

SAILMAKING - FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

12th September 2013

Dear Fellow Class Association Members,

We wrote to you in November 2012 seeking feedback on suggested ways forward on sailmaking. By way of reminder, it had become evident that there were deeply-felt views held by some on the on-going Approved Sailmaker arrangement with what is now Elvstrom Sailmakers UK Ltd. We recognised then – and continue to recognise – the support from Jeremy White since he took over at ESUK in mid-2011. Sails produced in the last two years seem, by and large, to have been much less problematical than earlier ones. It is a fact, however, that a number of actively-campaigned Sigma 33s are “out-of-class” and unable to participate in one-design racing because owners choose not to buy Elvstrom sails.

The survey conducted in November 2012 yielded a clear majority vote in favour of an investigation of alternatives. We contacted six sailmakers for quotations, and to see whether they might be prepared to participate in an evaluation process during the 2013 season. I wrote to you in February this year (and that newsletter is still accessible via the website www.sigma33.co.uk) to advise that North Sails based in Gosport and UK Sails based in Crosshaven were both enthusiastic about participating. Evaluations sails (a main, a #1 and a #2) were provided by both lofts by mid-May and an intensive evaluation process was undertaken. The outcome is summarised in a document posted to the class website by me on 28th August, but a copy is appended as Attachment A for those who may not have internet access or who may have missed it.

The net of this exercise has been to demonstrate that alternative sails can be produced at potentially very competitive costs, with quite possibly much greater durability, and without jeopardising the close one-design racing which is treasured by many of us.

In both cases the evaluation sails have been made using laminated sailcloth with polyester yarn, scrim and taffeta. But they are “panelled sails” and not the “string sail” laminates that we have been accustomed to with both Sobstad (“Genesis”) and Elvstrom (“EPEX”). The North sails use a tri-radial design with the seams designed to take the maximum load. The UK sails are horizontally-cut panels with “TapeDrive” S2 Glass tapes bonded externally on to the completed sails following the lines of maximum load. (In the Elvstrom “string sails”, the polyester yarn within the laminated panels is positioned to follow the load lines.)

We have subsequently been advised by Elvstrom that they, too, could provide tri-radial panelled sails, like North, and that these could well be cheaper and more durable than the current EPEX sails.

The panelled sails are clearly quite different from the current string sails, and so arguably “no longer one-design”. It is also fair to point out that sail design and construction evolved under both Sobstad and Elvstrom, and so sails have never been exactly the same from one season to another – and have sometimes changed quite significantly.

It has also been apparent from the Evaluation Sails that panelled sails may typically be as much as 25% heavier than the current equivalents. Both North and UK may modify slightly the designs, were they to be approved for class use. Actual mainsail weights: Elvstrom 30-32 lb, UK 34.8 lb, North 39.2 lb.

We set out various criteria against which we would attempt to assess alternative suppliers and it is worthwhile reconsidering where we now stand against those:

- Durability: the panelled sails have shown to be robust, but one season’s use is hardly fair measure. But both North and UK are confident about their products, and the Elvstrom comments on potential panelled sail supply is both interesting and relevant.
- One-design repeatability: both North and UK use sophisticated computer-controlled process for panel design and cutting. The application of the external tapes on the UK sails is manual, but is performed by them on hundreds of sails supplied every year.

- Reputation and quality: our investigations prior to seeking candidate sailmakers yielded no concerns with either North or UK, and there were various positive endorsements
- Post-sales service and geographically-distributed support: this has been hard to assess conclusively over one season. UK is particularly well-positioned to support the fleets in Ireland; North is Solent-centric like Elvstrom, but with a wider network of regional technical support. Areas like Scotland and the north and east of England might, however, not feel significantly better served. It is hard to pre-judge this, but assurances have been given on extended regional support.
- Price: Elvstrom were due to revise their prices this winter, but it now seems that the threat of “competitive pressures” may result in a re-think on that. Early indications are that their tri-radial sails, if approved, would be comparable in price to UK and still higher than North. Using a consistent baseline of “Winter 2012” it seemed highly likely at the time we went out to quotation that the panelled sails could well be at least 10% cheaper. It is also hard to believe that competition between sailmakers would do anything other than drive down prices. The downside, of course, is that one of two – or one of three – sailmakers would enjoy lower volumes of sails purchased, and so some adverse impact could arise from this. (In the case of North, they advised that if they were “one of three” as opposed to “one of two” there would be a 5% impact on prices.

Indicative “4 sail bundle prices”, “Winter Offer”, and including VAT @ 20% in £ sterling

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Elvstrom EPEX | 7496 |
| Elvstrom tri-radial | 6801 |
| North | 6234 (or 6546 if 5% hit applied for 3 sailmakers) |
| UK | 6810 |

The committee continues to believe strongly that a total free-for-all, with any sailmaker allowed, could be counter-productive and that it would be hard to avoid an “armaments race” where the deepest pockets could buy competitive advantage. Some additional thoughts on pros and cons are appended as Attachment B.

A major rewrite of Class Rules (especially in respect of sails) is long overdue and will be top priority for this winter. The sails-related rules can best be rewritten with the assistance of a small core group of experts, and future discussion regarding sailmaking will be better informed once the changes currently under consideration have had some seasons to settle down.

Before issuing a binding postal ballot on a rule change proposal, the committee seeks members’ views based on the significantly increased information gleaned from this summer’s efforts. Please complete the attached questionnaire and return it to Jo Chugg by 30th September.

We are determined to resolve this business as quickly as possible, with a binding Postal Ballot in October. Anyone who absolutely has to buy sails NOW should have no fears about approaching Elvstrom.

If you are not receiving this via email and/or are replying via hard copy, a reminder of Jo’s address:

Sigma 33 Class association
14 Motspur Park
New Malden
Surrey KT3 6PN

Finally, may we please use this as one more opportunity to tidy up our records on email details. We save a lot of money through the use of email, and communications are a lot more rapid. But addresses change, and details aren’t always passed on (or aren’t properly legible) and so your assistance in one more tidy-up would be extremely helpful.

Best wishes,



Donald McLaren
Chairman

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Sigma 33 Sails Evaluation – 2013

Analysis of Results by Event and by Sailmaker

| | Elvstrom | | North | | UK | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| | # of wins | overall | # of wins | overall | # of wins | overall |
| Irish Championship | 2 *** | 3 rd | 6 | 1 st | 2 | 2 nd |
| Scottish Series | 5 *** | 3 rd | 3 | 2 nd | 4 | 1 st |
| Class Championship | 7 *** | 1 st | 3 | 4 th | 0 | 5 th |
| Volvo Dun Laoghaire | 1 | 3 rd | 1 | 2 nd | 4 | 1 st |
| Cowes Week *** | 6 *** | *** | 0 | *** | 0 | *** |

*** different boats. This applied to the Evaluation Sails at Cowes each day, unlike the other events where they were used for the whole event by the same boat.

Analysis of Results by multi-event Boat

| | Irish | | Scottish | | Class Championship | | Dun Laoghaire | |
|------------------|----------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Sigmatic | | | UK | 1 st | Elvstrom | 1 st | | |
| Close Encounters | | | Elvstrom | 3 rd | Elvstrom | 2 nd | | |
| Squawk | North | 1 st | | | Elvstrom | 3 rd | | |
| White Mischief | Elvstrom | 4 th | | | North | 4 th | UK | 1 st |
| Leaky Roof 2 | | | Elvstrom | 4 th | UK | 5 th | North | 2 nd |
| Mayrise | | | North | 2 nd | Elvstrom | 6 th | | |
| Cariad | Elvstrom | 7 th | | | Elvstrom | 7 th | | |
| Sula | UK | 2 nd | | | Elvstrom | 8 th | | |

Attachment B: Points for Consideration in completing the questionnaire

In favour of change:

- The potential price advantages arising from competition
- The potential of increased local support in the event of queries or problems
- Improved durability and a better value-for-money proposition
- Improved continuity and stability of supply (compared with single sailmaker situation) in the event of a sailmaker ceasing trading or changing ownership
- In encouraging new owners to join the class, having multiple sailmakers may make it a more attractive proposition for someone interested in buying a Sigma 33

Against change:

- Erosion of the one-design ethos
- Price disadvantage due to reduced volume per sailmaker (Elvstrom are understood to have produced +/- 25 sails for the class per season in recent years)
- Possible armaments race from "picking and mixing" from different sailmakers to suit conditions
- Need to replace a sailmaker if any of those approved were to cease trading
- In encouraging new owners to join the class, having multiple sailmakers may add a layer of complexity for someone interested in buying a Sigma 33