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Défi Azimut - Lorient Agglomération : Records set to tumble in the Azimut

The holidays are over! Mid-September means it's back to business for the IMOCA's as autumn comes knocking in Brittany. As a result, some boisterous conditions await the 35 monohulls signed up for this Défi Azimut – Lorient Agglomération 2023 and the speedos are likely to go wild during Wednesday's Speed Runs off Lorient. Meantime, a packed programme of entertainment awaits the public in the Cité de la Voile Eric Tabarly throughout the week with a series of exchanges and conferences welcoming a host of prestigious guests to speak about the key topics making the news and shaping the future of offshore racing.

To note in this press release:

- 20 to 30 knots of breeze for Wednesday's Speed Runs
- Conditions favourable for records
- 35 IMOCA poised to tackle some demanding conditions
- A busy schedule of conferences kicking off on Tuesday
- An event open to the general public



Photo : V. Curutchet

Who could forget the Runs Azimut contested in a wisp of air in 2021 or those of 2022 in a gentle medium breeze? Well, 2023 promises to be a whole different ball game! After a scorching summer, the first really unsettled weather system of the autumn is due to hit the Atlantic this week. 20 to 30 knots of SW'ly wind are forecast for Wednesday's runs. Bows and foils will be smoking from 12 noon, transforming the Courreaux de Groix into a cauldron. Will 2023 be the record-breaking year? "We consider these to be 'top of the range' conditions, explains Race Director Hubert Lemonnier. That means the boats will be reaching their peak speed. Sea state permitting, we may have peaks of 35 knots and more, so these are record conditions."

Such conditions also call for caution on the part of the organisation. The IMOCA's are cut out for these conditions, but we're studying every possible scenario to guarantee the safety of the sailors as well as the public.

Performance and safety

The skippers are beginning to look more closely at what promises to be a breezy week of racing. "We're going to need to get out our crash helmets! exclaimed Franck Cammas (Charal) this morning, who's just back in Lorient after the first preliminary week of America's Cup racing in Barcelona. Racing aboard Charal alongside Jérémie Beyou, the sailor is very accepting of the situation: "We're beginning to get used to it. All the race starts for IMOCA in 2023 involve lively conditions so we know what we're in for!"

Participating in her very first IMOCA race, Violette Dorange isn't quite into the routine of things yet, but she doesn't seem too overawed by this baptism of fire: "It's our first clash and a lot of breeze is forecast, which is good as we'll be able to test the boat and have a thrilling ride with her! We will have to be careful though as there are lots of people on the water and we'll have to protect the boat so as not to damage her."

A final dress rehearsal, the 48H race in the Défi Azimut - Lorient Agglomération will also serve as qualification for the Transat Jacques Vabre, the high point of the 2023 season: "Race Management is considering the options at their disposal for adapting to what promises to be full-on weather conditions, but it's important to remember that IMOCA's are designed to cope with more than 50 knots of breeze in the Southern Ocean,"

explains Hubert Lemonnier. As such, it's down to each crew to strike the right balance between performance and safety...

Participation and a social get-together.

On land too, the Défi Azimut - Lorient Agglomération has already begun for Jean-Marie Corteville (President of the Azimut company) and his team, who have moved into Lorient La Base for the week. The first conference, which is open to the general public, is a 'Societal Engagement' workshop, jointly organised by Groupe Apicil, which will take place on Tuesday from 14:00 to 16:00 hours, by way of a prelude to the Défi. It will be the perfect opportunity to gather evidence from Damien Seguin, Samantha Davies, Paul Meilhat, Thomas Ruyant and Tanguy Le Turquais and enable them to share a humanist message with those in attendance and show why offshore racing is the ideal promotional tool.

Taking a more technical tone, Friday's Eurolarge conferences (invitation only) will be devoted to Artificial Intelligence in racing, foiling and the latest developments in the America's Cup, with all that Sailing Valley has to offer in terms of specialists in these cutting-edge domains.

To round off these exchanges on Friday, the final conference, which is aptly titled "We all have something from the ocean within us", will take place at 20:00 hours. Open to the public, it will take the form of a dialogue between the sailor Thomas Coville and Romain Troublé, who heads the Tara expeditions and whose schooner will be dockside in Lorient la Base over the weekend.

As ever, a wide-ranging programme is on offer to reflect the culture of the Défi, which champions the event's sporting ambitions as well as keeping a finger on the pulse of the latest issues affecting the domain.

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