CHAPTER XIII

The Midget Ocean Racing Club

by William Shaw

When the Midget Ocean Racing Club came into being in the U.S.A. in 1954, it needed someone to write a rule that would reflect the spirit of the group of young yachtsmen who had to do their blue water racing on a limited budget or not at all, and still be a formula which would produce fast, wholesome, seaworthy little boats.

William Shaw, a naval architect on the staff of Sparkman & Stephens, did the job so well that MORC is spreading from its original station in New York to the Pacific Coast and the Lakes; and one of the outstanding Eastern prize winners is a yacht of his design.

The desire to race small cruising boats on long courses has undoubtedly appealed to many people over the years. Many unrecorded events of this nature must have taken place in the past.

In 1950, the first steps to organize racing of this type were taken. In England a group of yachtsmen under the leadership of Patrick Ellam and Capt. John Illingworth formed the Junior Offshore Group. Their purpose was to develop fast cruisers between 16 and 20 ft. waterline length, for racing offshore.

It was understood that, if this sort of racing was to be successful, it had to be done with the highest degree of safety. With safety in mind, the JOG drafted a set of rules stipulating minimum stability, minimum flotation, maximum allowable volume for the cockpit, maximum area of the companionway and a list of compulsory equipment such as, life jackets, flares and personal

life lines. For measurement and handicapping the JOG adopted a rule similar to but somewhat simpler than the RORC rule.

Since that time the JOG has flourished in England and in other parts of the world. The races held by the JOG in England already number nine a year and vary in length from 40 to 230 miles. At the present time the JOG has two classes, the original class known as JOG V, 16 to 20 ft. waterline, and JOG IV, over 20 and under 24 ft. waterline. These numbers follow the RORC classes I, II and III, which cover ocean racers of from 70 to 19 ft. rating. The ratings of JOG V, must be between 12 and 18 feet. There are at present no rating limits in class IV.

In this country the development of the JOG was watched with keen interest. In the spring of 1954 the parent station of the MORC was formed in New York. The major credit for the formation of the MORC should go to Steve Corkery, whose leadership and efforts during the first few years insured the success that it now enjoys.

As in the case of the JOG, the MORC was founded for the purpose of racing small cruisers over long courses. Geographically, however, racing in the U.S. imposed a different problem. From the British Isles, interesting races could be run to the shores of France and Holland across the English Channel over a long weekend. The semi-protected waters found along the coasts of the United States and the Great Lakes offered a fine location for the type of racing contemplated.

The first step was to adopt a measurement rule suitable for this size and type of boat. The JOG had adopted the RORC rule with a few modifications. A review of the various rules in existence produced one approach, to follow the Cruising Club of America Rule, simplifying where possible. We were most fortunate in having the opportunity to consult with Olin Stephens in developing the rule. Our rule has been so sound that it has only been necessary to modify it slightly.

The development of the rule required much study. Data on many boats of the type that we expected to race had to be obtained. Twenty of these boats were rated under the CCA rule to determine whether or not any modifications were necessary to the rule as it stood. It soon became obvious that the CCA rule, when applied to these small boats, favored heavier displacements and larger sail areas than the boats actually had. The data was then plotted. From this a series of curves were obtained, showing, for example, displacement versus measured length and beam versus measured length. Comparing these curves with those obtained by plotting the base factors as obtained in accordance with the CCA rule revealed the fact that the slope of the curves were identical. They were not coincident. It was simply necessary to apply different constants. Each factor in the rule was tested in this manner. Finally the MORC Rule was evolved.

In addition to the measurement rule, it was necessary to prepare a complete list of safety requirements with which each competing yacht must comply before being allowed to race.

The type of races held by the MORC is best shown by the parent station's activities during a typical racing season. Eight races, ranging in distance from 15 to 164 miles are held. While the majority of these races are of the overnight type, a few weekends are set aside as rendezvous races. After the first two seasons of racing, the members decided to hold such day races, at the completion of which the boats would raft together, thus allowing the members to get to know the boats and one another, discuss club activities and socialize. These races produced many new memberships. For instance, people whose boats met the MORC requirements in most respects, but failed to fully qualify, might join the club, compete in a few day races and later modify their boats to fully qualify under the rule.

The long distance races are the main purpose of the organization. A typical weekend race over a course of 40 miles will start

Saturday morning about 9 o'clock. If the wind is favorable the fleet will finish on Sunday morning.

The same problems of navigation and tactics which confront the crews of large ocean racers exist on their smaller counterparts. In many instances they are magnified. Encountering a three knot foul current on a large boat capable of 7 knots is serious enough. Encountering the same current on a MORC boat capable of 4 knots is a catastrophe. What would constitute a good sailing breeze for the larger boat represents storm conditions for the MORC boat.

The more interesting races held by the parent station are the Block Island Race and the Illingworth Trophy Race. The former starts off the Norwalk Islands, Connecticut, and goes around the entrance bell to New Harbor on Block Island, finishing at Milford, Connecticut. The rhumb line distance is 164 miles. Shortly after the formation of the MORC, Capt. John Illingworth donated a trophy. For this cup the race starts and finishes off Larchmont, New York. The turning mark is presently the lightship bell at the Western end of Long Sand Shoal.

For the first two years of the MORC, the fleet consisted of existing small cruising boats, which qualified under the rule, after necessary structural modifications. The first MORC boat was a Herreshoff Bullseye, 12-½ feet on the waterline, owned by past Commodore Steve Corkery. *Sandman*, as she was called, required extensive alterations. The coaming forward was framed and decked over to form a cabin.

A watertight cockpit and two quarter berths which ran aft under the cockpit were installed. In addition to these changes, equipment required by the safety section of the rule had to be installed.

Typical of the other boats in the early fleet was a Honeymoon Class sloop designed by J. H. Linge, the Peoples' Boat designed by Per Brohill, a 21 foot waterline Alden sloop designed about 1932, a 23 foot overall raised deck Pennant and the famous *Sopranino*, the 19′ 8″ overall cutter in which Patrick Ellam and

Colin Moodie sailed across the Atlantic in 1952. The next few years added many more of the well known one-design cruisers to the fleet.

In 1956 the first boat specifically designed to the MORC rule made her appearance. *Medea*, designed by Richard Carlson, is 24 feet overall, has a displacement of about 3800 pounds and carries 226 sq. ft. of sail in a masthead rig. The boat has reverse sheer, relatively short ends and a built up fin keel with 1000 pounds of outside ballast. *Medea*'s first season was outstanding. She won every race she entered, including events held by other clubs. The following year a second boat specifically designed to the rule joined the fleet. *Trina*, owned by Wilbur L. Scranton, Jr. and designed by the author, is a 24 foot keel-centerboarder, displacing 4300 pounds. She carries 289 sq. ft. of sail in a masthead yawl rig. Like *Medea* the year before, *Trina* finished the season undefeated.

Taking a look at the boats themselves, we find that they vary in length from 15-½ feet to the rule limit of 24 feet, accommodations ran from two to four berths. Some are fitted with pipe berths, while others have built-in berths with foam rubber mattresses. Fresh water is carried in plastic bottles or built-in tanks with galley sink pumps. Water closets may be of the airplane type using chemical bags or regular marine heads. Most of the stoves are alcohol. One type that has come into favor is a small gimballed Sterno stove which permits the crew to put on a pot of coffee or a can of soup and let it warm while sail changes are being made. The majority of the boats are fitted with inboard power, some carry outboards and a few have no power at all. Many of the boats are fitted with electric lights using a 6 volt "hot shot" battery. With care one of these batteries will last a season.

If the growth of the MORC over the past four years continues at the same rate, by 1962 there will be well established racing fleets in every major yachting center throughout the United

States. Membership at the present time covers the West Coast, Great Lakes, East Coast, Gulf Coasts and Mexico. In 1958 the second official station of the MORC was established on the West Coast.

During the coming years more boats will be designed to the MORC rule. Although it is early to pass judgment, the performance of *Medea* and *Trina* would indicate that the rule produces a very sound type of boat. Several stock boat companies have already consulted the MORC to be sure that their designs qualify.

The rule itself will probably undergo minor alterations in an effort to properly evaluate the various factors that enter into the rating.

At present the maximum length is 24′ 1″. This was decided in order to eliminate separate classes within the club, since experience has shown it is unfair to race yachts with considerable length variation even under the best of the handicap systems. Many fast cruising boats in the 25 to 29 foot overall range have been built which would make fine additions to the fleet. Indications are that the length limitation may be extended to include boats of a larger size. This will result in two divisions, similar to the JOG.

One member, when asked why he joined the MORC replied, "I am tired of racing around the eternal triangle."

This statement indicated a situation which many of us are faced with at one time or another. We may go along happily year after year racing in a one-design class. Then the ties of matrimony challenge our season's standing. As the family grows, the problem becomes more acute. At last the racing boat is traded in for a small cruiser. The wife and kids are now happy and to a certain extent so is the old man. At least he is on the water. However, every time he meets an adversary of similar proportions a race takes place, even if only within his own cockpit.

The MORC has provided the answer to this problem for many. Most of us can usually get away for a weekend now and then to

take part in the long distance races sponsored by the club. During the course of the season two or three rendezvous races are scheduled which enable the wife and family to come along. The result is that the whole family can take an active part in the club.

These boats are within the budget of the young family. Upkeep is nominal. In many instances costly yard bills are avoided entirely since these boats can be trailered and stored in the owner's back yard.