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Du 19 au 24 septembre 2023

Défi Azimut - Lorient Agglomération :

48 hours of storm and hope

To note:

- 33 IMOCA's at the start of a 610-mile race gathering together Southern Brittany's finest line-up ever.
- Clean start at 10:30 UTC in the Courreaux de Groix. No recalls, no collisions.
- Leaders in position and the fleet already stretching out as the weather threatens.
- Tara, guest of honour at the Défi Azimut



Photo : JL Carli / Défi Azimut - Lorient Agglomération

Concentration, excitement, apprehension, every possible emotion was in evidence on the docks of Lorient La Base and Kernevel this morning as the skippers cast off and made for the start zone in Les Courreaux de Groix. Amidst the legendary sociability which has become a trademark of the Défi Azimut - Lorient Agglomération, there was a hint of solemnity in the air as the troops readied themselves for battle. With 33 boats in the running, helmed by some 66 sailors in all, some of whom have a string of offshore race wins to their credit, it's hard not to highlight the epic challenge that lies ahead of them on this 610-mile course. At 10:30 UTC, the competitors in this 48H Azimut set sail in a foreboding autumnal weather system, which will likely be far from easy to negotiate.

“Save for 4 or 5 boats, this line-up is reminiscent of a Figaro or the start of the Vendée Globe. It's a very rewarding outcome and it's exhilarating for us athletes to be a part of this event and see it go from strength to strength,” explained Yann Eliès this morning from aboard Arkéa Paprec, one of the latest additions to the fleet. As such, it's sure to be one of the boats to watch. “We're where we wanted to be, among IMOCA's top 5. We're going to try and hold onto our place for as long as possible, but I admit that there's going to be a steep learning curve to negotiate in this fairly important race,” confirmed teammate Yoann Richomme who's making an amazing debut in the class.

Dockside impressions

For other skippers this 48H Azimut, with its course designed specially to provide a taste of every point of sail, is an opportunity to dive headfirst into an IMOCA competition. “After the Solitaire du Figaro, I'm thrilled to be switching craft,” admits Gaston Morvan as he makes his major debut alongside Giancarlo Pedote, who is back in action with the same boat albeit with big new foils. “I'm going to try and give him a few little inshore racing tips. The weather isn't going to be easy. It's a bit stressful, but I'm fortunate to be sailing alongside an experienced sailor. Now it's up to me to show him he's made the right choice,” grins the sailor who has just rounded off a fabulous Solitaire du Figaro with a 4th place. For Violette Dorange (DeVenir) this race is going to be a real baptism of fire. “This morning I was a little stressed, but now that I'm aboard the boat I feel better and I'm focused. I feel good and safe on her. I'm thrilled to be setting sail with Damien (Guillou) who has a wealth

of experience to share,” enthuses the 22-year-old, who’s quickly raising her game and has the Vendée Globe in her line of sight. Before this major planetary adventure though, her focus is on performing well in her very first race aboard her IMOCA, formerly Jean Le Cam’s Hubert.

Clashing in Les Courreaux du Groix

As the fleet approaches the start line, they’re greeted by stormy skies coloured by a combination of blue patches and thick cloud. The island of Groix seems to boil up beneath a looming nimbostratus, but the wind has less punch to it than forecast. To the south a big squall, that the fleet should be able to sidestep, sets the scene for this 48H Azimut. “We’ll have quite a bit on our plate in this race and typically the course will also give us the opportunity to sail neck and neck with the others. It’s crucial that we make the most of this direct confrontation to quickly find the right trim,” explains Charlie Dalin, the double champion of the Défi Azimut, who is sailing his brand-new MACIF Santé Prévoyance, which is already showing great promise.

For now, the wind seems to be remaining manageable and one by one the foilers are shaking out their reefs. It’s under full mainsail and J2 that most of the leading pack line-up for the start. It’s a very long line, which means the most experienced sailors won’t get snarled up around the committee boat and can set sail fully powered up. Such is the case for Charal helmed by the dynamic duo of Beyou-Cammas, who lead out of the starting blocks, closely followed by Initiatives Cœur (Davies-Boutell) and Maître CoQ V (Bestaven-Pulvé). Further to windward, Bureau Vallée (Beaudart-Comagnac) and Groupe Apicil (Seguin-Bourguès) are bunched together as they drive towards the line, they too very much in on the action. Among the daggerboard boats, which are making headway with one reef, the best start goes to the duo on Lazare (Le Turquais- De Navacelle), closely followed by DeVenir (Dorange-Guillou).



The fleet to the south of the island of Groix.
Photo : JM Liot / Défi Azimut - Lorient Agglomération

A technical start

Though nobody copped a heavy hour-long penalty for overshooting the start, it’s mayhem in the chasing pack

and those keen to defend a seemingly favourable position at all costs are having to pay the price. As is often the case, it was important to make a break for it to leeward to really be able to show what they're made of, especially with the shifty breeze creating some holes in the dirty air in the wake of the leaders causing some of the boats to stall badly. Ultimately, it's Initiatives Cœur which brings her A game and is first around Les Chats cardinal mark, match racing with the fleet's other bright red boat, Groupe APICIL (Seguin-Bourguès).

The swell picks up a tad and there is lots of jockeying for position between For the Planet (Goodchild-Ruyant) and Maître CoQ V (Bestaven-Pulvé). It's not clear at this stage whether to luff up towards waypoint zero or slip along under the fleet to hold onto some boat speed. Forming part of the chasing pack, Macif Santé Prévoyance goes for the second option and quickly makes up ground.

The pace is picking up and, as the RIBs and spectator boats return to Lorient La Base, the leaders are foiling upwind at over 15 knots. The whole fleet is heading westwards where Waypoint 1 awaits them some 100 miles further down the racetrack along with the negotiation of a front early tonight. In the meantime, the focus will be on rounding the Penmarc'h headland at which point the wind is set to veer as it builds. The perfect opportunity for the fleet to reposition themselves then and establish a hierarchy on the leader board.

At 13:00 UTC, Charal is already 10 miles ahead of Human Immobilier (Cornic-Luro) and this is only the beginning...

Not to be missed tomorrow:

Whilst the fleet sinks its teeth into the competition in the 48H Azimut, the Défi Azimut - Lorient Agglomération is preparing to welcome a rather classy guest dockside. Indeed, the exploration schooner Tara is expected alongside the pontoon at the Cité de la Voile - Éric Tabarly tomorrow evening for three days. A home from home (Lorient is her port of registry) within the context of her latest expedition, 'Tara Europa', it's an ideal opportunity to honour the work of this schooner, which is fully kitted out to undertake a series of ambitious scientific research campaigns.

If you're in the area, head over to the Pen Duick shed at 18:00 UTC for a conference that is open to all, subject to the availability of seating, and goes by the name: 'We all have something from the ocean within us'. It will gather the skipper Thomas Coville and Romain Troublé, CEO of the Tara Foundation. This exchange will be hosted by Pierre Marcel, who produced the film 'Tabarly'.

Quotes from the boats:

Jérémy Beyou (Charal):

"The appeal of this event is that it slots in just before the autumn race, whether that be the Transat Jacques Vabre, the Route du Rhum or the Vendée Globe. It enables you to really test things out. It's a fantastic rehearsal for the skippers, the boat and also the shore team. It's an absolute must. We're pleased to be here enjoying sailing, though we're all too aware that sailing well in this race will help us in the Transat Jacques Vabre. We know that you can't afford to have the slightest glitch in IMOCA. A ripped sail is damning for the final ranking. We mustn't break our boats or make any strategic mistakes."

Eric Bellion (STAND AS ONE): "Being here today is a victory in itself. It's the culmination of three years of hard work. We're incredibly happy to be able to show off the fruits of our labour, which has been intense right the way through till last night. A race boat is such a massive puzzle. I'm pleased and proud for the whole team.

I always feel a bit apprehensive and scared at race starts. It's an art I'm yet to master. That said, with Martin (Le Pape) I have a real race start professional as he's done hundreds of them. We're poles apart. He's plugged into 100 more volts than me. He's very quick. He was born into the competition world. He's bringing into play the whole racing aspect so as to inject a whole new level of intensity. I'm learning a huge amount

from working alongside him.”

Giancarlo Pedote (Prysmian Group): “This is all about hunting down the right trim for the boat, which has undergone a major transformation, and try to get her making fast headway. I think we’ve added a fair few watts with these two foils. Gaston and I will try to really get the best out of our beautiful machine.

Results are not something that I’m focused on right now. My primary objective is to do things right. We know we still have a lot to learn. Even before we added the large foils the boat has had some good results. We have the potential; we just have to chase it down.”

Damien Guillou (DeVenir): “After the more vintage Golden Globe Race, I’m clearly changing tack, but it’s the same job essentially. It doesn’t make any difference whether you’re making more or less speed. Good seamanship is essential, especially on these boats and it’s important for Violette’s budding project. It’s very coherent. I really enjoy sailing with Violette and doing all I can to help her. This race comes at a fantastic time in terms of our schedule. It’s both a training session and a race. We’re going to try to perform well.”

MEDIAS

Photos et vidéos au format HD sont disponibles sur le serveur [IMOCA](#).

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’Epagne (Nicolas Troussel / Benjamin Schwartz)
- Coup de Pouce - Giffard Manutention (Manu Cousin / Clément Giraud)
- DeVenir (Violette Dorange / Damien Guillou)
- D’Ieteren Group (Denis Van Weynbergh / 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)
- Fossier - 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)

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