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Has The Optimist Evolved Too Far?

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The Optimist has introduced more kids to sailing than other boat, and is the dominant international class for youth competition. While the primary goal during the youth years is to instill the love of sailing, the influence of racing can impact the priorities.

As builders are vying to supply the fastest boats, there apparently remains enough wiggle room to improve on this 70 year old design. However, when new models come out, parents might need to step up to keep their kids from getting stepped on. This reality just hit Carlo Cagna as he shares in this report:

We are a group of Optimist parents that just attended the 35th Lake Garda Optimist Meeting, which was held April 13-16 for 1063 competitors.

Being new to the class and wishing to keep our kids occupied with a fantastic sport, we make a reasonable effort to accommodate them in what is otherwise an expensive activity. But we still feel it's worth it for both the sport and the social aspects around it.

We recently acquired new Optimists for our group of friends, though not the mainstream boats because they were too expensive for us. But we were in Garda with pride of our acquisition and our kids were happy.

However, among other good experiences we came across some unsettling information in the boat park. The gossip was how one of the biggest Optimist manufacturers found a way to bend the class measurement rules to develop a faster Optimist.

Despite being new to this sport, we managed to talk to some of the coaches and apparently these rumors were true. Also being said was how this new model had the support of the International Optimist Dinghy Association.

What this means to us is, after just buying competitive boats for our children, in a few months we will have to buy this newer model. We were told the Optimist was a one design class and our boats could be passed on to our younger sailors. Now our current Optimists will have much less value.

Being how the Optimist is a one design class, should this be allowed? Is this a favoring of some kind to bigger builders? We visited the [website of the manufacturer](#) and it's real as they are advertising these faster boats.

How can the Optimist class accept this? I am eager to hear from others about this situation.

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Brian Case · Manager at Four Winds Marine

Please don't believe the jargon used in glossy sales pamphlets, the Winner has been a great Optimist manufacturer but no different in quality to Blue Magic, McLaughlin and Carter as world leaders. Your new boats will be on the money for years, that's the simplicity of the Optimist. Boat park scuttlebutt about what's faster is just that, scuttlebutt.

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Optimist-Academy

As a fan of sailingscuttlebutt I am a bit disappointed that this article got published with a bit of research.

I surely hope, Carlos kids had fun in Garda as it is one of the best events ever in regards to opti sailing - even the name "meeting" rather than "race" or "regatta" describes its familiar nature.

Rather than bashing on a manufacturer who did nothing else than looking for a way to produce a class legal hull easier to handle in strong winds it would have been nice to look at actual facts:

- FarEast, Winner, McLaughlin, Nautivela, Blueblue, XSP and many more - there are indeed numerous manufacturers who stay within strict class rules
- Optiworld does pay a lot of attention to the goal that the class does not become a money game
- Winner actually puts in a lot of effort to offer charter boats at reasonable prices so overseas sailors can enjoy Garda as well
- Older hulls still win races and regattas world wide, I do believe the hull winning worlds 2016 was two or three years old...

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Taking advantage of measurement tolerances became a part of competitive sailing in the days of Earl Elms, Carl Eichenlaub, Herb Shear and a host of others.

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