in every respect, hung keel, spade

rudder, trim tab and wings. Pleione was designed by Jim Taylor and has been greatly admired for her performance and beauty. Within our trophies she is rated with the modern boats but as two more of these Spirit of Tradition boats have been built in Australia, the time may well soon come that a new trophy is needed to acknowledge and secure the place these yachts have within our class and events.

Our century of International 8-Metres journey is far from complete without a visit to the true backbone of our class; the classic fleet. Generally we refer to classic 8-Metres if they have been designed and built prior to the year of the Iroquois, 1967. These are the boats that wrote history, often with famous owners, kings and queens, industrialists, bankers, architects, merchants, entrepreneurs. However different their background often was, they shared the same passion and love we have for our boats today. Regardless if their status was gained by birth or entrepreneurship they all shared the same competitive spirit and eagerly commissioned 8-Metres, sometimes just to win that one race in conditions which they expected the new design to perform better than their current.

Sometimes the gods smiled on them and delivered that wind they hoped for, sometimes the bet on the gods moods didn't pay and they had better taken the old boat. The beauty of our rule is that the window through which the design needs to fit allows optimisation for certain wind and wave conditions but that the trade off was a lesser performance for the balance or remaining conditions giving other boats the chance to beat them to the finish. The best example of a superb light air 8-Metre is the Knud Reimers designed Glana. Short waterline and almost 85m² of rated sail area made her unbeatable on Lake Geneva. She won the coveted Boll d'Or eight times, a record that still stands today. On the other end of the spectrum you will find the boats built for the 1928 Olympics such as Aile VI, Hollandia and Tamara VIII (ex Noreg). They would have around 71m² rated sail area and a long sailing length which perfectly suited the windy conditions of the Zuiderzee near Amsterdam. The life span of the specialised designs was limited and some owners like Virgine Heriot, Marcus Wallenberg jr, August Tobias, King Alfonso and Baron Krupp would commission a new 8-Metre every other year. Today most of these boats still sail and compete in our annual events, thanks to caring owners and crews who kept them going even when heavy wooden boats were far from fashionable. Through their effort the old boats, and with it our class, survived the test of time. The sleek

lines and powerful rig would make sailors' hearts beat faster, and just like today make them take the long way home to see her at the dock and show an interest through a simple stop and stare or a question to what she may be. Through the stories told, the myth carried on and kept our boats on the shortlist of most admired pieces of functional art in the past century. The owner's love for their Eight would drive them to lay up boats when business was down while refusing to let go as they knew they would not be able to buy her back for a decade or so. As in the sixties right up until the mid eighties classic boats would be broken up one after the other. Somehow the Eights managed to remain their magic and despite their often deplorable condition they would remain a centre piece in the rotting row until mister right would come along. Well before classic boats became a thing of fashion you would see men and women hanging upside down in the bilge fixing the floors and frames, hoping to give their pride and joy a new lease on life. Sometimes the once thoroughbred racer would be converted to cruising, sometime the stern was chopped and the rig shortened to make her rate favourably under RORC, however wrong that may seem now, those decisions were made then and seemed right at the time and most of all, they kept the boats going.

Over the past 15 years classic boats gained status and with that movement the old Eights became some of the most sought after boats. A staggering number of classic 8-Metres has been restored to a standard unmatched in the past. Including major overhauls at boat yards, the number of full restoration projects is likely to be close to 100 world wide. A steady number of around 20 boats are under restoration and it is safe to say that our fleet is in better condition then ever before. The classic 8-Metres are the backbone of our class. They provide spectacle of unmatched beauty, these are the boats that are kept in families for generations and these are the boats that come to mind first when people think about our class.

The tribute for the survival of the class therefore goes to our predecessors who kept the Eights going and made them survive another year. The tribute goes to men like Eugene van Voorhis and Joni Hertell, the founders and long time officers of our association who had the vision to donate trophies worth racing for. They organised the class and staged events around the world.

The tribute goes to Gaston Schmalz and Per Wermelin for

building numerous new boats, shipping and competing them around the world and showing the world that the Eights were a class of boats worth fighting for. The tribute goes to all owners around the world for their dedication and care for the old boats, for their seemingly endless enthusiasm and good spirit that make our annual 8-Metre World Cup continue to be the event of the year and last but not least the tribute goes to Johan Anker, William Fife, Charles Nicholson, Beltrami, Alfred Mylne, Olin Stephens, Costaguta, Starling Burgess, Clinton Crane, Francois Camatte, Baglietto, Bjarne Aas, Frank Paine, Tore Holm, Gustav Estlander, Max Oertz, Henry Rasmussen, Jacques Fauroux, Ed Dubois, Pelle Peterson, Ian Howlett, Doug Peterson, Juliane Hempel, Peter Norlin and many more of the World's most esteemed naval architects who have designed amazingly beautiful, fast and versatile 8-Metres that would stand the test of time.

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*Photo by James Robinson
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