

Route Halifax Saint-Pierre

A new challenge !

When local institutions and the French Government are establishing their budget for next year, it seems appropriate to take stock on a summer key event for our archipelago, the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre Ocean Race. While preparing the 2010 edition, we met with Philippe Paturel, co-founder of RHSP, in order to get an update on the race, its evolution, its positioning in the region, its interest in the archipelago, and the image it conveys beyond our borders.

***Echo :** First an assessment. As an offshore competitor, a promoter of projects, a company manager and considering your ability at organizing and promoting events, what are your conclusions of the first four Route Halifax Saint Pierre Ocean Races?*

Philippe Paturel : While some may occasionally regret the confusion around the planning of an offshore race to our islands, it is now obvious that RHSP has become, since 2002, an important event for the highly skilled skippers with cruiser and competition boats, as well as for the first class volunteers and partners. But it was not always easy, because creating a new event implies a lot of trying and testing to reach its true potential and it's the case for our « Young Route ». The Marblehead-Halifax race is 100 years old for example. However, all aspects of the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre work well, sports-wise and festivity-wise, the choice of Halifax for point of departure, the hospitality in Saint-Pierre, media coverage, exchanges with the locals, the scale of the event... the purpose of the 2010 edition is to do better on every aspect.

***E :** The Route Halifax Saint-Pierre is a « handicap » race, do you think it makes it attractive to everyone?*

PP : Offshore racing, with or without handicap conveys a strong message to the public who tends to identify with the sailors: particularly in St Pierre & Miquelon where the sea has such an important place in our lives. Often people dread the open sea, the dangers of the waters surrounding our islands, and it's why an offshore race will always be a challenge. However, the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre is a two speed race, a vast majority can identify with. The handicap system helps to smooth out the performances of various types of boats, but the end results are unpredictable and fascinating. On the competition side, the intensity of the RHSP is similar to other prestigious offshore races. However, locally the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre is very special because each crew is sponsored by a Saint Pierre family and the race can be followed through the internet.

***E :** What are your thoughts on the course of the RHSP, the classes of boats involved ? Are you considering any changes?*

PP : The Nova Scotia-Saint Pierre direct course is now the most preferred, even though crossing the Grand Banks, known for their difficult weather conditions, gales and fog, is a real challenge. We are still currently working on the possibility of adding a new « open » class for the Mini 6.50 boat types in 2010. If we do, we may have to modify the course for this new class to enable North-American competitors in the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre to qualify for the Mini-Transat, departing from La Rochelle in 2011.

***E** : Locally, are you satisfied with the hospitality shown by the tourism industry and the media coverage?*

PP: The Route Halifax Saint-Pierre was the first one of its kind. The first four editions were generally satisfying on both aspects. To create a new event from scratch, with a difficult economical situation, a dying tourism industry and to promote this event to the media was a real challenge for the RHSP team. But we've succeeded since 2002. We knew it would not be easy, considering the supply difficulties our islands have been experiencing for many years. We hope that it will not be the case in 2010. Anyhow, according to the feedback we got from professionals and journalists, they welcomed the format of the race. In 2010, we will be working with them to offer a more important «tourism and media » coverage.

***E** : Speaking of the past editions, what points can be improved and what did you do about it?*

PP: Regarding competition, we think that the format is good and does not necessitate any major change. Of course, we have to attract more boats and find the financial means to promote Saint-Pierre and Miquelon as a destination. The liveliness of the musical shows and the warmth of the population were exceptional. We now have to ensure that we can attract as many partners as we can and that they can benefit from it and that they are aware of the possibilities they represent. About the media, even though the local coverage is excellent, the national overseas and the Canadian coverage were a little disappointing. We will have to work on this aspect to make sure that all efforts are made in 2010 to ensure a positive outcome.

***E** : The Route Halifax Saint-Pierre is a French-Canadian race. How was it perceived in the English community?*

PP: As an international event, the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre facilitated the integration of American boats, a few French and a lot of Canadians in the fleet. With an investment of the United States and the various promoting events in New-York between two editions, the race went from a regional status to an international one. It is positive for everybody and for the French also because they are generally the minority, since the regional cooperation agreement in ... 1992, 17 years already without any consistent benefits. The more the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre expands on the shores of the Canadian and American east coast, the stronger it gets. Our partners obtain a return on their investments and moreover, St Pierre & Miquelon gets to promote on a larger scale.

***E** : Do you think that Route Halifax Saint-Pierre has a positive influence on the image of St Pierre & Miquelon and of France generally speaking?*

PP: Without any doubt. The Route Halifax Saint-Pierre always did its best to represent a positive image of France and mainly of St Pierre & Miquelon. On this occasion, St Pierre & Miquelon resumes with its maritime tradition. Our islands have a very strong maritime past and it's always fascinating to bring back this past and tie it to the present. Exception made of the more recent events regarding supply difficulties and the fact that they do no justice to our islands or our mainland.

***E** : Do you think the economical situation can affect the future of the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre?*

PP: I guess, all budgets are currently under an important strain, but the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre is a great event with an excellent return for our local economy. However, if there are no possibilities for our partners and especially the French Government, the Territorial Council, the

Municipality of Saint Pierre, to increase or at least to maintain their level of support, the Route Halifax Saint-Pierre runs the risk of disappearing. Something I sincerely hope nobody wants.