



IMS Yachts

George Coumantaros was floating on air at the end of the 1996 Newport/Bermuda classic. His 85ft IMS maxi *Boomerang*, the second in a line of Frers designs, had not only won line honours in this 635 mile classic, smashing a 14 year passage record in the process by almost 5 hours, but after 21 previous attempts, he had also won the principal St David's Lighthouse Trophy for the best corrected time.

'It has been like David chasing the Golden Fleece. Winning the Lighthouse Trophy has always been one of my big ambitions in life,' George admitted at the finish when recalling the times he had won the race on elapsed time in 1984, 1990 and 1992 but never on handicap. 'I built this boat specially for this race. She is 1/3rd lighter than my previous maxi and much faster!' It was a crowning achievement that masked the tortured path that designer, builder and ultimately the owner were forced to walk in order to overcome a round of continuing changes to the International Measurement System (IMS) which have dogged the Rule ever since its inception in 1985.

This computerised rule was born from the best intentions and remains the most equitable way to rate yachts of disparate shape and performance. The problem, according to Germán Frers, is that the IMS has never been explained or presented well enough to owners and sailors who, for the most part, still cannot understand how their rating changes in line with their yacht's variable performance capabilities, more than a decade after the Rule was adopted around the world.

To most people, the IMS remains something of a black art, understandable only to computer experts. It was developed initially to rate well-designed cruiser/racers like Llwyd Ecclestone's 1998 Bermuda Race winner *Kodiak* on a par with custom boats. It is based on a Velocity Prediction Programme developed originally from research at MIT in the US and the Delft University in Holland. Utilising speed predictions from computer models all based on fundamental principals of hydro and aerodynamics, the IMS is designed to assess any yacht's performance across a broad band of conditions. It was thought to be so accurate that its originators built in a variable allowance to give race officers the option of taking account of conditions during the race. If the winds prove to be principally reaching and running, then the system can be tuned to penalise the downwind flyers within the fleet, or indeed provide them with a benefit if conditions are biased towards upwind work. The problem for crews is that with such variations, they never really know who has to give whom time out on the course.

However, the demise of the International Offshore Rule increased pressure on the Offshore Racing Council to use the IMS to rate grand-prix yachts, and thanks to wealthy owners and sponsored high profile campaigns, certain designers have been