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# Dun Laoghaire vies with Aran Islands for sailing affections

David Branigan



Sailing

Two sailing regattas this week, on opposite coasts, have succeeded in mustering a large proportion of Ireland's boating community. And both, in turn have their own spectacles on offer although for different reasons.

On Dublin Bay, the biennial Volvo Dun Laoghaire Regatta begins this afternoon with an official turnout of 475 boats although this is widely predicted to top 490 entries when latecomers are facilitated.

And at Cill Ronan in the Aran Islands, the annual West of Ireland Offshore Racing Association week got underway yesterday where 45 boats have made the journey to the outskirts of Galway Bay.

That number is expected to swell further at the weekend when 20 traditional hooker craft will arrive for their own racing.

But from the modern racing yachts' perspective, the two events have gathered up over 200 racing crews; probably around 1,800 sailors.

Based on the Irish ECHO handicap register that most if not all regular racing boats use, with a total of 498 boats listed well over half the national fleet will be at sea and competing over the next few days.

Early results from the WIORA event include victory in the opening race for Liam Burke's Tribal from Galway Bay Sailing Club in the biggest class of the series, Division 1 where the Corby 25-footer has some stiff competition.

Burke leads after one race on both ECHO and IRC handi-

cap systems, a result that is mirrored in Division 2 where Aidan Breen's Port of Galway

is at the front of his nine-strong class.

In Dun Laoghaire, the 475-strong fleet includes dinghies and one-designs as well as the bigger handicap boats. It's a formula unique to the Dublin Regatta as its Cork counterpart events at Crosshaven and Kinsale - Volvo Cork Week and O'Leary Life Sovereigns Cup respectively - both cater for handicap classes principally.

What Dun Laoghaire offers this week is scale and the momentum that 'entries beget entries'.

And so, the biggest class turnouts of the year so far are

likely on Dublin Bay though with some notable exceptions.

As previously noted, the resurgence of interest in offshore and distance sailing has led to a trickle-down effect for day-regattas that have all introduced Coastal Courses with their own dedicated fleet.

Many of the larger boats have opted for these courses but before now might have only had the option of racing in Division 0.

But as with the recent Sovereigns Cup in Kinsale, Dun Laoghaire has also found that the 'Zeroes' have been hugely depleted in numbers, in part due to the recession but also

because of the draw of the Coastal racing.

A fleet of over 30 boats will sail a variety of courses around Dublin Bay though

with light winds expected for at least the first half of the series, these are likely to be extended 'round the buoys' type races rather than significant distance affairs.

With at least three potential Division 0 boats gone to the coast, the bigger boats will have a smaller field to contend with though the class will remain interesting as the regatta will be the third instalment in the continuing match-race between Conor Phelan's Jump

Juice from the Royal Cork Yacht Club and Tony Ackland's Dark Angel from Swansea.

In the season opener in Crosshaven three weeks ago, the visitor laid down a series of wins to defeat the reigning national title-holder at the ICRA National championships.

This was followed by the Sovereigns event at Kinsale where Phelan's crew found some chinks in the Welsh armour and scored two wins from six races though ultimately fell to Ackland once more.

Will Dun Laoghaire even the contest out some more or will others in the division such as Jay Colville's Forty Licks from East Down YC upset the duel?

Unsurprisingly, with the bulk of Ireland's J109 class based in Dun Laoghaire, 14 of these boats will be contesting Division 1 with John Maybury's Joker 2, the triple national champion likely to be the boat to beat over the weekend.



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Maybury's Royal Irish YC clubmate Paul O'Higgins' Rockabill VI is also in this class but with light airs forecast, the conditions aren't likely to favour this 36-footer.

