



The Next Gen sets a date for the Défi Azimut Lorient Agglomération

Every September, the Défi Azimut heralds the start of the autumn season for the IMOCA class. What is more, this three-act event will once again provide a showcase for the new generation of IMOCAs making their competitive debut. Featuring a range of new boats and new faces with some ambitious campaigns, they will face some stiff opposition from the category's star players. Indeed, with the meeting set to bring together the biggest fleet of IMOCAs since the start of the season, the key movers and shakers of Sailing Valley will be keeping a close eye on this festive sports event. Don't forget to save the date, 15 to 20 September 2026, at Brittany's offshore racing hub, Lorient La Base.

Kicking off with showstopping speed runs and the singlehanded 48H sprint for the top spot, the event will round off with the crewed Tour de Groix island race, which is open to sponsors. In the midst of this heady cocktail of sport, an array of meetings and conferences with the industry's leaders will shine a spotlight on the offshore racing ecosystem. Created in 2011 by Jean-Marie Corteville, President of Azimut, the Défi Azimut Lorient Agglomération format, has shown again and again that it has managed to expertly stand the test of time.

Boasting the perfect slot in the race schedule, 'Le Défi', as the event is affectionately known on the pontoons of Lorient La Base, "*will be the first major event of the season*", confirms Francis Le Goff, who is delighted to be returning to his post as Race Director alongside Pierre Hays: "*The only pressure on our shoulders is our ability to come up with a course where everyone makes it back in time for the party! By its very nature, the Défi is a relaxed event focused on doing things right whilst ensuring that it is worthwhile on a competitive level. It's a clever mix!*"

Between 15 and 20 skippers are due to come together in Lorient in early September for what will be the final clash before the Route du Rhum Destination Guadeloupe, the main event of 2026.

For some, this will also be their first race, whether they're newcomers to the IMOCA class like Pierre-Louis Atwell (Résilient), or have been promoted to the role of skipper like Davy Beudart, former crewmate of Louis Burton, who will be stepping up to the challenge of helming his old Bureau Vallée single-handed.

Next Gen and safe bets



Photo credit : Benjamin Sellier / WInd4

One of the highlights of this Défi Azimut 2026 will be the new boats expected to line up for the start. These include Groupe Dubreuil, which Sébastien Simon has had built at the experienced British yard Carrington Boats, as well as DMG Mori Global One made in Brittany at Multiplast for Japanese skipper Kojiro Shiraishi. The former will have only just been launched and the latter is due to take part in the transatlantic sprint The Ocean Race Atlantic in early September and very much hopes to make it back to Lorient on time and fighting fit!

In any case, these two post-Vendée Globe 2024-generation Verdier designs are the first of this next gen to compete in an IMOCA competition.

With their flared hull forms inspired by the America's Cup's AC 75s, suffice to say that all eyes will be on their take-off speed in the Runs. The same is true for Jérémie Beyou's Charal, triple-winner of the Défi, which was invincible in the breezy downwind conditions during the Transat Café L'Or, and boasts a new underbody designed to take-off earlier in a medium breeze.

"The playing field has changed since the start of the season thanks to the arrival of some new boats, explains Elodie Bonafous, who has clearly got the measure of her Verdier design Association Petits Princes – Quéguiner. With her sights on the top five in Lorient, the young woman is among the class' rising stars and poised to

challenge its key players, that include Macif Santé Prévoyance skippered by Briton Sam Goodchild, winner of the Défi Azimut 2025, as well as Allagrande Mapei helmed by Italian Ambrogio Beccaria, who managed to turn things around in the closing miles of the Vendée Arctique to pocket victory. “*You need a bit of luck on your side to win!*” admits the sailor, now a firm fixture in Brittany, who has been drawing on the impressive network of resources and expertise in Sailing Valley since his victory in the Mini-Transat 2019 and has headed a series of highly successful campaigns. The first races of the season have also brought to the fore some standout performances by some of the relative underdogs, including Corentin Horeau on MACSF (ex Paprec Arkea), though he modestly describes himself as ‘still in the learning phase’ in terms of managing a team and handling the inherent risks of these powerful IMOCA machines. “*To my mind, the timing of the Défi Azimut is spot on in this first season,*” comments the winner of the Solitaire du Figaro 2025.

Finally, it is important to note that at least four IMOCAs with daggerboards are intending to compete in Lorient, with Café Joyeux emerging as the natural leader. Making his IMOCA debut in last year’s Défi Azimut no less, skipper Nicolas d’Estais has shown that he knows how to get the best out of the legendary VPLP Verdier design, which triumphed in the Vendée Globe 2015. One to watch, this pairing may well leave a few foilers in its wake!



Photo credit : JM Liot / Défi Azimut 2025

The Figaro sailors join the action!

The Figaro class will also join the action during this Défi Azimut Lorient Agglomération. The careers of skippers such as Corentin Horeau, Nicolas Lunven, as well as Jérémie Beyou, Sébastien Simon, Violette Dorange, and Elodie Bonafous - to name just a few - illustrate the clear connections between the two worlds. It's a natural connection that Jean-Marie Corteville and Marcus Hutchinson, vice president of the Figaro class, wanted to strengthen by inviting up-and-coming offshore sailors to take part in the Tour de Groix (delayed start) aboard their Beneteau Figaro yachts. The more, the merrier, as we say!

Entries:

Fabrice Amedeo - FDJ United - Ocean Calling
Pierre-Louis Attwell - Résilient
Ambrogio Beccaria - Allagrande MAPEI
Davy Beaudart - Bureau Vallée
Jérémie Beyou - Charal
Élodie Bonafous - Association Petits Princes - Quéguiner
Manuel Cousin - Coup de Pouce
Violette Dorange - Initiatives-Cœur
Nicolas d'Estais - Café Joyeux
Maël Garnier - Ruban Rose - tbc
Sam Goodchild - MACIF Santé Prévoyance
Corentin Horeau - MACSF
Sébastien Marsset - FOUSSIER
Paul Meilhat - NC - à confirmer
Scott Shawyer - Canada Ocean Racing - tbc
Kojiro Shiraishi - DMG MORI Global One - tbc
Sébastien Simon - Groupe Dubreuil - tbc
Masa Suzuki - tbc
Armel Tripon - Les P'tits Doudous

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