

Racing

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Pre-start

The America's what?

IT'S BEEN an exciting month for ocean racing enthusiasts. First came the news that Britain's Royal Ocean Racing Club is to investigate the feasibility of reviving the Admiral's Cup in 2011.

New Zealand has a proud history in what was once the world's premier offshore regatta, with *Propoganda* (Peter Lester), *Goldcorp* (Richard Dodson) and *Kiwi* (Tom Dodson) combining to win the coveted trophy in 1987.

Pre-start understands Auckland Jim Farmer is preparing for the possible 2011 revival by building a TP52 that should be ready for the Coastal Classic in October; it will be interesting to see who Farmer teams up with should the Admiral's Cup be reinstated.

The announcement of a Round Lord Howe race (page 74) starting and finishing in Newcastle next May is another exciting development. It will never supplant the Sydney-Hobart as Australasia's premier ocean race, but there will be plenty attracted to the fast reaching conditions expected, as opposed to a windward slog.

Undoubtedly the most exciting news, though, is the proposed South Pacific Mini circuit (see adjacent story). The circuit is admittedly only at the embryonic stage, but how good would it be to follow a fleet of courageous solo sailors bobbing about the South Pacific Ocean and the Tasman Sea in 6.5m canting keelers?



Propoganda, Kiwi, Goldcorp

South Pacific Mini circuit

Big plans for mini idea

Plans afoot to put New Zealand on the Mini 650 map.

A GROUP of fiscally-frustrated solo sailors have unveiled a cut-price plan to establish Auckland as the capital of a new South Pacific Mini circuit.

Disillusioned by the multi-million dollar exclusivity of big-boat ocean racing, the group of internet savvy Kiwis has floated the possibility of a bargain-basement start-up price for skippers interested in the proposed Open 650 (or Mini Transat) circuit.

By pooling production and component costs and opting for rugged but cheap materials – aluminium over carbon masts, for example – it is hoped the initial set-up cost of one of the 21-footers could be kept to as little as \$75,000.

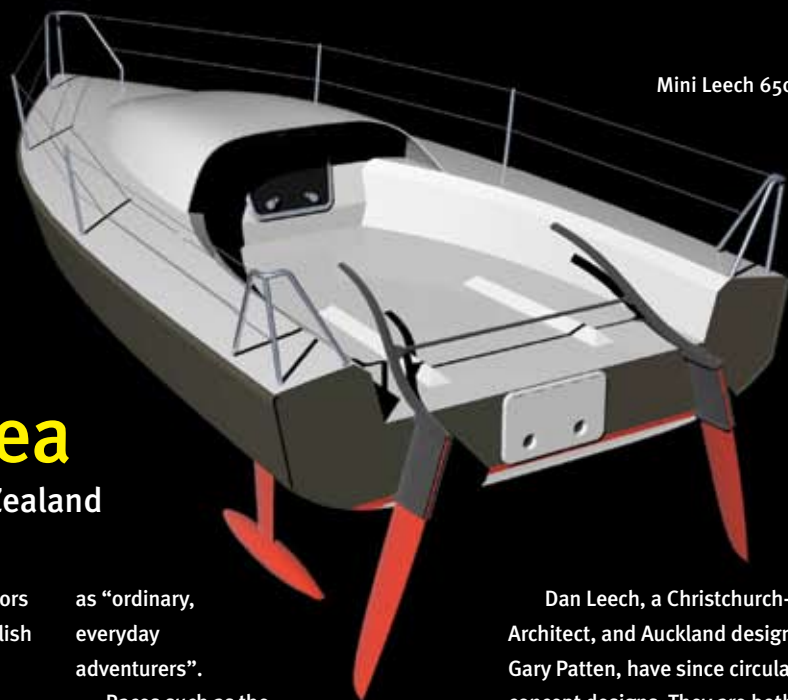
An exciting calendar of races, including New Zealand's premier coastal and offshore events, has heightened interest for sailors with serious single-handed ocean racing ambitions as well

as "ordinary, everyday adventurers".

Races such as the Coastal Classic and Auckland to Fiji and Noumea Ocean Races would be used as a feeder series to a main 'South Pacific triangle' where Auckland would serve as the start and finish hub in an autumn race circuit taking in Fiji or Noumea and Hamilton Island.

A meeting in Auckland last month, arranged after prolonged interest in an online sailing forum, mobilised wannabe skippers, designers, boat builders and potential marine industry backers.

At least three sailors committed to building boats and as many as nine others indicated they would be interested in campaigns if the concept takes off. There has also been interest from sailors in Australia and Noumea.



Mini Leech 650

Dan Leech, a Christchurch-based Naval Architect, and Auckland designer-builder Gary Patten, have since circulated 650 concept designs. They are both poised to start production (Leech in conjunction with Wellington boat builder Matt Stenchman) providing there is cash to back up the initial flurry of interest.

The purposely over-canvased boats would come in hull and deck packages or kitset form and are small enough to be squeezed into a standard sized garage, allowing skippers to finish them off at home as time and money allows.

It is envisaged founding skippers would eventually upgrade to new boats or refit their existing 650s with the likes of carbon masts. That would have the spin-off by offering potential new skippers cut-price, entry level equipment in years to come.

David Howie, editor of the website crew.org where the South Pacific Mini



Mini Leech 650

Dan Leech and Matt Stenchman have been working on a prototype Mini for NZ. The project is aimed at keeping costs to a minimum by allowing skippers to build the boats in their garages using a full CNC kitset build package. Two build options would be offered, either plywood hull sides and interior structure with a stripped

plank cedar bottom and cabin top or a E glass/foam hull side and interior structure with stripped planked cedar bottom and cabin top. The boats come with a canting keel, twin rudders and cunards boards and a quick release keel setup for easy transporting.

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circuit was conceived, is not surprised by the initial interest.

“Just look at the Auckland to Noumea race [which started on June 27], you’re talking \$1 million minimum for a boat capable of winning,” Howie said.

“In my day those races used to attract fleets of 80, Lotus’, Chicos’ and Cav 32s. It was easy to get a ride. Now you’re talking \$250,000 to \$300,000 minimum for a competitive 30-footer which is just insane.”

Howie gives the proposed circuit a “50-50” chance of getting off the ground and guesses the first boats could hit the water within a year.

Importantly the proposal has the backing of the marine industry with representatives from Selden Masts, Lidgard Sails, Chains Ropes and Anchors and Safety at Sea all indicating varying degrees of support at the June 10 meeting.

“There are at least three guys ready to go ahead, another two who will when that happens and three or four waiting to see what happens. We’ll have to see what happens when it comes to getting the wallet out, but I’m fizzing [at the prospect],” Howie said.

The Mini 650 class has been described as the “little sister of the big ocean races”. The Mini Transat is its main draw-card, attracting the world’s largest fleet of offshore racing yachts for the 4000-plus nautical mile romp across the Atlantic; New Zealander Chris Sayer first stirred Kiwi interest in the race when he finished third in 1999 and second, unofficially, as a “pirate” entry in 2003.

At just 6.5m, the Open 650 certainly isn’t for the faint-hearted as this assessment on the unofficial Mini Transat site indicates: “Be aware that this race is serious, and not to be taken light-heartedly. It takes a lot of money, time and effort. And then you are sailing a wild beast of a boat, with huge risks involved. It can cost you your life. Do not under estimate it.” – Kent Gray



HE HAS no car, no house and “no budget to speak of” and he couldn’t be happier. Conrad Colman is living his solo ocean racing dream, starting small in Europe’s popular Mini 650 class, but thinking big with visions of one-day winning the Vendee Globe.

The 25-year-old Aucklander has achieved credible top-20 placings in his first three outings in the 650’s highly-competitive serie (or production) class and is confident of making the start-line for September’s famous Mini Transat.

Colman had moved up to second reserve for the 4200 nautical mile race to Salvador de Bahia in Brazil (via Portugal’s Madeira Island) at the time of going to press, and the historic pre-race drop-out rate suggests he should follow in the legendary wake of Kiwi Mini 650 pioneer Chris Sayer by taking the gun off La Rochelle on September 13th.

A Mini Transat start would be a huge opportunity, and challenge, for Colman who has redefined his life to pursue a career as a professional ocean racer.

Born to an American father (who had sailed to NZ) and a Kiwi mother, Colman grew up sailing Optimists in Auckland and was absorbed by the Whitbread Round the

World stopovers hosted by the City of Sails at the time.

After moving to the US at the age of 15, he proved good enough to race mountain bikes at an elite level and smart enough to start his own business while still at university. But Colman, living in dusty Colorado, “didn’t like where my economics degree was taking me” and hankered for a return to the sea.

He now calls his cramped 6.5m (21-foot) boat *Betelgeuse* home, joining a gypsy-like community of aspiring young professionals and middle-aged solo sailing dreamers who sail around Europe from race to race.

Colman received a “very friendly private loan” to help purchase his 50,000 euro boat and has saved further money by designing and making his own sails. He supplements his racing by finding work in boat yards but his budget is so tight he recently opted to sail the English Channel from France to work on his sails in Cowes as it saved the price of a return ferry ticket, and because “any miles are good miles.”

Colman’s long-term goal is to win the Vendee Globe, the grand-daddy of Open 60 races. In between times he is eyeing a quick graduation to the Open 40 class with

the 2011-12 Portimao Global Ocean Race, again scheduled to stopover in Wellington, and the Route de Rhum his preferred stepping stones toward the big time.

“My ambition is to win the Vendee, with my first participation in 2016. I’ll be 32 by then but there are a lot of sea miles between now and then,” Colman said.

Colman placed 18th in his solo debut, the Pornichet Select 650, was 12th from 26 starters in the Mini Pavois and 13th in the two-handed Mini Fastnet. He has the Royal Western Mini Fastnet (a 720nm loop taking in Plymouth-Cowes-Fastnet-Cork-Plymouth) lined up as his final shakedown race in early July and will then settle in Lorient to round out his training and preparation for the Mini Transat. – Kent Gray

