

Classic Yachts Challenge 2008



Maybe it's because Panerai is 'native': whatever the reason, the leg of the Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge 2008 in Imperia, on the Italian Riviera, possessed an atmosphere that inspired extra passion toward and affection for the sponsor.

Ken Kessler



Imperia's hosting of the event, or the XV Vele d'Epoca di Imperia to give it its full name, presented a picture-perfect challenge to the 101 yachts in the competition. The weather was glorious, the skies so blue it hurt, but the waters were choppy enough to scupper a day of racing. And when we landlubbers did eventually sail into the midst of the event on one of the spotter crafts, we knew instantly that the sport is even tougher than it looks. And hanging over the edge of a 50- or 70-year-old-plus craft at speed, mere inches from the icy, choppy brine - I'll stick with the X-Box version.

Despite the rarefied nature of vintage yachting, this was no elitist spectacle: the town itself is a resort and the port was filled with tents and booths selling foods, souvenirs and other goods and services, more like a summer fair. These added attractions - and one of them, from a local auto club, displayed a stunning red 1950s Lancia Aurelia B24 Spider in perfect condition - accounted for a crowd of spectators estimated at over 200,000 for the five days of the event.



It was, by the Challenge's standards, a model event. Yachts moored on the quays of the Porto Maurizio included craft from Italy, France, Monaco, Great Britain, the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Holland, Malta and Antigua. The aforementioned displays and events taking place on the quay and in the village included the 4th "Città Di Imperia" Concorso Internazionale di Decorazione

Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge, 2008.

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Floreal (International Flower Decoration Competition), exhibitions of "The Sea and the Red Cross" at the Palazzina Liberty and "The Movements of the Eye" by the painter Giovanni Battista De Andreis at the Villa Faravelli and others promoted by the Department for Cultural Heritage and Activities of the Comune of Imperia. And Imperia does take the event to heart: the Italian Post Office produced special postmarks for the regatta.

Put Helm alee

Despite the cancellation of the races on Saturday, 13th September, due to the strong winds between 20 and 25 knots and the accompanying rough seas, four races were completed: two on the regatta course, one on a windward/leeward coastal course for the larger yachts, and one on a triangular course between buoys for the smaller yachts.

On a sombre note, the yachting community was saddened to learn of the death of Olin Stephens, the legendary US yacht designer who passed away the day before at the age of 100. At least ten of "his" boats were at Imperia; without hesitation, the fourth and last race in the programme, was dedicated to him. It was a fitting tribute to the man regarded by many as the most successful yacht designer of the 20th century: he designed over 2,000 yachts, including eight winners of the America's Cup and the winners of the first two editions of the Whitbread Round-the-World Race.

Among the many special presentations at the closing ceremony, an award went to the Palinurus Sailing School of the Italian Navy for the loyalty demonstrated by its participation in the Imperia Meeting. The 1st Piero Ranzini Trophy was presented as a "thank-you" award in memory of the former President of the Imperia Meeting, to the yacht Fire Bird. The CIM (International Mediterranean Committee) Cup for outstanding conduct and sporting spirit went to the two yachts, Irina VII and Windigo, while the Imperia Yacht Club Trophy was presented to Luigi Viale, a native of Imperia and a yachtsman, fresh from the Beijing 2008 Olympics where he competed in the Star class.

Of course, this delightful event - away from the F1-like intensity of the America's Cup - is a showcase for Panerai, who honour the series with a new model every year, the watch presented to the race winners. For this series, the limited edition watch is the manual wind Luminor Regatta Chronograph, suitably engraved "Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge 2008" on its back plate. And if you weren't one of the lucky victors, Panerai generously made 500 of them. ☺

Further information: www.panerai.com



Luminor Regatta Chronograph, £4,700. A 44 mm case the watch has a hand wound mechanical Panerai OP XXVI movement and shows hours, minutes and seconds, with a two-dial chronograph and a tachymeter scale around the bezel.