

MORE COMPETITIVE MOBIL

Dave Morgan reports on the north east Scotland sailing scene

BIG HANDICAP changes have been introduced by the organisers of this year's Mobil North Sea Yacht Race, as part of a package to attract back the 50-plus fleets of the late 80s and early 90s.

Chairman of the Royal Findhorn Yacht Club/Banff Sailing Club Joint Offshore Racing Committee, David Horn, says the CYCA handicap system of recent years has been dropped in favour of LYS.

It's just part of a revamped North Sea event which will be enjoying its 13th year when it is started at Banff Bay on 5 July. When the 1300 start gun sets the fleet off for Stavanger some 320 miles to the east, the organisers hope it will be amassing one of the biggest competitive fleets for some years, with the emphasis on racing rather than cruising.

'There's been a feeling that the North Sea Race was really just a means to an end', said the chairman. 'Many crews have commented that they'd welcome a sharper competitive edge and we've been told the old handicapping system needed to be overhauled.'

The CYCA system made it difficult to satisfy all skippers.

'It was time for a change and everyone we spoke to, especially in Norway, made it plain that LYS was the way to go' said David. 'It was really the pressure from our Norwegian colleagues which helped us make up our minds to change. We believe that for the North Sea fleet LYS is a much sounder system than CYCA.'

Lossiemouth-based Tomatin Series champion Jens Jacobsen has been co-opted onto the joint offshore committee to oversee the new LYS system. The



Norwegian yachtsman designed and built the successful Gambling 34 cruiser-racer class of which he arguably has the fastest example, his pristine and powerfully rigged Lady in Red.'

Offshore committee secretary Robin Miller of Findhorn said: 'Jens was the ideal choice. He's now local, has incredible experience racing in Norway and here and has first hand knowledge in the design and construction of performance yachts.'

Thanks to continuing sponsorship support from Mobil North Sea there are more prizes available this year, and more corporate crews are expected to join in with the oil industry and other firms in Scotland being encouraged to enter a yacht and crew.

There will be six monohull classes this year with a seventh class for multihulls. The committee are keen to introduce CHS and will consider it for the future.

There are plenty of shorter races in Scotland, but the challenge of a 300-mile plus North Sea event is unique and

A saltire at the crosstrees is a sure sign of a Scottish fleet gathering for the Mobil Banff/Stavanger race.

as such we are determined to attract yachtsmen to take part in what is the only event of its kind in the north.'

Committee secretary Robin Miller, who has competed in all but one event (the 1995 race had to be missed to allow him and his wife Isobel to celebrate their Ruby wedding!) will be taking part again this year with his Westerly Longbow Shallon of Rhu.

The race has got a lot to offer', he said. 'There's a full social programme before the start at Banff and Macduff and after the finish at Stavanger. We've arranged free berthing for competitors at Macduff throughout the week running up to the start and once the fleet arrive in Stavanger there'll be an opportunity to cruise and take part in club races.'

It's the hospitality offered by the Stavanger Sailing Club which has made the event into the success it has become.

BE SAFE

Safety is a high priority for the North Sea event. Classified as an RORC Category 2 event, the North Sea Yacht Race nevertheless recommends all yachts to carry EPIRBs and urges skippers to ensure the highest standard of safety and emergency equipment including suitable liferafts. Random gear inspections will

be carried out on the fleet at Macduff before the gun.

Strenuous efforts are being made this year to attract more entries from the west coast and the Clyde Cruising Club have been enlisted to help spread the word. Make a note of the date - 5 July. More details are available from Robin Miller by telephoning him on 01309 690213 or writing to his home, Craigendarroch, Findhorn, By Forres, Moray.