

# YACHTS

## THEIR

## OWN

# JUDGES

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**T**HE apparent lack of an umpire, referee or any rule-enforcement authority in yacht races seems to make nonsense of the constant talk of rules, instructions and protests — but because all yachts are judges, of themselves and all other yachts, the amount of attention given to the rules is probably as much as in any sport.

An independent judge controls the start for correctness of procedure, mainly to make sure that the starting sequence follows the routine expected by the boats but, even here, incidents between boats are the concern of the boats.

It is impracticable to give all boats expert supervision all the time, except by having a judge in every boat — and this is exactly what happens. Every skipper is a judge of his own and all other yachts and their behaviour.

## No protest

**A** “PORT and starboard” incident on the beat, a right-of-way refusal as overlapped boats approach a turning mark, or a collision between yacht and buoy on the course — all these are beyond the eye of an overall judge and are dealt with by the yachts themselves.

In the port and starboard case the offending boat retires because there is no acceptable reason for not giving way when on port, to a starboard boat. By retiring, a slightly smaller penalty is incurred than if the matter is taken to protest and earns the inevitable disqualification.

The overlap case is typical of those in which doubt, quite genuinely, is felt by the yachts concerned about who is the offender. One or the other, or both, fly red protest flags just above deck level and race on regardless. One yacht may decide that it was at fault and, when ashore after the race, will “sign off” retired so that the matter need not go to a protest committee.

## Utmost care

**T**HE yacht in collision with a mark of the course is a normal case of a penalty imposed, and carried out, by the judge on board. With utmost care for all other boats, the offender makes a complete turn round the mark before sailing on and that is the end of the matter.

Hitting a mark was a disqualification offence but so often it was a matter of the mark hitting the boat that the lesser and fairer penalty was introduced. It is penalty enough to watch a boat drift on to a mark without being able to lift paddle or start engine to avoid it unless damage is inevitable.

Although it may seem that this “every yacht its own umpire” principle is full of holes, it works. Bumpers and borers and pot-hunting fanatics do exist, but seldom thrive in a sport in which there are no teams to carry the individual.

It is easy to appreciate the difference in problems faced on the Rio course from a line to a line and those of a vlei dinghy rounding 18 marks in a three-lap race in confined waters crowded with 59 other boats—all hostile and all judges.

A wind stronger than any met in the South Atlantic is just one more problem.