

FIRST ARRIVALS



Property developer Mike Slade's ICAP Leopard secured a second consecutive line honours victory in the Rolex Fastnet Race in the early hours of this morning. With the mixed conditions the 100ft super-maxi was considerably behind the course record she set two years ago. Arriving at the Plymouth breakwater finish line at 00:09:36 GMT, her elapsed time on this occasion was 2 days 11 hours 9 minutes and 36 seconds, compared to 1 day 20 hours 18 minutes and 53 seconds in 2007.

"It was a great race," commented Slade. "It is always nice to have a race where there are no breakages or damage. We didn't get into any difficult situations. We just wanted to get around fast and competently. All in all we are delighted to be here, second time running, back to back victories in this great race. A huge thanks to the RORC, our sponsors ICAP and Rolex for yet again taking an interest in yachting."

To have broken the record would have required more wind, but despite this the 2009 Rolex Fastnet Race was still a nailbiter, said Slade. "There was a lot of light air and 'are we going to get through a tide gate?' It made for a very exciting race. We were always looking over our backs because, Rosebud, Ran and Luna Rossa were all there, all ganging up, only 20 miles behind all the time. So we couldn't afford to make any mistakes."

ICAP Leopard's next major events are the Rolex Middle Sea Race out of Malta in October followed by the Rolex Sydney Hobart in December. "No one has ever won all three and we will give it a try," said Slade adding that he would be back to try for a third win in the RORC's biennial offshore classic in 2011. Specifically this is a warm-up for the race to Hobart. "There is Maximus from NZ, Alfa Romeo and Wild Oats, so we'll have our work cut out. We will go down there and represent Britain and try and knock off the Aussies. God knows what they are going to do at the Oval [the Ashes cricket contest]. We might need to get some revenge!"

ICAP Leopard arrived in Plymouth earlier than anticipated. On the way to the Bishop Rock the boats behind had been closing in on her, but on the final leg to the finish they managed to redress the balance, hanging on to the breeze, contrary to the forecast and making the tide at the Lizard. "I think the boats behind ended up transitioning into our breeze," explained Ray Davies, Emirates Team New Zealand afterguard, who was calling tactics on board ICAP Leopard. "We never got the breeze they had and they sailed out of their westerly."

Karl Kwok's brand new Farr 80, Beau Geste was second home, arriving in drizzly Plymouth at 03:25:03 GMT, and now tied up in Sutton Harbour. "The race has been enjoyable," commented Kwok. "We are racing the same IRC Class SZ boats as we did in Cowes Week, so we know each other's strengths and weaknesses more or less. Knowing that beating everyone on handicap is almost impossible, our hope was maybe line honours for the class, because once into the ocean, waterline (length) counts. So it was a drag race and we beat Ran on that one, but they are pretty close."

Apart from three short races at Cowes Week, this was Beau Geste's first major race and both Kwok and skipper Gavin Brady said they still have much to learn about the set-up and development of the boat. "There are still a lot of things we can still do to reduce its rating," said Kwok, who intends to enter his new boat in all the classic races he has not yet entered. Their program includes the Maxi Yacht Rolex Cup in Sardinia then the Rolex Middle Sea Race. Brady added: "It is a big ask to bring a boat like this straight into one of the biggest events in Europe as your first race, but there is a lot we can take out of it."

Brady says that in the Rolex Fastnet Race, the leaders seemed to be connected by elastic. "Our race didn't really start for 24 hours and in a race that is that short you are giving away a lot of race course, where you are behind your competitors. By the time we passed Ran 2 we were 13-14 hours into the race. As soon as we got up to a ten-mile lead, then the compression started again and each time that happened, there was less and less race course."

One of the most interesting races on the water, that developed in the last few hours, was that between Niklas Zennström's Judel Vrolijk 72, Ran 2 and BT IMOCA 60, sailed two handed by Sebastien Josse and Jean-François Cuzon. This battle from Bishop Rock to the finish was won by the French duo, arriving just over one minute ahead, the wind dropping all the time to a minimum of five knots.

"We saw Ran just before the Scilly Isles," recounted Josse. "We crossed and we said 'maybe these guys will gybe, because we are on starboard'. And no one moved...but then we are a bad reference because when we gybe we have to start 20 minutes before! Then eventually we saw the bowman go on the bow, furl the staysail and in seconds they were away. So I said 'maybe we won't match race with these guys because we'll lose'."

Nonetheless in the VMR running conditions, the blue IMOCA 60 stayed ahead, despite having run headlong into a moon fish while crossing the Celtic Sea and running out of diesel by the time they reached the finish.

Despite being beaten on the water by BT IMOCA 60, this was of little consequence to Niklas Zennström and the crew of Ran 2. This morning they remain the leader overall on handicap.

"I think we knew it would be up to the last bit here, but I think we have a good chance," commented the Skype founder on their prospects of a handicap win in what is the first major offshore race for their new boat. "We didn't lose so much here at the last bit. We had a good breeze all the way in, so we have a good chance. But now we have to wait and see."

Zennström had no regrets about bringing his boat all the way back up to UK from the Mediterranean, to where it will now return. "One of the objectives when we built the boat was to race a Rolex Fastnet Race competitively. Two years ago we had to pull out - so we had some revenge to do..."

According to Ran 2 navigator Steve Hayles, they ended up arriving in Plymouth three hours earlier than he had anticipated yesterday. After the distance between the front runners compressed as they reached Bishop Rock, he says it was not the wind speed but the direction that saved them on the final run home. "It stayed a bit more westerly and it didn't go around to the north, so we didn't have all the issues of trying to get under the land. We ended up running down in here." They then got less foul tide passing the Lizard, extending their lead over the boats astern.

This morning the lead boats in IRC Class Z have been rounding the Fastnet Rock, with the majority of the fleet still crossing the Celtic Sea outbound. Under handicap, Piet Vroon's new Ker 46, Tonnerre de Breskens has taken the lead in IRC Z and is now most of the way back to Bishop Rock. French boats continue to dominate the small handicap classes. The Grand Soleil 43 Codiam remains in front of Class 1, having

rounded the rock at 0300 GMT. Just short of the rock, the A35 Prime Time has taken over first place in Class 2, while the Dufour 34 Major Tom is still first in Class 3.

Finish times:

- 1) ICAP Leopard, Mike Slade (GBR) – 00:09:36 GMT
- 2) Beau Geste, Karl Kwok (HK) - 03:25:03
- 3) BT IMOCA 60, Sebastien Josse (FRA) - 04:00:15
- 4) Ran 2, Niklas Zennström (SWE) - 04:01:33
- 5) Artemis Ocean Racing, Sam Davies (UK) and Sidney Gavignet (FRA) - 05:15:41
- 6) Safran, Marc Guillemot (FRA) – 05:56:18
- 7) Team Pindar, Mike Sanderson (NZ) – 06:15:42
- 8) Aviva, Dee Caffari (UK) – 06:57:13
- 9) Luna Rossa, Flavio Flavini (ITA) – 07:01:54
- 10) Rosebud Team DYT, Roger Sturgeon (USA) – 07:45:37
- 11) Akena Verandas, Arnaud Boissières (FRA) – 08:34:51