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Sailing

Dún Laoghaire Regatta helps break down yachting stereotypes

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The scene at the port formerly known as Kingstown yesterday could easily have been an early etching of the first sailing regatta at the 200-year old harbour: traditional classic and modern boats racing side by side with the iconic East Pier lighthouse

as the backdrop.

The occasion is the Volvo Dún Laoghaire Regatta that has attracted 475 boats in a mix of keelboats, dinghies, one-designs and traditional craft with almost half the fleet from outside the Dublin Bay area.

Ireland's fickle summer threatened to spoil the occasion

with an indifferent breeze but the race management teams persisted and as they did, the breeze built to 10-12 knots and a full programme was completed for day one. But even the weather couldn't alter the spectacle of a bay full of sails, a bustling harbour, two piers busy with walkers and the backdrop

of the Victorian seafront town. By early evening, the estimated 2,500 competitors were ashore and the four waterfront yachts clubs thronged.

Elements

All elements taken together, all the stereotyped "yachting" boxes are ticked for a sport that re-

mains deliberately aloof from the mainstream and reserved for social elitists so beloved of Ireland's semi-dormant begradgers. And while the true profile of the sport does indeed include elements of yachting's early years, the modern sport in Ireland has moved on as evidenced by the diverse participa-

tion at this mega-regatta.

The truth is the super-wealthy tycoons of 100 years ago have moved beyond these waters; Victorian yachties weren't much interested in sunshine that today is offered in abundance between the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. Facilities in these more

glamorous locations are better suited to the superyachts. Even more modest yachts are more likely to be found close to an airport with a regular direct service from a low-fares airline.

The "yachting-set" would look distinctly out of place in colder northern latitudes where cruising maxi yachts in-

frequently venture. If such boats were to happen into Dublin Bay this weekend, what they would discover would be a celebration of all things sailing. Such issues won't matter much to the thousands competing and opening day's results set the scene for the next three days.