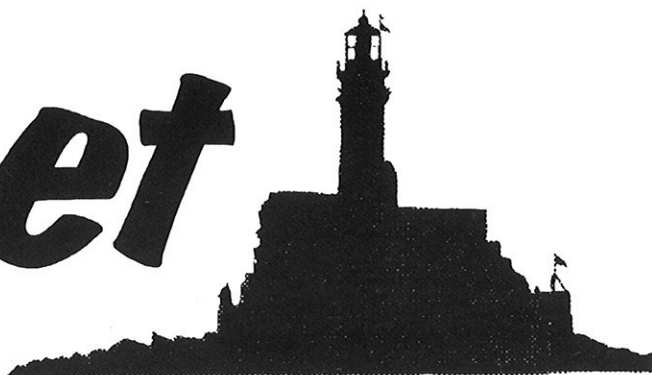


Fastnet

by Peter Clutterbuck

with contributions from competitors and spectators.



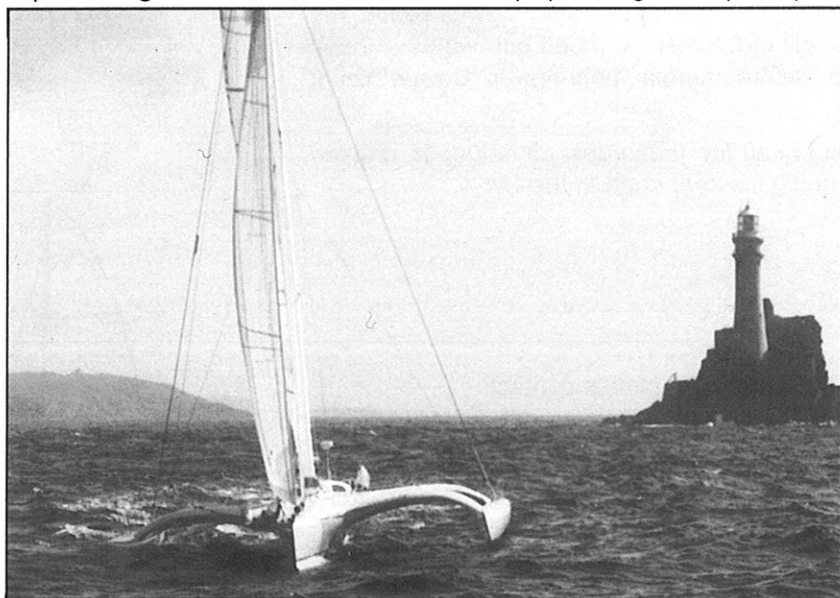
The Fastnet Rock lies in the Atlantic, off Ireland's Southwest Coast. 247 yachts from 15 nations entered the race, starting from Cowes, rounding "the Rock", and finishing in Plymouth - a course of 605 miles. For the first time since the original Fastnet race in 1925, the Royal Ocean Racing Club allowed multihulls to enter: there were three 60ft French Formula 1 trimarans, and nine 30 - 50ft multihulls in the S-Multihull class, representing the USA, UK, France

85 of the 303 starters finished, and 24 boats were abandoned. 136 sailors were rescued as a result of a huge air-sea rescue effort. A quarter of the fleet (all keelboats) were inverted 180 - 360 degrees. The Search and Rescue Aircraft, which are equipped with radar which can measure wave height, reported 50-60 foot seas, and yachtsmen with experience of many Southern Ocean races had never seen seas as bad, caused mainly by 90 degree very sharp

mugs on deck. Few multihulls have any plumbing. Safety standards worldwide were overhauled after 1979. Multihull safety has also improved since 1979, principally stronger construction, more buoyant hulls, escape hatches, and proof now that drogues off the stern, or preferably parachute anchors off the bow, allow survival in extreme conditions.

On the 40 foot Owen tri *Spirit of England*, we focussed on two key areas to improve speed and safety prior to the race: weather research, and night sailing. Offshore sailing accidents occur most frequently between 2 and 4 am, which was also the worst time in the '79 storm. The start of the '79 race was in light airs, with a forecast of Force 5-6 at the Fastnet, as a low was coming in to the southwest of Ireland. Our situation was a small high over the Channel at the start, a deepening low west of Ireland, and forecast of Force 5-6 in the west of the course - a classic Fastnet weather situation.

The early part of the race would be dominated by sea breezes and land breezes, which we studied in the days before the start. The key would be to keep inshore to optimise these and the tides, and offshore to catch the gradient wind in between, keeping both options open. Whilst a gale was unlikely, the complex system of lows and fronts awaited west of Ireland, so we took our drogue and para-anchor, partly as our skipper was wearing the MOCRA Safety Officer hat and wanted to set a good example. The key strategic issue on the Fastnet legs was which side of the rhumb line to go: we decided to edge south on each



and Russia.

The race has a reputation for bad weather, common in the Atlantic in August, and roughly a quarter of the races have had severe Force 8-9 gales, most often on the longest 180 mile leg between Land's End and Ireland. The sea has frequently removed chunks of the Rock and the lighthouse, twisting steel, even 130 feet above sea level.

The Force 11 storm in the 1979 race claimed nineteen lives, fifteen from the monohull fleet, and four from an unofficial multihull entry. Only

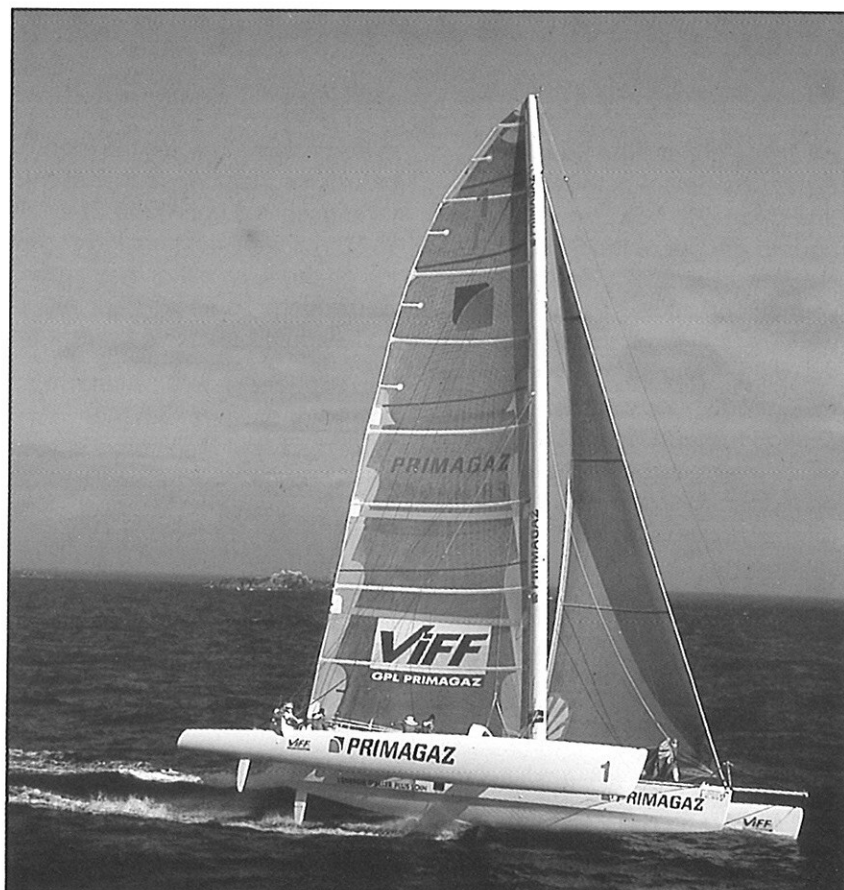
veer in a trough within a 135 degree veer over 12 hours.

The race has had enormous influence on yacht design. The early races took three weeks, and in this race, Laurent Bourgnon's *Primagaz* broke the record with a time of 45 hours, 45 minutes: ten times faster. Few sports have seen such dramatic improvements over a half century. The leading maxi in the 1960s had elaborate meals served below, and it was required to dress for dinner. Winning boats nowadays rarely have a table - dinner is freeze dried eaten out of

leg to hedge the expected troughs in the southerly airstream.

With me was Brian Thompson, fresh off another Transpac in Steve Fosset's 60 foot tri *Lakota*, and working on the 60 foot cat Stars and Stripes. Brian was on his third season on *Spirit*, having been in the winning crew in the Falmouth-Azores, and Three Peaks Races previously. Brian is rapidly becoming Britain's leading offshore multihull sailor, with a wealth of wins and world records. Richard Pocock and Digby Fox were rounding off a successful RORC season on *Spirit*. Richard is the 'A' class catamaran national champion, and has extensive offshore experience dating from the 60 foot tri *Colt Cars*, which included surviving a pitchpole. Richard also survived a 180 degree inversion in an OOD 34 in the '79 Fastnet, the crew wondering whether the boat would ever come upright again. Digby races Dart 15s and 18s, and like the others is an excellent multihull driver. Our crew was a quiet one, with a collection of cool and logical minds, and a broad wealth of multihull experience.

This year saw more fast boats, and more rock stars than ever before in one race. There were races within races. It was the first time in history that the French Formula 1 60s, the Whitbread 60 fleet, the Ericsson 80/Grand Mistral fleet, Open 60 Vendee/BOC boats and the Admirals Cup fleet have all been in



Primagaz at the Scillies - Christian Fevrier

one event. The crew list looked like a "Who's Who of Sailing". There were America's Cup drivers and Olympic medalists. It was a privilege just to be at the start line.

The monohulls started 2 1/2 hours ahead of us, which gave them the chance to get the fair tide through the Needles past Portland Bill. The faster boats, including all the trimarans and the W-60s started at the back, with a two hour gap to reduce congestion. We saw Loick Peyron's *Fujicolors* sparring with *Primagaz*, then it was our start at 17:00, which went perfectly with a reach down the line on starboard, and a last minute gybe onto port on the stronger fair tide on the Island side. We led the S-Multis

beating down the Solent, with Ralph Marx's American entry, the Shuttleworth 34 *Shockwave*, Richard Tolkien's Bailey 40 *FPC Greenaway (Mollymawk)* and Claude Develay's French Irens 50 *Nootka* snapping at our heels. The Russian *Gazprom*, Mike Butterfield's *Dragonfly 1000 Dragonflyer*, and two Banshee 35s - Peter Lillywhite's *Hasty Lady*, and Tony Purser's *Backlash* made up the S-Multi group.

Shortly before the start *Dragonflyer* lost the propeller off her inboard diesel - no questions about her engine and propeller factor !

Guy Gibbins aboard *Dragonflyer* writes: *Gazprom*, had misunderstood the race instructions, as *Dragonflyer* hardened up for the start, *Gazprom* hoisted her kite to run down the 1/2 mile or so to 'check-in' with the gate boat, it would be halfway across Lyme Bay before she caught us again.

Spirit led the W-60s out to the Needles crossing tacks with Laurie Smith, Chris Dickson, Grant Dalton et al surrounded by 4 helicopters. The new W-60 design is very fast in light airs and upwind, recognising that Whitbread Races are won and lost in the Doldrums.

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Bill Bailey aboard the *Banshee Backlash* writes: "In the light airs and dying ebb tide, we struggled hard to get out of the Solent and clear over the Bridge before the young flood could push us back - we kept fairly up hard to what was left of the SW'ly breeze, while other faster boats - *Hasty Lady*, *Dragonflyer* and *Gazprom* - eased off on freer courses more to the north and disappeared into the murk and gathering night.

Guy Gibbins: "just short of Old Harry Rocks, the tide finally

miles offshore to catch the land breeze, as there was no gradient wind expected until 0300. The W-60s all went offshore looking for the gradient, so either they were all using the same weather info, or none wanted to take a flyer.

Bob Wingate on *FPC Greenaway*: "We went offshore with the Whitbreads but didn't have enough line to kedge."

Clutterbuck: "We passed 200 anchored monohulls in 3 knots of wind off the Dorset coast in the foul tide, an amazing experience

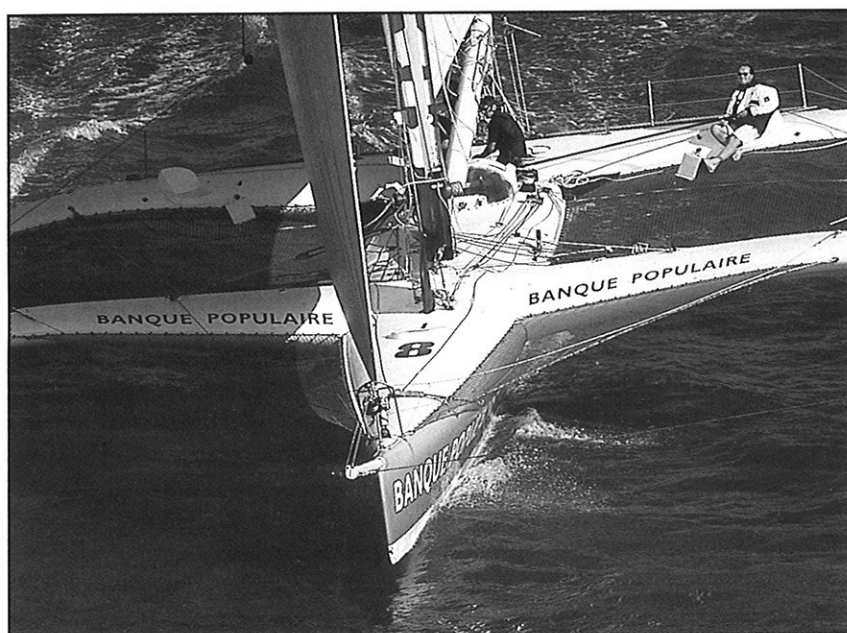
Maid, *Yellowdrama*, *Crusader* and a few other rather large boats. Without knowing it, we must have passed nearly 200 boats during the night. We never saw a Sigma 38 or BH41 or J105 or any other of the normal fleet."

Guy Gibbins: "The early hours saw us ghosting westwards again, we scraped round Portland Bill just as the tide was turning against us, hoping *Hasty Lady* and *Backlash* were behind....As we crossed Lyme Bay, pretty well down the rhumb line, we started to reel in the tail end of the monohull fleet, one in particular we couldn't seem to pass, as we converged *Gazprom* focussed out of the haze, for an hour we paced them, then the wind upped a couple of knots, Vitali let off the handbrake and they were gone over the horizon...Mike the skipper had arrived onboard avec sextant, as per race instructions. A sunny afternoon seemed just the time for a ceremonial waving of this early 19th century GPS substitute. Initial inspection revealed an index error equal to 45 miles. Squinting at the sun confirmed a position line in the Northern Hemisphere and a further suggestion to obtain a really accurate fix was rejected by the skipper when he discovered it involved lowering the offending instrument on a rope in order to establish the depth. Apparently these modern plastic sextants just don't sink like the old ones did!"

Bob Wingate: "We were up with 50ft Admiral's Cuppers though they gained on us as they were more inshore at the headlands."

Bill Bailey: "I think we squeezed every last ounce out of my tidal analysis, for by the Runnel Stone we were about 12-15 miles ahead of *Hasty Lady* by their reckoning, and *Dragonflyer* was back there too.

Laurent Bourgnon reported: "From EC1 to Land's End, the lead changed several times. At Land's End the three (*Primagaz*, *Fujicolor* and *Banque Populaire*) multihulls



overcame boat speed and we anchored just short of the massed barbeque fleet in Studland Bay."

The 60ft multihulls were set a special race course and were obliged to round EC1 buoy, adding 25 miles to their route. Laurent Bourgnon reported:

"We have been becalmed during hours in heavy fog near EC1 (which he rounded at 0214hrs). There were dozen of big ships coming right at us. Without our radar and a special alarm device emitting a powerful echo, we could have rammed by ships several times. Some of them crossed us at less than fifty meters. We were in real danger."

Peter Clutterbuck continues: We used the sea breeze as far as Anvil Point, then positioned ourselves 5

surrounded by hundreds of red and green lights in a silence only interrupted by rattling anchor chains. The barometer dropped a touch, confirming that the high was drifting north, so we headed offshore to catch the expected easterly gradient, then gybed back in and went through the Portland Bill tidal race to get maximum fair tide. The race reaches 9 knots in springs and is to be avoided in any kind of swell or foul weather.

We kept offshore using the gradient and keeping clear of any interfering seabreeze, running close to *Nootka* down the Devon coast.

Ralph Marx on *Shockwave* "During the first night we had no idea how we were doing. We woke up to find ourselves with *Australian*



Fullcolor at the Scilles - Christian Fevrier

were level !"

Christian Fevrier writes: "It was a great sight to see *Primagaz* and *Fujicolor* with our helicopter when arriving at the Bishop's Rock lighthouse. Sometimes you are lucky. Sun came just for one hour. They were just separated by one mile, speeding in the 20 knots range. *Primagaz* broke the inner forestay just before the Fastnet and losing half an hour to repair, while *Banque Populaire* broke her gennaker halyard snap shackle and lost an hour retrieving it.

Peter Clutterbuck continues: We had to drive very hard after Lands End to get ahead of *Nootka* with our light air reacher up in Force 5 reach.

We were now on the edge of the Atlantic low, feeling its southerly airstream. We blew out both the reacher telltale windows (2 sq ft each reinforced with carbon and kevlar), then while Brian and I were off watch below during the night, there was a loud bang, and Richard yelled "Need some help.....". The reacher had blown the masthead shackle and we lost the sail overboard - recovered it whilst unable to drop blow 10

knots dead downwind.

Bob Wingate: "An hour after the Runnel Stone the bowsprit bobstay broke which hampered our spinnaker work for the rest of the race."

Guy Gibbins: "Lands End to the Fastnet, a nice breeze, kite up, boat speed gently rising, two hundred plus miles into the race and still boats all around. By now we were passing forty footers, the skipper insisting on rigging the cockpit table, pink gins etc. for every monohull passed. Soon we were seeing gusts of 25 knots true as we reached into the Rock under kite, Bill and I managed a spurt at of 16.5 knots before our watch ended, sleeping fitfully as we listened to Mike and William career into the gloom at ever unrealistic numbers.

31 hours 34 minutes after leaving Cowes, *Primagaz* rounded the Fastnet at 0024 on Monday morning, followed two minutes later by *Fujicolor* with *Banque Populaire* 54 minutes later. The Ericsson 80 *BIL* was first monohull round 6 hours later.

Clutterbuck: We were driving the

boat harder than ever before. We hit 23-24 knots boatspeed on a screaming reach overnight to the Rock, the wind gusting to Force 6, catching the W-60 fleet in the process. *Banque Populaire* was coming back reefed with staysail - we were closing at over 40 knots!

Spirit rounded the Rock in 22nd place 7 minutes behind the Whitbread 60 EF Education, and were the first S-multi round the Rock, with *Nootka* 30 seconds behind, having just failed to establish an overlap - not a good place to call for water in some lumpy seas! Celebrations were in order with a shot of whisky all round from Digby's silver flask. We all recalled previous roundings: my last one in my Wayfarer dinghy, but Brian topped us all with a comment that he had done three in 1995 on *Lakota*: one as an unofficial Fastnet entry (setting an unofficial record at 2 days 8 hours), one breaking the Round Ireland record, and one breaking the Round Britain and Ireland record.

The next boat Richard Tolkien's *FPC Greenaway* rounded four and a half hours later. The only boats ahead were the three 60ft multis,



five Ericsson 80s (ex Grand Mistral), nine Whitbread 60s, two Open 60s and two other maxi monohulls.

Ralph Marx's on Shockwave writes: "We did see *Spirit* heading back from the Rock, only a stones throw away from *Nootka* and, by our calculations, 55 miles ahead of us."

Shockwave rounded in 34th place six and a half hours behind *Spirit of England*. Less than 6 hours later, shortly before midnight on the Monday, the 30ft Russian catamaran *Gazprom* was 63rd to round only 7 minutes behind the American Admirals Cupper *Jameson*.

Mike Butterfield's *Dragonflyer* rounded on Tuesday 0445 in 130th position in amongst Sigma 38s.

Bill Bailey (*Banshee Backlash*) writes: Once into the Celtic Sea tidal current trickery was useless and *Hasty Lady*, *Dragonflyer* and *Gazprom* steadily caught us up, each eventually passing us on a deep reach all the way. In the night, about 25 miles from the Fastnet I kept the new kite set, we steadily pulled *Hasty Lady* back until about 4-500 yards to windward of them and 12 miles short of the Fastnet Light - our tack line chafed through. We had to get t'others up on deck to recover the sail - but as they were sleep-fuddled this exercise took over half-an-hour. Then it was decided by committee not to reset the sail,

so it was stuffed into the saloon while t'others went back to bed. In the predawn *Hasty Lady* set her kite again and rounded the Fastnet just ahead of us. We didn't see much of them again.....*Hasty Lady* was the next multihull round at shortly before 11:00 in 220th place with *Backlash* 64 minutes later.

On MOCRA Rating at the Rock, *Spirit* held a three hour lead on corrected time with *Hasty Lady* holding a seven minute advantage over *Dragonflyer*.

Clutterbuck: We blew two mast rotator blocks, and a barberhauler block - replaced with spares. Next night a mainsheet block blew up - also replaced with a spare. We put in a reef, then there was yet another minor explosion as the first reef line blew later in the night. We decided to unreef by default. There were some nasty black squalls looking like tornadoes in the night. *Nootka* got away from us on the beat back to Bishop Rock.

Ralph Marx(*Shockwave*): "The trip back was completely upwind. It got a little light and tricky around Bishop and it didn't help that we were a little fatigued by this point. About an hour past the Bishop, a front passed through giving us a ton of rain and good breeze! We hit 19 knots surfing to windward on following seas. It was a nice sensation!

Bill Bailey(*Backlash*): "On the way

back to Scillies, we anticipated the unforecast slow wind shift from S to SW, as did *Hasty Lady*, they hoping we would tack to the west, and we hoping the same of them - and we both stayed on starboard but fairly deep, following the eventually-freeing wind around. *Hasty Lady* not very far ahead, got clear round the Bishop Rock with the tail-end of a fair tide and wind, while we - about 40 minutes later - ended up parked 300yards off the Western Rocks in a near-calm and tide, turning, pushing us the wrong way."

Peter Clutterbuck : " We throttled up to 20 knots again to the Lizard, and I wore some excellent safety goggles which dealt admirably with the 30 knot spray. We ran downwind so Brian could go up the mast on the fractional spinnaker halyard with a boathook to grab the masthead spinnaker halyard. We then reset the reacher, complete with 2 large holes in it, and crossed the finish line in 3 days 46 minutes. We were ahead of all the Admirals Cup entries, in spite of their earlier start. It was fun to finish in amongst professionally sailed, sponsored entries twice our size with fifty times the budget.

Ralph Marx(*Shockwave*): "During the night it gradually got lighter and lighter though. As it got lighter the Admirals Cup boats started gaining on us. The last several miles took many hours as it was nearly dead calm. We kept the boat moving but there were several boats that crept up from astern. The finish was super exciting. We were in the middle of all the AC boats finishing, 4 of the big boats and the ILC 40's. We had a great time with it all as we fought it out with all the big boys for the last 2 miles. Several times we surged out in front of the entire group only to be stopped by lack of wind. "

Guy Gibbins: "Rounded Bishop, lovely weather, caught the race update over the VHF, we need to finish by early am Thursday to win, ETA 2200 Wednesday - looks

Fastnet Race

Elapsed H:M

1 PRIMAGAZ -	45:44	T60 Van Pet	Laurent Bourgnon
2 FUJICOLOR -	45:55	T60 Nigel Irens	Loic Peyron
3 BANQUE POPULAR	48:38	T60 Nigel Irens	Francis Joyon
4 BIL	61:57	M80 Ericsson	Ross Field
5 NICORETTE	62:07	M80 Ericsson	Ludde Ingvall
6 MORNING GLORY	63:45	M80 Reichel-Pugh	Hugo Plattner
7 FLYING DUTCHMAN		M80 Ericsson	
8 GLOBAL INITIATIVE	66:53	M80 Ericsson	S Borodinov
9 JACOB'S CREEK	66:53	M80 Ericsson	A Cahalan
10 MERIT CUP	65:15	M64 Whitbread 60	Grant Dalton
11 TOSHIBA	65:17	M64 Whitbread 60	Chris Dickson/Dennis Conner
12 SWEDISH MATCH	65:19	M64 Whitbread 60	Gunnar Krantz
13 SILK CUT	65:25	M64 Whitbread 60	Lawrie Smith
14 CHESSIE RACING	65:29	M64 Whibread 60	G Collins
15 EF LANGUAGE		M64 Whitbread 60	Paul Cayard
16 AQUITAINE INNOVATIONS		M60 Finot	Yves Parlier, Eric Tabarly
17 INNOVATION KVAERNER	67:32	M64 Whitbread 60	Knut Frostad
18 BRUNEL SUNENERGY	67:37	M64 Whitbread 60	A van Bergek
19 ROYAL BLUE	70:01	M80 Maxi	G Ekdahl
20 PRB		M60 Finot	Isabelle Autissier
21 EF EDUCATION	68:08	M64 Whitbread 60	Christine Guillou
22 NOOTKA	69:15	T50 Irens	Claude Develay
23 SPIRIT OF ENGLAND	72:46	T40 Fehrenbach/Owen	Peter Clutterbuck, Brian Thompson, Digby Fox, Richard Pocock
24 MADINA MILANO		M50	
25 FLASH GORDON		M50 Farr	
26 FPC GREENWAY (ex Mollymawk)	81:50	T40 Bailey	Richard Tolkein, Peter Foot, Bob Wingate, Andrew Hurst
40 SHOCKWAVE	88:14	T34 Shuttleworth	Ralph Marx, Alistair Wood
87 GAZPROM	100:01	C30 Ivan 30	Vitali Belyakov, Alexandre Rogov, Pavel Tkatchev, Sergei Poulkov
122 DRAGONFLYER	113:25	T33 Dragonfly	Mike Butterfield, Guy Gibbins, Bill Whitney, William Graham
214 HASTY LADY	120:27	C35 Banshee	Andrew Walker, Peter Lillywhite
235 BACKLASH	124:47	C35 Banshee	Tony Purser, Bill Bailey, Duncan Balfour, John Lewis, John Davis

Boats listed in finishing order - elapsed times vary due to different starting times.

good. Lizard abeam, looks great, wind starts to get light, quick sail change throughout entire wardrobe, Plymouth appears twinkling in the distance, no wind, change watch, still no wind. Dawn Thursday, QAB (60ft mono sailed by Bob Beggs) appears out of the gloom, light, light landbreeze wafts us frustratingly closer...calm.... seabreeze ! we cross the line at 10:25, 122nd overall.

The new record of the Fastnet stands as 1 day 21 hours 44 minutes and 47 seconds for Primagaz. Average speed for the 630 miles : 13,77 knots.

Not too bad when you know that the boats have been sailing in very light winds and calms during the first 15 hours of the race ! Fujicolor, finished 11 minutes later.

"We have to work on the sails now, said Bourgnon. Our 3DL North mainsail seems too flat too us and lacks of power sometimes."

Spirit of England won the MOCRA Crystal trophy for the best corrected time under MRR, with

Hasty Lady second.

MOCRA RULE CORRECTED TIME

	H:M:S
Spirit of England	112:04:45
Hasty Lady	124:18:55
FPC Greenaway	125:12:21
Backlash	127:54:13
Dragonflyer	129:18:29
Gazprom	130:07:28
Shockwave	138:17:00

FASTNET ROUNDINGS

	H:M:S
Primagaz	31:34:16
Fujicolor	31:36:35
Banque Populaire	32:28:30
Spirit of England	42:00:57
Nootka	42:01:33
FPC Greenaway	46:39:56
Shockwave	48:40:43
Gazprom	54:18:48
Dragonflyer	59:43:45
Hasty Lady	65:51:45
Backlash	66:55:50