



PURE CELEBRATION

In a celebration of 200 years of sailing, the Royal Yacht Squadron Bicentenary Regatta provided not just pageantry but tight racing. **TOBY HEPPELL** reports

Tradition and longevity seemed the watchwords in the Solent in late July, as attention flicked away from the high-octane America's Cup racing in Portsmouth and across the water to the Royal Yacht Squadron, as celebrations of the club's 200th anniversary got underway.

This special Bicentenary Regatta provided for many a somewhat purer expression of the traditional side of sailing. At front and centre of the action – as they have a tendency to be – were the three J-Class yachts, Velsheda, Lionheart and Ranger, but just as impressive to see were three

classics in the form of Herreshoff replica Eleonora, Fife ketch Sumurun and another William Fife design, Mariquita.

Despite being invitation-only, this was not simply a classic regatta reserved only for the most traditional and expensive boats, but rather an event to celebrate two centuries of the RYS's achievements and international standing. The boats on the water were well-known names both internationally and within the Solent, with small IRC racers competing against some of the biggest and most exciting yachts, such as George David's recently launched Rambler 88, the Maxi 72s Spirit of Jethou and Bella Mente, Mike Slade's Leopard and Tom Siebel's Swan

90 Odin. In addition to the IRC, classic and J-Class racing there was also team racing in the Squadron's brand-new fleet of J/70s, with under 30s representing yacht clubs across the globe. After some 126 races, the eventual victor was a team from St Francis Yacht Club, San Francisco. Meanwhile, the New York Yacht Club team took a close win in the Level Rating Class, which saw one-design racing in Beneteau First 40s.

Despite unseasonable weather causing day one to be cancelled, there was plenty in store. Perhaps the highlight was a Race Around the Island on the Wednesday, which saw strong winds and patchy blue skies delivering some classic racing. And



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Above
The Around the Island Race was a highlight for crews

Right, from top
The glorious J-Class united; Maxi 72 Spirit of Jethou; yachts represented 25 clubs worldwide



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the start that managed to sum up the feel of the regatta best was actually the first away that day at 8am as Eleonora, Mariquita and Sumurun shared the line with the MOD70 trimaran, Concise 10 – a fitting juxtaposition of old and new if ever there was one.

The Commodore of the Royal Yacht Squadron, Christopher Sharples, took the helm of Ranger for part of the race. “We had perfect conditions with a good stiff breeze and a few bumps in the wind against tide off St Catherine’s,” he said. “It was a great atmosphere to be on such an iconic yacht surrounded by spectator boats, a very special experience.”

Line honours for the race went to the MOD70 Concise 10, which completed the anti-clockwise lap of the Isle of Wight in three hours and 32 minutes. Elsewhere in the competitive IRC1 fleet, the TP52s had the best of it with Tony Langley’s Gladiator taking the win on corrected. □