

Three new ORC Champions Crowned in Gdansk

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Sunny skies, shifty winds and close competition formed a perfect final day for two races on Selden Mast Day that featured hard fights all the way to the end...especially in Class B.

Near-perfect conditions today provided a fantastic ending to four days of competition at the Dr Irena Eris ORC European Championship Gdansk 2017. Two hard-fought final races determined the new 2017 European ORC champions in each of three classes, and while ultimately the winners were yesterday's series leaders in each, they had to fight to the end to keep themselves at the top of their respective podiums.

No where was this seen more keenly than in Class B, where in all the inshore races the X-41's battled with each other with the skills honed over years of racing these boats as one designs throughout the Baltic region. As Thomas Jungblut on Docken huden from Germany said, "We have been racing these boats against each other for many years. We know how to tune them to be fast in all conditions, we know the crew work needed to get around the course, and all the techniques. Its really close amongst us, we push each other all the time."

Early in the series it looked as though Martin Eslander's X-41 Xini Freedom from Finland would be dominating this group with a solid scoreline of 5-4-1-2 going into today. However, it was an X-41 from Estonia, Priit Tammemagi's Premium skippered by Mati Sepp, who won two races and with a win earned in the 5th race could now drop an 8th place in Race 1 to take the lead by 2 points because Xini scored 3rd place in this 5th race.

The two rivals battled in the pre-start of Race 6, the final race of the series, mindful this could determine the championship because Jungblut and the Docken huden team in third place were too far away in points to appear to be a threat.

“They came at us pretty hard,” said Xini tactician Sten Mohr. “I have done some match racing myself, so we knew how to keep clear and keep our options open. But both of us got very close to the start line on final approach, so we knew the line call would be close.”

The Race Committee led by Ariane Mainemare did find them over the start line along with two other boats, and according to the rules sounded a horn and raised the X flag...yet neither came back to re-start. Premium was fast, 3 minutes ahead of Xini on the 5.4-mile course, and looked as though she would win the race and the ORC European Class B title crown. Yet with both were scored OCS, causing this race to be discarded instead of their worst scores from the offshore race, and thus put Xini in the lead by one point instead.

A redress decision given Premium in yesterday’s Race 4 was also rescinded by the International Jury on further review of the case, so Premium also lost a point and dropped to the Bronze medal position, with the Germans on Docken huden elevated to Silver. Remarkably, only one point separated all podium places, a testament to the intense competition in this class.

Along with Eslander and Mohr, the new Class B ORC European Gold Medalists on Xini Freedom are Anssi Lyden, Pyry Itkonen, Arthur Hallberg, Jari Baggstrom, Christer Maggstrom, Mats Lindgren, Patrik Schalin, Janne Versterlund and Nora Tunkelo.

In Class A the scenarios were not nearly as complex given the smaller number of boats in the class. Tea Ekengren-Suaren’s Swan 45 Blue Nights from Finland did what they needed to do to stay on top. By winning the first 6.3-mile race, their 2-2-1-2-1 scoreline was almost unassailable in the last race: they just had to make sure their closest rivals from Denmark – Erik Berth’s Swan 45 Tarok VII – did not win this race to put them tied in points and win the tie-break. While doing this, Alex Seehaufer’s Soto 40 Sportfreund had a great 3-1 day to move up to take the Bronze medal slot. For Blue Nights and Sportfreund this was their first podium finishes in a major ORC championship.

Ekengren-Suaren’s winning international crew on Blue Nights consisted of: Ganzalo Araujo, Pablo Iglesias, Toni Stoschek, Piotr Przybylski, Edu Mach, Esa Mach, Patrik Linqvist, Ceci Rosario, Henri Kuitinen, and Corentin Tahon.

Class C was much like Class A, where a dominant team had to just continue doing what got them to the top and not make silly mistakes. Patrik Forsgren’s modified First 36.7 Pro4U from Sweden did just that by scoring their second win of the series in today’s first race, then staying clean and close to their closest competition in a shifty and contentious second race that featured two general recalls and a Black Flag. The racing was so close in fact that Pro4U had to share 3rd and 4th place points with a boat well behind them, Juss Ojala’s First 34.7 Jazz from Estonia, but it made no difference: they finished well-clear of the runner-up and last year’s Class C champion, Aivar Tuulberg’s Arcona 340 Katariina II. On the podium for Bronze was

Racing with Forsgren and his all-amateur crew to earn Gold Medals was Andres Martensson, Joakim Hoppe, Oskar Hellblom, Oskar Somermaa, Johan Tuvstedt, Andres Bork and Peter Thorwid.

Winners in the Corinthian Division of all-amateur crews were Tarok VII in Class A, Peter Buhl's Swan 42 Sirena from Denmark in Class B, and Pro4U in Class C.

"We are extremely pleased with the strong record turnout, the amazing hospitality, the excellent race management and the great value this event has shown the sailors, the sponsors and all others affiliated with this event," said Dobbs Davis, representative for ORC. "The close racing and high competitive level shows the rating system is working well, and we congratulate all the winners, they very much earned their medals this week."

By Dobbs Davis