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My association with the superyacht arena began with a past edition of the Perini Navi Cup. After twenty years of organising, shall we say ‘conventional’ regattas, I was called in to be Principal Race Officer at Porto Cervo. It was a real eye opener”.

The rise in popularity of superyacht racing has been an eye opener for more than just Peter Craig. “Consider this: the St. Barths Bucket just celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. The Bucket was the first superyacht regatta. That means that just twenty-six years ago the concept of superyacht racing didn’t exist”.

In just a quarter of a century superyacht racing has evolved in a number of ways. “These regattas give owners a new way to enjoy their assets. At first the only superyacht races were the Buckets and Superyacht Cup Palma,” says Craig. “Now there are ten to twelve to choose from every year. They used to be casual get-togethers where the emphasis was on the social component. Handicapping was arranged so that anyone could win and no one complained; it was just the owners, their permanent crew, guests and plenty to eat and drink. It was all about having fun at a great venue”.

While the fun component hasn’t changed, challenges did arise. “Some of these challenges are why I was brought in,” says Craig. With his extensive experience in organizing high profile regattas, Craig was the man to turn to when managing superyacht fleets became difficult.

“You have to look at the disparity of the yachts that race in superyacht regattas. They range from true cruisers where racing was never a consideration during design and build as most Perini Navi yachts are, to more performance oriented yachts, such as *P2*, to yachts designed to race like the J Class yachts. How do you organize a fleet like that so that the racing is fair and safe? How should you handle class breaks?”

Dividing the classes fairly and providing a level playing field requires experience and know-how, but it’s not the most important aspect of organizing a regatta. “Safety is,” says Craig. “The logic is simple: big yachts racing means massive loads on the sails, running rigging and equipment.

When you push, things can break, accidents can happen, people can get hurt. How do you avoid situations like that?”

The Superyacht Racing Association (SYRA) was created in 2011 with a mission to “enhance the enjoyment of superyacht owners by taking all available steps to ensure safe racing and encourage fair competition”. Peter Craig was hired as their Executive Director. “To have a successful regatta you need a great venue, a good-sized fleet and appropriate racing rules for these large cruising yachts. This will keep the events fun and the fun will keep the superyacht phenomenon going”.

Special superyacht racing rules were written and tested in 2011 and the latest edition of the Perini Navi Cup and nearly all superyacht regattas are using them now. “As the scene became more competitive the structure had to change. Not too long ago, bringing professional racing sailors aboard was frowned upon at superyacht regattas. Now it is recommended. You’d better have people onboard who know the racing rules, can execute crew maneuvers and understand the loads that can be put on equipment when you push. Roles have to be clear, the permanent and racing crews need to work well together and communication is critical. As with any sport, there is no substitute for talent and experience”.

Many people who participate in superyacht regattas are there as guests and may not have any sailboat racing experience at all. “Those people need to listen carefully during the Captain’s pre-race briefing. There should be someone on board to monitor guests and to explain where it is safe to be during manoeuvres and where it’s not. Then the guests can sit back, have a drink and enjoy the experience”.

Because the yacht owner’s enjoyment is what these events are all about. “Beyond ratings and safe racing, the real challenge is to be sure everyone – the owners, their guests, and all others affiliated with the events – enjoy the experience,” says Craig.

www.superyra.com

Peter Craig