



A SHORT HISTORY OF TIMING

*40 years of the World Sailing
Speed Record Council*

Contact details:

WSSRC
PO Box 2
Bordon
Hampshire GU35 9JX
UK

Email: johnreedwssr@gmail.com





© PPL Media

IDEC - Francis Joyon (France). Single-handed Around the World Record Holder

Cover picture: l'Hydroptère - *World Nautical Mile Record Holder, Crossing San Francisco Bay. Alcatraz Island to leeward.*

Photo: © Christophe Launay

INTRODUCTION

The integrity of WSSRC has always depended on the skill and hard work of its Commissioners – men and women who seem to spend an inordinate amount of time standing on windswept shores or in icy water while strange sailing craft flash pass. One who has been involved since the very beginning is Michael Ellison who has quite literally spent years of his life ensuring that the right competitor gets the right time and that it is an accurate one. Here’s how he recalls it:

Time? A frightening thought - I spent over a year on Fuerteventura alone ! The start was two weeks in Australia for Yellow Pages. A month in California for Longshot, a month or six weeks in Namibia for kites and then Sailrocket each year since 2006 Luderitz only has a small airport, a sign on the gate says “Please hand your guns to a member of staff before boarding the plane”. Usually I am driven from Cape Town or last year from Johannesburg by a competitor. It normally takes over 24 hours flying time to South Africa via the Gulf or via Frankfurt to Windhoek. Two weeks in Tonga (2004) and two weeks in Cape Verde islands clocked up some flying hours plus the driving time down to the numerous early “annual” French events, totting up several months in total at Ste Marie, Fos, Port St Louis, Leucate, etc..

I hope that we can get across that WSSRC needs new records and our aim is to help improve speeds - but at the same time we owe a duty to existing record holders to see that their speed is fairly exceeded. I like to point out that every competitor’s best speed is their personal record and therefore every attempt has to be measured with similar care.



Michael enjoying a little gentle kayaking near St Kilda

A Word from The President



1972 – 2012.... 40 years. Just like a Ruby Wedding! Well, perhaps not exactly like a marriage, but it has been a long, intensive and close collaboration of the many players – both on and off the water – who have been involved in sailing speed records over the last 40 years. It is certainly a cause for celebration that we are still going from strength to strength after all this time.

I once saw a headline in a yachting journal which read: “WSSRC – the Masters of Time”. This may have sounded a bit pretentious, but the writer meant that we are responsible for time-keeping. It is our duty to approve and ratify, maintain and publish exact and accurate data. In our quest for rigorous and strict accuracy we have always remained at the forefront of technological developments. And all of our Council members are expert in the required fields of observing and ratifying records. I am very proud to be Chairman of this prestigious organisation and it is a

particular honour to follow in the footsteps of one of my illustrious predecessors, Sir Reginald Bennett, who did so much to gain international recognition for the WSSRC Council, and to whom I owe so much.

And we must not forget John Reed, who has been managing the Secretariat since the beginning. As one of the historic first members of the organisation he certainly is the keeper of the temple!

My best wishes for WSSRC and its next 40 years. I wish that it may continue to be as efficient as ever and likewise continue in its development of technical knowledge. And may there be strong winds for all those attempting records....!

Claude Breton, August, 2012



© PPL Media

The 55 knot sailing experience!

THE HISTORY

© PPL Media



Crossbow, the first world record holder

The year 2012 has been in many ways a momentous one for sailing. The Olympic regatta was contested at Portland, which was also the birth-place of speed sailing and of the WSSRC, which was set up to provide fair and accurate measurement of speeds achieved under sail. Shortly before the 2012 Olympics, our governing body ISAF announced that for the next Olympics in Rio kite-sailing would be added to the list of events. May we modestly point out that it was in a WSSRC event at Portland that kite-sailing was first seen in competition, and, following the usual tantrums that accompany the creation of any new sport, was welcomed into the ISAF family. Today, the fastest speed under sail is 55.65 knots, achieved by Rob Douglas of USA in a WSSRC supervised event at Luderitz, Namibia. And if anyone visiting the 2012 Olympic regatta needed to see what this fantastic new sport looks like, they only had to glance towards Chesil Beach where local enthusiasts could be observed zooming up and down the old 500m speed course, whenever the breeze was up.

It is somewhat ironic that the creation of the World Sailing Speed Record Council resulted from the boastful claim of a paint company. This outfit, which made a special soft graphite paint, announced that the C-Class catamaran

Lady Helmsman, (which was indeed a very fast boat) had sailed at 30 knots. This so annoyed Bernard Hayman, editor of *Yachting World* that he demanded to know how this speed had been measured and was told that by sailing close to the promenade of Southend-on-Sea, the boat could be paced by a car.

That was ridiculous, but inspired the magazine to propose a new event, devoted entirely to measured speed. The Royal Yachting Association agreed to organize it and after an extensive search Portland Harbour was selected as the best venue and, because of its geography, 500m was determined as the distance to be sailed.

© PPL Media



No harness, no foot-straps but the first sailboards changed everything

From the outset it was intended that the World Sailing Speed Record could be attempted anywhere in the world. The first event was held in 1972 and was won convincingly by the 60ft proa *Crossbow*, specially designed and built for the newspaper proprietor Timothy Colman, with a speed of 26.30 knots, measured by stopwatch on a course marked by a circle of buoys. So much for the painters and their 30 knots!

Colman kept up his involvement for another six years and the second *Crossbow* eventually reached 36.00 knots while the nearest rival, the hydrofoiler *Icarus*, could only manage 28.15 knots. If the only possible record-breaker would have been a hugely-expensive multihull, then the enthusiasm could have died, but it was saved by two things: a strong interest in this new game from other countries, especially France and Holland, and the invention of the Windsurfer. This sailboard and thousands of imitators was cheap, potentially fast, and easy to carry on a car roof. In 1986 Pascal Maka of France blew the *Crossbow* era away with a speed of 38.86 knots, sailing not at Portland, but at Sotavento in Spain.

The Portland course was converted from the circle to a straight line along the beach, but received a fatal setback when French enthusiasts saw the possibility of constructing a special course to take full advantage of the famous Mistral wind. The 'French Trench' at Stees Maries de la Mer enabled sailboards to increase their speeds dramatically to a fraction below 50 knots by 2008 before it, too, became a victim of exotic locations such as Luderitz in Namibia. In any case, the contribution of the organizers had long since changed from being an event manager to a global ratification authority, providing rules and supervision to every possible record under sail.



The foiler Icarus on the old course at Portland

There followed a fascinating era in which the outright world record was forced slowly upwards by a non-stop battle between boards and boats – or rather *engins* as the French describe them. In Australia an unremitting effort by Lindsay Cunningham and his team was finally rewarded when *Macquarie Innovation* touched 50 knots in 2009. Meanwhile the British-built inclined rig machine *Sail Rocket* was transported to Namibia for a series of attempts which continue today. In France, the long development of the big foiler *l'Hydroptère* was rewarded by a small step upwards to 50.17 knots, only to see it raised again the following year by the kite-boarder Rob Douglas who bettered 55 knots in Namibia.



The inclined rig proa Sailrocket at speed

© Helena Darveida/VestaSailrocket

A huge increase in WSSRC's work came in 1988 when it took on responsibility for offshore and passage records. This happened during the chairmanship of Sir Peter Johnson who was an experienced Ocean Racing skipper



© PPL Media

Mari-Cha III, *Transatlantic Monohull*
Record Holder in 1998

himself. No-one could possibly have imagined the extraordinary number of distance records that now exist – think only of the transatlantic and round the world courses that are under almost constant attack by craft and crews of every kind.

There could be no more challenging course than around the world and its iconic status was given a powerful boost when a French group donated the *Trophée Jules Verne* for the first crew to do it in less than the magic figure of 80 days. This 'barrier' was surmounted by the legendary French sailor Bruno Peyron in just 79 days, 6 hours in 1993.

In the following year there was a highly-dramatic contest between the catamaran *Enza New Zealand* and the trimaran *Lyonaïsse des Eaux*, each of which knocked about 3 days

off the record. But the really astonishing fact is the current record, set by Loïck Peyron and crew in the trimaran *Banque Populaire 5*, in just 45 days, 13 hours.

Once a record is established there follows an effort to establish what might be called special versions of it such as 'single-handed', 'by a woman' or by a limited type of yacht such as 'mono-hull', 'Up to 40ft in length'. Nowadays WSSRC has a full list of categories which can apply to any course. However, the Council does not recognize human condition records such as "youngest" or "oldest".

A popular new category, on the other hand, is for yachts with 'powered sailing systems'. This is because there is a new breed of big and fast cruiser-racer sailing yacht that cannot be handled safely or effectively without powered winches. Major races such as the Volvo Ocean Race permit moveable keels and ballast, and so it makes sense for WSSRC to recognize their best times.

Increasingly offshore records depend on satellite navigation systems such as GPS to verify them, and there was a huge step forward in the ratification procedure when Stan Honey, the well-known offshore navigator and electronics wizard, developed a small, portable GPS logger which can be placed aboard any yacht wishing to attempt an offshore record. This is known as the WSSRC 'Black Box' and is crucial in proving exactly where a yacht has been during a lengthy passage. In spite of this, there is still a requirement for starts and finishes to be witnessed by human eyes, which are looking keenly for any deviation from the rules, such as the number of people on board.

WORLD RECORDS

PRINCIPAL SPEED RECORDS

Outright World Record over 500m

(Any craft, any crew)

Paul Larsen (Aus)

65.45 knots, "Vestas Sailrocket 2",

Namibia, 2012

By a woman

Charlotte Consorti (France)

50.43 knots, kite-board, Luteritz,

Namibia, 2010

PRINCIPAL PASSAGE RECORDS

Transatlantic W to E,

Ambrose Light to Lizard Point

(any craft, any crew)

Banque Populaire 5,

Pascal Bidegorry (France) and crew,

3d 15h 25m 48s (32.94 knots) 2009.

Single-handed

Sodebo, Thomas Colville (France)

5d 19h 30m 40s (20.97 knots) 2008.

Monohull

Mari-Cha IV, Robert Miller & Crew (GB) 6d

17h 52m 39s (18.05 knots) 2003

Woman & single-handed woman

Castorama B&Q, Ellen MacArthur (GB)

7d 3h 49m 57s (17.09 knots) 2004

Around the World

(any craft, any crew, non-stop)

Banque Populaire 5, Loïck Peyron (France)

45d 13h 42m 53s (19.75 knots) 2012

Single-handed, non-stop

IDEC, Francis Joyon (France)

57d 13h 34m 6s (15.84 knots) 2008)

Single-handed woman, non-stop

B&Q, Ellen MacArthur (GB)

71d 14h 18m 33s (12.66 knots) 2005

DISTANCE SAILED IN 24 HOURS

Banque Populaire 5,

Pascal Bidegorry (France) and crew,

908.2nm (37.84 knots) 2009

NAUTICAL MILE

l'Hydroptère,

Alain Thebault (France) and crew,

50.17 knots, 2009

The full list of records over 500m plus all the passage records in all categories can be found at:

<http://www.sailspeedrecords.com>

Mike Ellison gives a tongue-in-cheek account of the Commissioner's task:-

“The WSSRC sends observers (nowadays commissioners) to ensure “a level playing field” and, in addition, a course marshal will be appointed to sort out matters such as time to start, safety procedures and order of starting. At all inshore events nowadays timing is by video cameras at the start and finish, with the pictures showing the transit posts and numbered sails or vests, plus a clock showing 100th second on one screen. The film can be sent by land line or radio and this is a weak link because, although it may work perfectly in 40 knots of wind, a 55 knot gust might blow the aerial over just when a record run is in progress - or wires might be submerged at high tide. These risks are accepted, but if the Commissioner closes the course because the rescue boats are being rescued, the generator has run out of fuel or the water becomes too shallow, these are considered deliberate acts. Those with the fastest times are delighted, those who expected to become the fastest - always the majority - are furious, and quite certain that it was only done to prevent them recording a faster speed. The Commissioner goes to interesting but windy places around the world. Requirements for the task are endless patience to wait for the wind which will blow “tomorrow”, broad shoulders to accept that the fastest run ever has not been recorded due to some fault of theirs, and knowledge of the wind and water to understand the new designs and ideas coming on.”

And finally, John Reed rounds off the story....



“I am privileged to have been involved with the WSSRC since its inception, to have seen it grow from a part-time job, with an occasional attempt, to a full-time occupation. It started as a British fringe sport and is now fully international with our army of Commissioners around the World. The first world record was for 26.3 knots timed with hand stop watches across buoyed transits. Now the record is well over 50 knots using GPS measuring and video timing, and I recall the excitement when the first yacht circumnavigated in under 80 days – now it’s 45 days. Truly the WSSRC is the yardstick of sailing development and its work keeps me well out of trouble...!”



Members of the WSSRC hard at work during the 2012 General Meeting at the Royal St George Yacht Club, Dun Laoghaire, Ireland.

Council Members

Claude Breton (Chairman)	FRA
Jean-Louis Fabry (Vice Chairman)	FRA
Stan Honey (Vice Chairman)	USA
John Brooks	AUS
Peter Davis	GBR
Michael Ellison	GBR
Janet Hellmann	USA
Ken Milnes	USA
David Pelly	GBR
Christophe Simian	FRA
John Reed (Secretary)	GBR

Honorary Members

Michel Barbier	FRA
Michel Rousselet	FRA
Christian Fevrier	FRA
Nicolas Hurel	FRA

Past Chairmen

Peter Scott	GBR	1972
Bernard Hayman	GBR	1972
John Fisk	GBR	1974
Beecher Moore	GBR	1975
Sir Reginald Bennett	GBR	1980
Sir Peter Johnson	GBR	2001 -2003



© PPL Media

The 'Trench' at Luderitz, Namibia