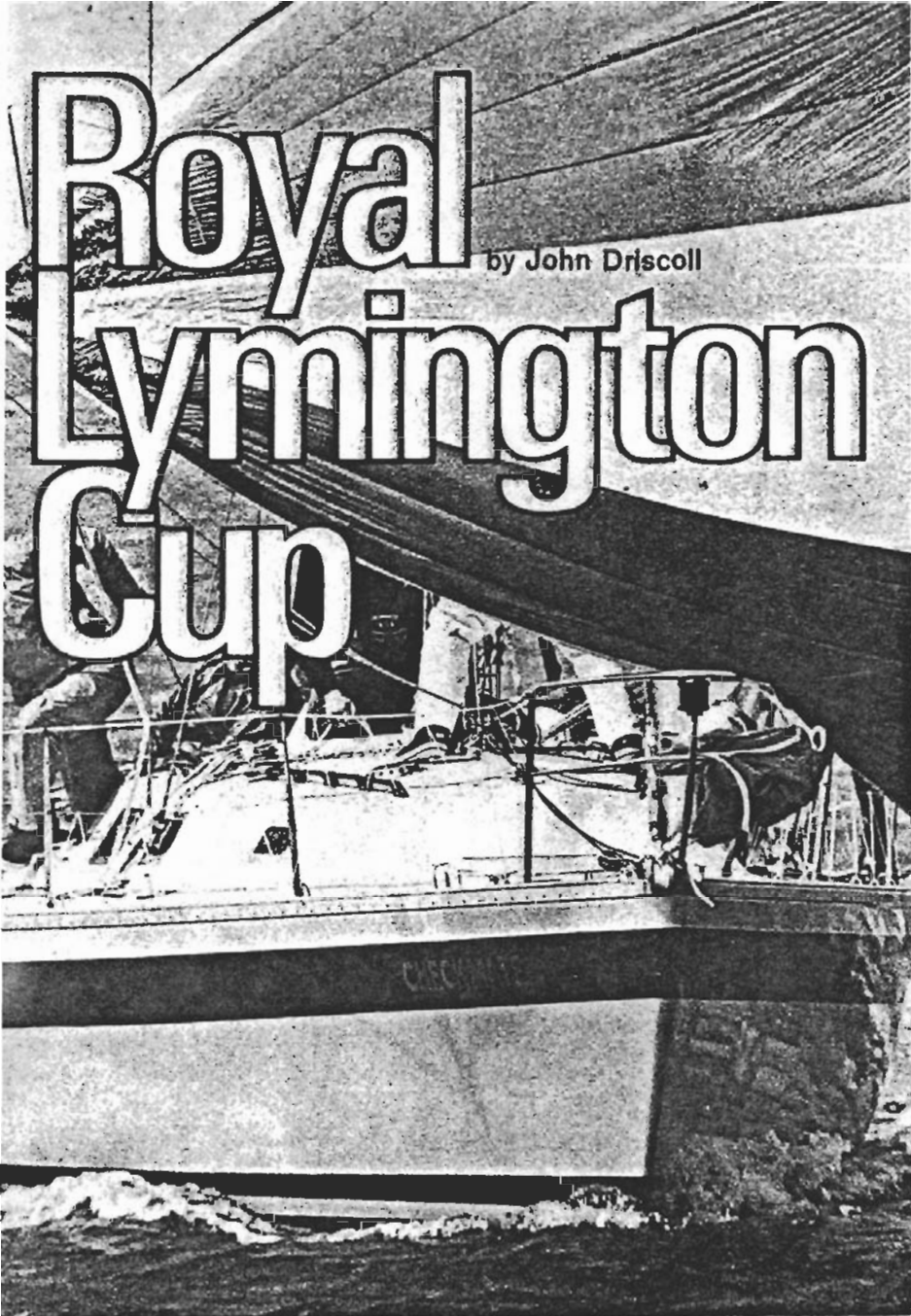


Royal Lymington Cup

by John Driscoll



hero Pelle Petterson, joint runner-up with Oakeley at last year's series was back, this time sailing against two of the top American match racing helmsmen.

Dennis Durgan, current holder of the Congressional Cup (see *Yachting World*, May) has been competing in match racing events in the United States for the last 10 years, while Dick Deaver, runner-up to Durgan this year and twice the previous Congressional Cup winner, is acknowledged as a world leader in match racing tactics. His tactics were certainly enough to give him a comfortable margin at Lymington, for he won every race on the water bar one.

Adding to the international flavour of the event, Bruno Troublé stood in for Larry Marks, whose commitments as helmsman on *Morning Cloud* in helping her on her way to a class win in the RORC Seine Bay race prevented him from appearing at Lymington.

Troublé, who is marketing manager for the French boatbuilder Michel Dufour SA, is likely to be the skipper of Baron Bich's latest America's Cup hope *France III*, so the Lymington series gave him some valuable practice against two of the other challengers, Petterson and Oakeley. All three had met some weeks earlier at this year's Congressional Cup, where some pundits dismissed Troublé easily, but his approach to the racing at Lymington was perhaps the most intense of all the competitors.

It was certainly not lacking in attention to detail. In spite of a clause in the sailing instructions which pro-

The new Peterson-designed OOD34s replaced the Contessa 32 at this year's series. The 34s were popular with helmsmen for their light handling

Britain's John Oakeley took time off from the 12-metre campaign to compete against other potential America's Cup challengers

FOR FIVE years now, the sport of match racing has been kept alive in England by the Royal Lymington Yacht Club. This fine form of competition, which obeys different laws to fleet racing, although sailed under the same book of rules, is racing at its purest.

Each match is a duel, in which helmsmen lay their ability open to view. Poor sailing cannot be hidden by the latest results of the yacht designers' skills, as in IOR racing, neither can failure be blamed on an old boat or sails. In the match racing arena there is no second—and the loser has only himself or his crew to blame for defeat.

Over the course of those five years, the Royal Lymington's match racing championship has changed in many details, but the fundamental concept, borrowed from the Congressional Cup in California, has remained the same. A number of distinguished helmsmen have been invited to the series, to race against each other in rounds of two-boat

matches until one emerges as the victor. It is a true gladiator's ring, except that each combatant is given identical weapons.

This year the helmsmen came from even further afield than before, and the club was right to drop the word "British" from the Match Racing Championship title, for more than half the skippers came from overseas. Two real locals were Phil Crebbin, winner of the 1976 and 1977 events whose luck was out this year as his only win on the water—against Dick Deaver—was reversed on protest, and Peter Bruce, who stood in at short notice when dinghy champion Lawrie Smith backed out. John Oakeley took time off from the *Lionheart* campaign to give some of his crew a taste of what match racing is all about.

Defending his 1978 title was Ireland's Harold Cudmore, who attacked the series with his usual bravado, while the other visitors were all well-versed in match racing tactics. Sweden's national sailing



hibited such action, his crew went to some lengths to cut down unnecessary weight and windage, including removal of the fixed topping lift, abandoning the snap shackles on the end of the spinnaker guys, and modifying the inner forestay.

Of course, it could be argued that all these measures were intended, together with the use of a prodigious amount of tape on sharp pieces of rigging, to cut down the chances of foul-ups in the boat handling. In the past, matches have been lost as the result of even a genoa leach line becoming caught up during a tack and holding the genoa aback, slowing the leader enough for his opponent to break cover and win.

Certainly, any gains from reduced

have been used in all the earlier Lymington series. The injection-moulded 34s should have been as close to identical as possible, as the moulding process allows the weight to be controlled strictly, all deckgear was standard, and suits of Hood mainsails, No 1 genoas and spinnakers were supplied to each boat.

Certainly none of the skippers had any complaint against the boats. Those who had competed in previous Lymington events found the 34s much more nimble than their predecessors, while the crews who had come from the Congressional Cup found life much easier than on the under-winded Cal 40s used there.

With the boats so well-matched, it

in the other 24 matches.

The solution for the organisers of the event is clear—go back to Christchurch Bay. That was where the first series was run, but the championship was moved into the Solent to save the time of getting out through Hurst Narrows and into the Bay. That might reduce the attraction of the event as far as spectators are concerned, but it must be remembered for whom the series is being run.

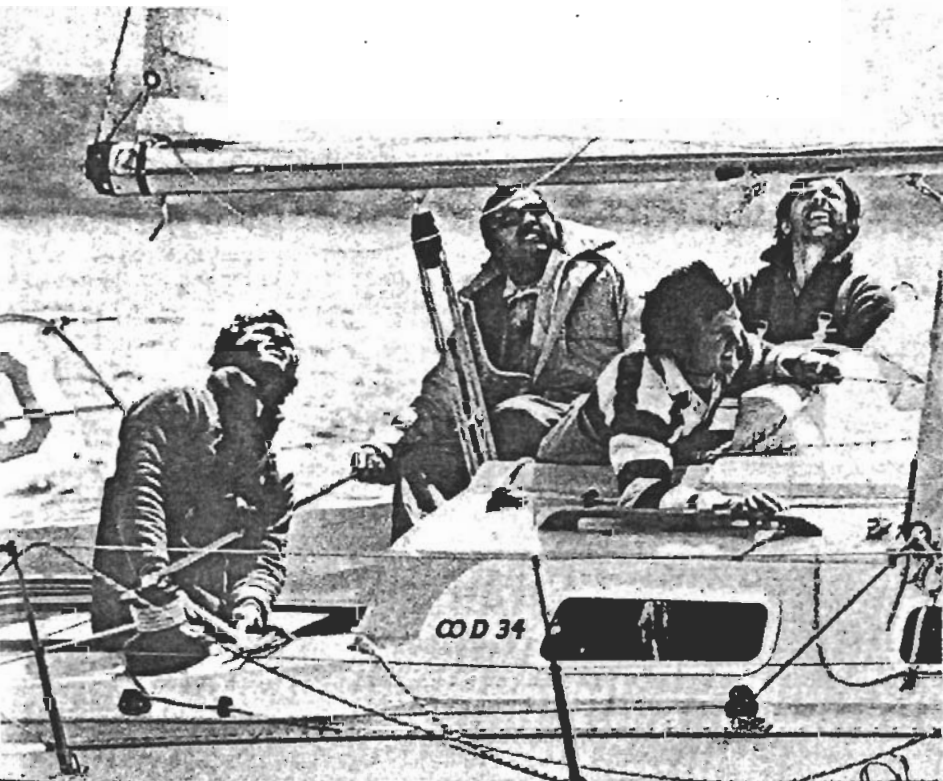
As the pre-start manoeuvres are so important, the Royal Lymington YC could do well to follow the Congressional Cup practice, where the duelling starts at the 10-minute gun, rather than at the 5-minute. Although one competitor this year made a habit of hiding away behind committee and spectator boats, and only dashing out seconds before the gun, by far the most exciting part of most matches is the wary circling, tailing for the best start position, which is resolved sometimes well after the starting signal when one boat breaks for the line.

Apart from these comments, and one from Dick Deaver that an 11 000-mile round trip was a long way to travel for just two days of racing, the Royal Lymington Cup proved that the gentle art of match racing is flourishing, if only among a select few. Next year's series promises to be even better, if, that is, some of the helmsmen can afford the time off from preparation for another big match racing event.

Results: 1, Dick Deaver, 6 wins; 2, John Oakeley, 5 wins; 3=, Bruno Troublé, Harold Cudmore, Dennis Durgan, 4 wins.

Total concentration shown by Dick Deaver and his (largely) American crew.

The short races were won by tactics and boat handling, rather than minor differences in boat speed. Smooth spinnaker hoists were essential to maintain any lead built up on the windward leg.



Photographs by Jonathan Eastland

windage must have been more psychological than tangible, for these short match races, whose total distance never reaches anything like an America's Cup course, are won by tactics rather than minute differences in boat speed. Troublé's approach was certainly in strong contrast to some of the other skippers who argued that, since the windward legs were so short, it actually paid for once to have the spinnaker, packed in its turtle, lashed ready at the pulpit before the start. In that way, with sheets and guys attached and pole ready to hoist, they could start the run with a minimum of fuss and, by inference, a minimum of time lost.

From all that, it can be seen that the important elements in this branch of yacht racing are the helmsman, his tactics and his crew. It can be argued that the choice of boats is irrelevant, as long as they are equally matched. That explains the move to the new Offshore One-Design 34s from Contessa 32s, which

was a pity that the competitors found their racing spoilt by another factor. For once it wasn't the weather, although the fifth round of matches was turned upside down when the light fickle wind in which the race had started disappeared soon afterwards. No, it was the factor which dominates all racing down at the western end of the Solent—the tide.

There's an old maxim in match racing that it should all be over before the start, and that was particularly true in this year's series, for the tide dictated post-start tactics to such an extent that it would have been suicidal for the trailing boat to initiate a tacking duel. That is the classic way to get ahead if you've lost the start—continue tacking until the leader, who has to cover tack for tack—makes a mistake to let you through. Unfortunately the tide, with the presence of a shore close by, meant that virtually all the races were near-processions. Apart from that fifth round already mentioned, there were only four place changes

