

BERMUDES-LORIENT Q&A

Pure Ocean is an NGO based in Marseille and Lorient, France, raising funds to support state-of-the-art applied research projects to conserve marine biodiversity, protect, restore fragile marine ecosystems and increase our knowledge of the ocean. Since its creation in 2017, the foundation has had a strong focus on sailing as a means of reaching both the general public and potential donors.

1. Can you please describe the culture of Pure Ocean and the Bermuda - Lorient Challenge to readers who have not had the chance to participate?

There's a great history to the race from the 1970's and 1980's which captured the imagination of sailing fans but despite several attempts there hasn't been a race between Bermuda and Lorient for quite some time. At Pure Ocean we believe in the power of sports, and sailing for raising awareness about the need to protect the ocean which is why we're restarting the Bermuda - Lorient, along with our partners Absolute Dreamer and Lorient Grand Large.

We are keen to welcome a range of boats to resurrect the iconic race, challenging sailors to beat the race times that took the sport to a wider audience around 40 years ago. The monohull Fernande, in 1979, skippered by Jean-Claude Parisis and Olivier de Rosny won and the catamaran William-Saurin, with Eugène Riguidel and Jean-François le Menec at the helm, then set the fastest time for the crossing of 12 days 23 hours and 16 minutes in 1983.

2. What's the competition (or rally) like, and what kinds of sailors can one expect to meet on the dock before the start?

We are hoping to attract a range of both professional and amateur sailors who may be heading back to Europe for the summer racing season following the Caribbean regattas such as Les Voiles de St. Barth. Of course, it's going to be a competitive race for those dedicated to offshore racing but we also want the sailors to help us spread the message about ocean conservation. We have been talking to a range of boats about taking part, including multihull and Class 40.

3. What kind of entry numbers are you seeing this year? Also, how do these stack up to previous editions?

We aim to have several boats taking part this year with a view to cementing and expanding the event in future as an annual fixture of the sailing calendar. There are some boats that are unable to take part this year but have already expressed an interest for next year which is great news. We are also proud to have four-times Transat Jacques Vabre winner Jean-Pierre Dick on board as an ambassador and his JP54 will be taking part in the race this year.

4. Weather-wise, what kind conditions can sailors expect to encounter in the Atlantic in May? What are the best-case and worst-case weather scenarios?

In May the weather is warmer with long hours of daylight which makes for good sailing conditions. If we get the right depressions that will whisk the boats across the Atlantic in fast times, maybe beating the record, then it will be a good crossing. The best scenario is to have a depression that brings us directly from Bermuda to Brittany with good winds and the worst is if there are anticyclonic conditions on the route with light winds forcing us north to find some more downwind conditions.

5. I know it's still early days in terms of entries, but are you eyeing any perennial favorites for strong finishes? What about any dark horses?

I don't want to make any predictions and jinx anyone before we've even started but with veteran sailors like Jean-Pierre Dick involved it's going to be a fast and competitive race.

6. What was the reason for changing the course from St Pierre et Miquelon—Lorient (2020, 2021) to Bermuda—Lorient for 2022?

We organised two editions out of St Pierre et Miquelon which were successful but its geographical location, so far north, makes it difficult to attract many sailors. Shifting the start line much further south will make it easier to increase numbers as there are more boats sailing around Bermuda, and in the Caribbean, that intend to head to Europe for the summer.

7. Do you suspect that European-based boats that are racing on the Caribbean circuit might join the rally as a fun/safe way to get their boats home?

That's absolutely the idea, as mentioned earlier. They can not only take part in a boat race but also do something positive for ocean health. Our longer term vision is to have racing boats create specific "charters" where a mix of professional and amateur sailors who maybe don't have the level of experience can take part in an exciting and impactful adventure and maybe break a sailing record too!

8. Can you tell us about any efforts that you and the other regatta organizers have made to try to lower the regatta's environmental footprint or otherwise green-up the regatta?

We aim to keep the footprint of the race in Bermuda as small as possible. When the boats arrive in Lorient we are looking to have an event which will convene key stakeholders to discuss ways in which we can work together to restore ocean health. The race is 'green' by nature and has a dual purpose to highlight the wonderful sport of sailing and our amazing ocean whilst raising funds and awareness to protect it for future generations.

9. Is there anything else that you'd like to add, for the record?

If anyone who reads this is inspired to take part then please contact mission@pure-ocean.org

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