



Progress Report on New Class Builders

JUNE 12, 2020 -- In a previous article, ILCA outlined the new requirements mandated in World Sailing's Olympic Equipment Policy for allowing new builders access to markets for Olympic sailing equipment. This article will attempt to summarize the new procedures put in place by ILCA and give a brief status report on the ongoing process to bring on new manufacturers.

In response to concerns over European Union antitrust law, World Sailing has adopted a new Olympic Equipment Policy for its Olympic classes beginning with the 2024 Olympics. Generally, the policy mandates that all Olympic classes allow interested and qualified manufacturers of boats and equipment to gain access to the market through an open process. Recognizing the importance of the 4-year Olympic cycle the idea is that this process occurs early enough to insure equipment from new manufacturers to be universally available well in advance of the Olympic Games.

World Sailing's policy is general, it applies to manufacturers of boats and related equipment such as foils, spars and sails. Obviously, this is a big change for ILCA so the approach has been to first tackle bringing on the new builders (hull manufacturers) and then follow in the coming months to opening to parts manufacturers. More detail will come on that in the future.

It should be pointed out that of the current Olympic classes, ours is the most impacted by this new policy as our class sees the most sales of boats and equipment worldwide each year. This also means our class is the most visible in World Sailing's efforts to comply with EU antitrust law.

The actual process for opening to new builders has been described in detail in a previous article. The process can be generally summarized as falling into four main Stages:

1. Initial Application – Open to any applicant and reviewed on broad criteria to ensure that the applicant is reasonably likely to be able to meet the detailed requirements and understand fully what is involved in the process.
2. Detailed Submission – All applicants who were successful in passing the first Stage were then invited to submit a fully detailed application covering a full range of information on experience, personnel, manufacturing capability and facilities, marketing experience, a business plan etc. During this process applicants were required to sign non-disclosure agreements and were then provided with full information on all the technical and contractual requirements needed to become a class builder.
3. Pre-Production Samples – If the applicant is successful in satisfying the requirements of the detailed review they are then granted provisional builder status. This allows them to purchase the required moulds etc. from the class and set up for initial production. They are

then required to produce 10 hulls as a final approval criterion. If they successfully meet all the construction manual requirements in producing the 10 boats they will then be granted full class builder status.

4. Ongoing Review – All new builders will be subject to regular checks by the class and World Sailing to ensure that they continue to fully meet the requirements of the class construction manual and the World Sailing Olympic agreement.

At the heart of this process is the principle that has underpinned the success of the class for nearly 50 years: that every boat built by any manufacturer is as identical as possible to the boats from other manufacturers, and that it is the sailor who determines the results of any race, not the equipment. ILCA is taking this very seriously and, as previously reported, has recently significantly augmented its technical staff – both to help confirm new builders as they work through the process but, more important, to ensure ongoing compliance with the build manual.

The process is now well underway. Out of over 30 initial applications, seven builders were initially offered the opportunity to become new class builders after Stage 2, as detailed in a previous press article, subject to their signing the required contracts and completing the necessary technical approvals and construction of test boats. To date six of these have elected to proceed and are now in Stage 3. All six are commencing preparations to manufacture boats. A small number of additional builders are still engaged in Stage 2 of the process and may be added to the list of builders over the next few months.

Of the 6 builders currently proceeding three, Ovington, Devoti and Nautivela, have received their moulds while the other three, Rio Tecna, Element 6 Evolution and Zou Inter Marine, have moulds in transport and should receive them in the coming weeks. All three of the European builders have been impacted by issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and, obviously this has slowed their progress towards becoming approved builders. Still, both Ovington and Devoti have been able to start work on producing their first test boats with Nautivela now also in making progress. Depending on how soon each can get back to full operation they could be producing their first new boats for sale within a couple of months – currently projecting a summer timeline. It is anticipated that the rest of the builders could be producing boats in the early fall. Once again, it needs to be stressed that any predictions on when new boats will become available will depend critically on further impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once the new builders have completed the approval process and are in full production the ILCA Technical Team will begin the process of bringing on new manufacturers of foils, spars and sails. In addition, they will begin the process of ensuring ongoing compliance with the build manual.

It is important to again stress that ILCA is fully committed to maintaining the strict one-design nature of the class – that all existing boats can compete side-by-side with boats from new builders in tests of sailor against sailor, not equipment against equipment – and, critically, at the cheapest price possible. The first step in that process is for the ILCA Technical Team to work with all of the builders – new and legacy – to ensure strict compliance with the build manual. After that the team will work to make sure of ongoing compliance – through regular inspections of the manufacturers, development of in-field spot tests of boats and equipment and sailor feedback. The one-design principle is critical to our

class and its long term future and the class aims to make this the centerpiece as we move forward with new manufacturers.

Obviously, this compliance comes with a cost and ILCA has developed a plan for funding this oversight in a manner which should minimally impact the price of boats and equipment. Future articles will outline this plan in more detail and will also look at the proposed procedure for ensuring compliance with the build manual and maintaining the strict one-design nature of the boats.