

Dear Jester

With last year's Jester Challenge cancelled, we are very, very keen that we have some sort of event this summer, particularly as so many of you have registered to take part in either or both of the Azores and Baltimore challenges. As you will of course be aware, we are still in a very uncertain situation as regards COVID and international travel restrictions.

Here is our understanding of the current position:

**Azores:** currently travel between UK and Portugal, including the Azores and Madeira, is under one of the harshest European regimes, with only essential travel allowed, fourteen day quarantine periods at both ends, and the requirement for a negative PCR test within 72 hours before arrival. At the moment there is no indication when this might be changed, or in what way. Given that we are now only three months away from our start date, things don't look too hopeful. Clearly potential starters to the Azores need to have a decent period of notice. We have decided that a minimum six weeks is required, meaning we would have to make a decision by early May, only 7-8 weeks from now.

**Baltimore:** Ireland is currently under a Level 5 stay-at-home lockdown. The government has said only that this will be 'to at least the 5<sup>th</sup> April'. What will happen after that? We have no idea. Will it be possible for foreign yachts to enter? We have no idea. Will there be a Baltimore Pirates' Week? We have no idea.

Along with the uncertainties, we are very mindful too of the fact that the last thing we would want to do is damage the good relations we have with Praia and Baltimore by either turning up when we are not welcome, or by causing them difficulty or embarrassment. We also have to bear in mind that even if some restrictions are lifted, they can also be re-imposed very quickly, quite possibly while people are at sea.

So our current assessment is that the Azores is unlikely, Baltimore more likely, but still very uncertain.

That then leaves the question of the UK and what we may or may not be allowed to do at this end. At the moment, all restrictions are scheduled to be lifted on June 21<sup>st</sup>. which is slightly too late for us. It looks like overnight boat stays will be allowed from 12<sup>th</sup> April, with further relaxation on 17<sup>th</sup> May, although both these dates still have a 'minimum travel' notice, whatever that means. There will also be continuing restrictions on social gatherings, which would impact on things like skippers' dinners and so on.

In general, we're taking the view that a start from the UK will be possible, subject to following onshore guidelines. Once again we have to bear in mind that these dates could be subject to alteration, either against us or in our favour.

If we end up in a position where a UK start is feasible, but entry to Baltimore or the Azores is not feasible, we have come up with a fall-back position which will at least allow Jesters to put to sea and have a good sail.

This would be the one-off Jester Fastnet Challenge! A c.500 mile nautical jaunt along one of the most hallowed routes in offshore racing (though of course we won't be racing), starting June 13<sup>th</sup>. This could be sailed in four possible combinations:

1. Plymouth/Fastnet/Plymouth
2. Plymouth/Fastnet/Pwllheli
3. Pwllheli/Fastnet/Pwllheli
4. Pwllheli/Fastnet/Plymouth

Take your pick!

OK, it's not ideal. In a way it's Baltimore without the Baltimore. But it's something, which is, after all, better than nothing.

The other very important point about this fall-back option is that it would be possible to make a very last-minute decision as to whether it's a JBC or a JFC. So we would be able to decide almost in real time, rather than having to try to second guess what may happen over a period of weeks in the future. Skippers could be prepared for either; in terms of sailing they are pretty much identical apart from the stopover. We considered other options for somewhere to sail to, even within the UK, but they all lack the kind of sea room that we feel is necessary for a single-handed fleet, and also gave too much inequality between the Plymouth and Pwllheli start points. We don't discount the possibility that we have overlooked a better alternative, so if you do have a brilliant idea, let us know as soon as possible.

As you can see, we're engaged in a tricky juggling act here, so hope you will bear with us as we try to work towards the best outcome. We'll of course do our best to keep everyone up to date as the situation unfolds. And if anyone has any contacts in the Azores or Ireland who might help in getting a sense of what is going on *in situ* there, please let us know.

So, as Ewen would say, onwards!

Best wishes

The Jester Helm:

George Arnison

Howards Chivers

Roger Taylor