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*Du 19 au 24 septembre 2023*

**Défi Azimut - Lorient Agglomération :**

## A study of the scoresheet

Breeze, heavy seas, beating, reaching and running... Some bracing and varied conditions await the 34 competing duos from Thursday at 10:30 UTC when the starting gun releases the fleet onto the 48H Azimut racetrack. The first meeting of the year with nearly all the IMOCA's in attendance, this eagerly awaited 628-mile race is shaping up to be a thrilling debut. We assess the exceptional line-up prior to tomorrow's full-scale test.

**To note:**

- Start at 10:30 UTC tomorrow of the 48H Azimut, a 628-mile course in boisterous and varied conditions
- The first clash of 2023 with the bulk of the IMOCA fleet

- Four headline acts and numerous contenders with an outside chance of gold.
- A match at every stage of the fleet with several new boats and numerous transformations of older designs.



Photo : Mark Loyd / IMOCA

As is the case every year, the Défi Azimut – Lorient Agglomération is an opportunity to bring a little order to the ever-changing IMOCA scoresheet. Indeed, the 2023 season has seen the arrival of several new designs, some of which have already made quite the impression.

### **Four headline acts**

The latest of the current crop of Verdier designs, Macif Santé Prévoyance is a melting pot of talent, starting with that of her skipper Charlie Dalin, reigning champion of the Défi Azimut twice over, who managed to transform his 2020 generation Apivia into the absolute reference. One month on from her launch, Dalin, with excellent support from Pascal Bidégorry, snatched victory from Yoann Richomme in the Rolex Fastnet Race. Meantime, the latter double champion of the Figaro, paired with Yann Eliès (who boasts three Solitaire du Figaro crowns no less...), has an innovative platform designed by the Antoine Koch and Finot-Conq team around his own unique vision of an IMOCA. Once again, his steed is of noble birth and has not suffered the same structural issues as For People, which was created by the same duo of naval architects: “We had a glitch in the Bermudes 1000 Race so we strengthened the forward section of Paprec-Arkea before the Fastnet, explains Yoann. Thomas thought

he would update his boat after the race instead... As such, we didn't have the same issues as him and had the chance to discover loads during the Fastnet that we hadn't anticipated. The new foils enable the boat to fly upwind with a greater angle of heel, which has an impact on the sides of the hull more than the bottom. As such, we've further reinforced the boat in these areas!"

Leaving his new charger in the safe hands of his yard until early October then, Thomas Ruyant is joining Sam Goodchild on For The Planet for this race and we can rely on this pairing to really push the boat, the double Route du Rhum-Transat Jacques Vabre champion with her skipper Thomas... As such, she has every chance of securing a win here. The same is true for Charal whose crew will be keen for a revenge match after not being able to exploit her to the full during the Fastnet due to headsail issues. There's no doubt that the Manuard design is formidable, especially when powered up, and we can count on the vast experience of the Beyou-Cammas duo to get the best out of her.

### **A host of contenders with an outside chance...**

On paper, these four IMOCA's appear to be a cut above the rest, but with the boisterous conditions expected in the 48H race, every minor error or technical issue will work in the competition's favour.

And what a stellar cast make up the competition! The first of these have to be the boats which competed in The Ocean Race. Having racked up over 30,000 miles on the clock on all the seas of the globe, Biotherm (Paul Meilhat and Mariana Lobato) and Malizia - Sea Explorer (Boris Herrmann and Will Harris) clearly won't have any scruples about the forecast conditions. "The Défi Azimut is a thrilling meeting point, says Antoine Mermod, President of Class IMOCA. It's the first clash of 2023, which has gathered together the entire line-up and it will enable us to establish an initial hierarchy."

This same hierarchy could well be turned upside down though by a number of other incredibly honed duos, at the top of which are Initiatives-Cœur (Sam Davies and Jackson Bouttell), V and B - Monbana - Mayenne (Maxime Sorel and Christopher Pratt), as well as Occitane en Provence, Clarisse Crémer and Alan Roberts' ex-Apivia, which features larger foils thanks to the grandfather clause. Also worth betting on will be Teamwork (Justine Mettraux and Julien Villion) and Maître Coq V. Recovered from an accident which has kept him away from the dock for over two months, Yannick Bestaven believes that "there's very little separating ten or so boats, which all stand a chance of a podium place. Some may well have come out lighter than others but have had to be reinforced. Their performances are increasingly similar and it's one thing

to do well for 48 hours, but another thing entirely to keep pace with the leaders for three months,” points out the winner of the last Vendée Globe, who is setting sail tomorrow alongside Julien Pulvé from La Rochelle.

### **... and a bunch of sailors keen to shake things up!**

And within this landscape coloured by the latest IMOCAs, what can be said about the very latest launch? Stand as One helmed by Eric Bellion and teamed up with Martin Le Pape, who brings the energy of youth and his Figaro expertise to the fore, is a true architectural gamble. Indeed, with no foils, how will this seemingly frugal design fare against the best flying boats? “You mustn’t wait for the chance to catch us out! warns Martin on the deck of the scow bow IMOCA tugging at her lines in Lorient La Base. The first question is to work out how much we lose on a reach in relation to the foilers in breezy conditions and the 48H will be highly instructive in that regard. For the rest, we need medium conditions and downwind VMG in particular to get the best out of the boat...” Fortunately, that’s exactly what awaits the IMOCAs after the second course mark, at which point the less powerful boats will still have 400 miles to go to play catch-up.

The Défi Azimut-Lorient Agglomération will also be an opportunity to gauge the new potential of the IMOCAs which have undergone major transformations. This is the case for Groupe Apicil (Damien Seguin and Laurent Bourguès) and Prysmian Group (Giancarlo Pedote and Gaston Morvan), two 2015 VPLP-Verdier designs, which have had serious upgrades with large foils and modifications to the bow, along with DMG Mori skippered by Kojiro Shiraishi. “5 metres of the boat have been remodelled and we now have latest generation VPLP foils,” explains his co-skipper Benoit Mariette, who has “high hopes that these modifications will bring the boat up to standard.” It’s the same gamble on Corum l’Epargne (Nicolas Troussel and Benjamin Schwartz). Change of foils, new hull bottom, revised structure... it’s safe to say that Nicolas Troussel has really gone to town on his Kouyoumdjian design, which he has been tweaking for the past three years.

### **Face-off for the daggerboard boats**

Although there is no dedicated ranking for the daggerboard boats, which were created between 2006 and 2011, they make up their own unique category and the competitive appeal for their skippers is just as strong as it is for the rest of the fleet. The boats are similar, but there’s a wide assortment of sporting backgrounds among their skippers. At the forefront of this category, Tanguy Le

Turquais, teamed with Félix de Navacelle on Lazare, will really have their work cut out against Louis Duc and Rémi Aubrun (Fives Group-Lantana Environnement), Sébastien Marsset and Sophie Faguet (Foussier - Mon Courtier Energie), not to mention Benjamin Ferré and Pierre Le Roy, who likely have the best boat of this 'daggerboard' generation with Monnoyeur-Duo for a Job, ex MACIF and winner of the Vendée Globe 2012. The race will also serve as a major test for Manu Cousin and Clément Giraud, who have completed the transformation of their old Farr design Coup de Pouce-Giffard Manutention, her mast and daggerboards having been moved aft, her ballast tanks revamped and new rudders added...

In short, there's been a lot going on in IMOCA and now everyone has 48 hours to show just what they're made of!



Photo : Christian Roche

**Justine Mettraux (TeamWork):** "We know it's going to go by in a flash. We're expecting breeze as far as the waypoint in southern Biscay, through to late Friday. Conditions will be especially strong at the start, then downwind, but it will be more manageable. We're trying to prepare the boat well and really check lots of little details which might make a difference. Over recent months, it's been very light in Brittany and the majority of us haven't sailed in any breeze lately. This will be a welcome shift and will get us back on track with a view to the Transat Jacques Vabre. We'll await the latest weather forecasts for this

evening and tomorrow morning to give us a clearer indication of what to expect, particularly with regards to our gameplan for the start with lots of boats on the water and little room for manoeuvre.”

**Sébastien Marsset (Foussier - Mon courtier Energie ):** “We need these boisterous conditions to prepare for the Vendée Globe and for other races. We practice a sport where weather constraints call the tune and I have a sturdy boat for breezy conditions. The Défi Azimut, which alternates between a wide range of wind angles and strengths on fairly long tacks with manoeuvres which can cost dearly, is the perfect way to really work through your sail wardrobe. I don’t have an abundance of sails and I hope this race will teach me how to develop the ones I have for the Vendée Globe, which remains my primary objective. The double-handed years are tougher for the older generation boats like mine, which are pitted against foilers that may be pushed to the maximum, something that isn’t necessarily the case in a singlehanded round the world. However, I hope to size up the competition among the reference daggerboard boats. It’ll be important to keep an eye on sail changing as you can quickly become a cropper in these conditions through material breakage or human error.”

**Nicolas Troussel (Corum L’Épargne):** “It’s no storm either. I’m really very happy to be able to continue to get a real feel for the boat in these conditions and size up her potential along this fantastic course. This Mk2 version of the boat is very different in terms of handling. Contesting a fleet race will allow us to get to know her better. Facing off against others is the main challenge of this competition and it’s the best way to tweak your trimming. We’re interested to see just what speeds can be posted. It’s fair to say that it won’t necessarily be easy to get sleep at the start and we’re going to be absolutely shattered at the finish.”

**Yoann Richomme (Paprec-Arkea):** “We suffered minor damage in the Bermudes 1000 race. As a result, Paprec-Arkea was strengthened before the Fastnet and Thomas thought he would update his boat after the race instead... As such, we didn’t have the same issues as him and had the chance to discover loads during the Fastnet that we hadn’t anticipated. The new foils enable the boat to fly upwind with a greater angle of heel, which has an impact on the sides of the hull more than the bottom. As such, we’ve further reinforced the boat in these areas! On these composite boats, when the structure begins

to be impacted, there are a whole host of consequences. It's a bit like when a supporting wall in your house collapses. The reinforcements we've made have been integrated in the boats that did The Ocean Race too. There's no escaping it. The 48H race is an added test and we're massively lucky because, as with the Bermudes 1000 Race and Fastnet, it's going to be breezy, whilst it was very calm last year. We could well have rocked up for the start of the Transat Jacques Vabre with the Mk1 version of the boat and then broken everything."

**Yannick Bestaven (Maître Coq V):** "I gave myself a bit of a fright with my accident and I've been suffering a lot over the past three months. Right now, I'm at the peak of fitness and I really want to get out sailing. I'm not too worried about how the boat has progressed as she's been sailing constantly with the team. I feel like I have an outside chance, which is a position I love. There's very little separating ten or so boats, which all stand a chance of a podium place. Some may well have come out lighter than others but have had to be reinforced. Their performances are increasingly similar and it's one thing to do well for 48 hours, but another thing entirely to keep pace with the leaders for three months. Nobody will be able to drive our boats at their true potential over that distance. It'll be important to be good at the right time."

**Martin Le Pape (Stand as one):** "You mustn't wait for the chance to catch us out! The first question is to work out how much we lose on a reach in relation to the foilers in breezy conditions and the 48H will be highly instructive in that regard. We already know from our training sessions at Port La Forêt that there may be quite a difference in performance as all the new boats manage to fly upwind by sailing a bit lower. As the race involves a beat then a reach, the 48H format is not likely to work in our favour, but we'll be able to try to make up some ground and catch up a few foilers through downwind VMG, which is our favourite point of sail. Stand as One is very light and simple to get up and going and she's quicker on paper than the other daggerboard boats when she's able to power up thanks to her hull shape (scow). We've sailed 2,500 miles with her since her launch in June, but it's the first race and we're eager to get down to action."

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## LES ENGAGES

- Groupe Apicil (Damien Seguin / Laurent Bourgues)
- Biotherm (Paul Meilhat / Mariana Lobato)
- Bureau Vallée (Louis Burton / Davy Beaudart)
- Charal (Jérémy Beyou / Franck Cammas)
- Corum L'Épargne (Nicolas Troussel / Benjamin Schwartz)
- Coup de Pouce - Giffard Manutention (Manu Cousin / Clément Giraud)
- DeVenir (Violette Dorange / Damien Guillou)
- D'ieteren Group (Denis Van Weybergh / Erwann Le Mene)
- DMG MORI Global One (Kojiro Shiraishi / Benoit Mariette)
- Fives group - Lantana environnement (Louis Duc / Remi Aubrun)
- For the Planet (Sam Goodchild / Thomas Ruyant)
- Fortinet - Best Western (Romain Attanasio / Loïs Berrehar)
- Foussier - Mon courtier Energie (Sébastien Marsset / Sophie Faguet)
- Freelance.com (Guirec Soudée / Roland Jourdain)
- Gentoo Sailing Team (James Harayda / Stéphane Le Diraison)
- Hublot (Alan Roura / Simon Koster)
- Human (Antoine Cornic / Jean-Charles Luro)
- Initiatives Coeur (Sam Davies / Jack Bouttell)
- La Mie Câline (Arnaud Boissières / Gérald Véniard)
- Lazare (Tanguy Le Turquais / Felix de Navacelle)
- L'Occitane en Provence (Clarisse Cremer / Alan Roberts)



- MACIF (Charlie Dalin / Pascal Bidégorry)
- MACSF (Isabelle Joschke / Alain Gautier)
- Maître Coq V (Yannick Bestaven / Julien Pulvé)
- Malizia - Seaexplorer (Boris Herrmann / Will Harris)
- Monnoyeur - Duo for a job (Benjamin Ferré / Pierre Le Roy)
- Nexans - Arts & Fenêtres (Fabrice Amedeo / Andréas Baden)
- Oliver Heer Ocean Racing (Oliver Heer / Nils Palmieri)
- Paprec Arkéa (Yoann Richomme / Yann Elies)
- Prysmian Group (Giancarlo Pedote / Gaston Morvan)
- STAND AS ONE (Eric Bellion / Martin Le Pape)
- Szabi Ocean Racing (Weöres Szabolcs / Irina Gracheva)
- Teamwork (Justine Mettraux / Julien Villion)
- V AND B - MONBANA – MAYENNE (Maxime Sorel / Christopher Pratt)

## CONTACTS



### **Sillages Communication**

Matthieu Honoré

06 30 54 42 90

[matthieu@sillages-communication.com](mailto:matthieu@sillages-communication.com)

[www.sillages-communication.com](http://www.sillages-communication.com)

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