

# VENDÉE VICTORY

IMOCA CLASS PHENOM CHARLIE DALIN TALKS RIVALRIES, ROUTING, AND REDESIGNS—PLUS WHAT IT TOOK TO WIN ONE OF THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST SPORTING EVENTS.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEAN-Louis CARLI / ALEA





MACIF Santé Prévoyance is one of the latest generation of foiling IMOCA 60s.

"This is by far the best finish line I've ever crossed. Today, I can confidently say I'm the happiest man in the world," reported an exhausted Charlie Dalin shortly after crossing the Vendée Globe finish line on January 14, 2025. The 40-year-old skipper had spent 64 days, 19 hours, and 22 minutes at sea, racing solo around the world to win the 2024/25 Vendée Globe in *MACIF Santé Prévoyance* and smashing the course record by more than nine days.

In recent years, the amiable French skipper has risen from a Figaro contender to prominence in the IMOCA class, securing the IMOCA 60 world championship in 2021 and 2022, sailing with the winning 11th Hour Racing Team campaign during The Ocean Race in 2023, and scoring line honors in the 2020/21 Vendée Globe. Two weeks after his victory, he offered a wide-ranging discussion of the race and what it took to win it.

### The IMOCA Community

Though each skipper in this race takes on months of isolation and self-sufficiency while competing off the water the solo sailors of the IMOCA class have formed their own community of elite racers, often training together and sharing in what can otherwise be a very solitary sport.

"I've known many of the other skippers in this fleet for years because so many of us come from the Figaro class. I know the



Old rivals and former roommates Yoann Richomme and Charlie Dalin are reunited at the finish line after over two months at sea.

every moment of the journey a challenge, and this intense rivalry is what allowed us to set these records."

Besides, during the 2016 Solitaire du Figaro, Richomme beat Dalin by just four minutes after over a week at sea, and Dalin has never let that go.

### Designing a Winner

Like any box-rule classes, not every IMOCA 60 is created equal. Class rules stipulate that the maximum allowable dimensions include a 60-foot hull length, 66-foot LOA, 14.76-foot draft, and 95.14-foot air draft, plus standardized wing masts, standing rigging, booms, and canting keel control system. They're each allowed two rudders, one keel, and two foils. But over the 34 years that these boats have been in production, a lot of evolving technology has fit into those standards, and boats of different ages all compete together in the Vendée Globe.

For the 2024/25 race, Dalin—who is himself a naval architect—teamed up with designer Guillaume Verdier to create a winner. His boat, *MACIF Santé Prévoyance*, splashed in 2022 and has put up a few first-place finishes since then, including the 2024 New York-Vendée and Defi Azimut Agglomération.

"With *Apivia*, my last boat, we designed it to be first to Cape of Good Hope, because that's where the systems start to spread out and maybe you can catch a cold front to get away from the pack. The boat was versatile, it starts foiling early, good at reaching, especially in medium winds. The problem I had with *Apivia* was downwind, and especially downwind in a heavy sea state. That was true with many IMOCA of that generation," Dalin says.

"Some skippers decided to put quite a lot of effort into fixing the downwind performance, so they lost performance in medium and reaching conditions, like Boris Hermann's *Malizia* and Yoann Richomme's *Paprec Arkea*. But they're really good in heavy sea states and downwind—better than me," says Dalin, who didn't make drastic changes to *Apivia*'s strengths and weaknesses when designing *MACIF Santé Prévoyance*. He did, however, change the layout, making a smaller cockpit and putting the living space aft of it, which made moving around the boat easier and more ergonomic.

In a class like this, the design is all about tradeoffs, and even with some of the world's most specialized naval architects on the case, the Vendée Globe is far from a race you can win from the design shed. Ultimately, it comes down to the conditions.



Dalin came in second place in 2021, fueling his determination to be on the top of the podium this year.

"The design is always a bet because you don't know what weather you're going to get during the race. You make your hull choices years before the race. We had quite a lot of reaching in the Southern Ocean, so that worked in my favor this time, but if we'd been racing three weeks later, maybe it would have favored Yoann."

### Strategy Shift

Foiling IMOCA can sail faster than the wind, which means that they can outrun a weather system even in some of the most treacherous waters on earth. Dalin says it's less about wind speeds and more about the wave state, which means learning a whole new way to consider your routing.

"With foils you don't need to chase strong winds to go fast. It's actually the reverse. As soon as there's more than 20 knots of wind, the sea state comes up, so it's harder to go fast. The ideal wind speed in the Vendée Globe is 18 to 22 knots. Any more than that, the sea state degrades a lot. Before, I focused a lot more on the wind, but now it's very much about the waves. And it's not just the period, but the steepness, which makes everything a bit more complex."

Going from displacement mode to foiling is another confounding variable. At different points of sail, the boats need different minimum wind speeds to get up on the foils. "On a beam reach, maybe 11 knots is where you can start foiling, but upwind you need 16 to 18 knots to start foiling, and downwind, you need 13 or 14 knots," he says.

And finally, the sailplan also impacts

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEAN-MARIE LIOT / ALEA



Every sail change can cost 12 to 14 nautical miles on an IMOCA 60, so Dalin is very intentional about his routing decisions. Below, Dalin greets fans who came out to see his arrival.

how you can interact with the weather systems. "A half-hour sail change, which is fast alone on a 60-foot boat, can cost you 12 to 14 nautical miles, so you have to be very cautious and thoughtful about your decisions," he says. "It's really dangerous to maneuver on the foredeck at speed, so especially when you're reaching you have to slow down. It takes a lot of time and also a lot of physical effort. The mast is 20 meters high and the heavier sails, when they're dry, are 80 kilos—and most of the time they're wet. So not only are you losing ground, but you're losing energy."

He says that he averaged five to seven hours per day on routing and weather during the race because of the complexity of each of these factors working together.

### Taking Care of the Boat

The Vendée Globe is truly the test case for the old adage "to finish first, first you must finish." In recent years, sinkings, dismastes, and all manner of issues have plagued the fleet. In 2020/21, the attrition rate was over a quarter of the fleet and included even some of most accomplished sailors. Dalin says he was constantly checking for the early warning signs.

"You're listening out for the noises because a lot of the time the first sign something is wrong is the noise. You check your hardware and your sheets, and when you slow the boat down for sail changes, it's always a good time to look around and make sure everything looks right."

### THE LEADER BOARD

Charlie Dalin (Macif Santé Prévoyance)  
Yoann Richomme (Paprec Arkéa)  
Sébastien Simon (Groupe Dubreuil)  
Jérémie Beyou (Charal)  
Paul Mielhat (Biotherm)  
Nicolas Lunven (Holcim-PRB)  
Thomas Ruyant (Vulnerable)  
Justine Mettraux (Teamwork-Team SNEF)  
Sam Goodchild (Vulnerable)  
Bejamin Dutreux (Guyot Environment-Water Family)  
Clarisse Crémer (L'Occitane en Provence)  
Boris Herrmann (Malizia-SeaExplorer)  
Sam Davies (Initiatives-Coeur)  
Romain Attanasio (Fortinet-Best Western)  
Damien Seguin (Groupe Apicil)  
Benjamin Ferré (Monnoyeur-Duo for a Job)  
Tanguy Le Turquais (Lazare)  
Alan Roura (Hublot)  
Isabelle Joschke (Macsf)  
Jean Le Cam (Tout Commence en Finistère-Armor Lux)  
Conrad Colman (MS Amlin)  
Giancarlo Pedote (Prysmian)  
Guirec Soudée (Freelance.com)  
Kojo Shiraishi (DMG Mori Global One)  
Violette Dorange (Devenir)  
Louis Duc (Fives Group-Lantana Environnement)  
Sébastien Marsset (Foussier)

#### Still On the Course at Press Time:

Antoine Cornic (Human Immobilier)  
Jingkun Xu (Singchain Team Haikou)  
Oliver Heer (Tut Gut.)  
Manuel Cousin (Coup de Pouce)  
Fabrice Amedeo (Nexans-Wewise)  
Denis Van Weynbergh (D'leteren Group)

#### Abandoned:

Arnaud Boissières (La Mie Câline)  
Eric Bellion (Stand As One-Altavia)  
Yannick Bestaven (Maître Coq V)  
Pip Hare (Medallia)  
Szabolcs Weöres (New Europe)  
Louis Bruton (Bureau Vallée)  
Maxime Sorel (V and B-Monbana-Mayenne)

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEAN-LOUIS CARLU / ALEA (ABOVE); MARTIN VIEZER / DISOBEY / MACIF (ABOVE)



Dalin is greeted by a fleet of fans upon arriving in Les Sables-d'Olonne after breaking the course record by nine days. Below, he addresses them at a press conference, with his trophy to the left.

"I was lucky I spotted my problems early enough to address them. I had a hydraulic leakage in the south Atlantic. I lost four liters of fluid, but I had five in stock. If it had gone on longer, that would have been a problem."

"I also cracked the hull. When that happened, I had almost sailed 600 miles in 24 hours, and I knew I was forcing too much on the boat. I didn't know how it was going to materialize, but I knew I was hurting the boat for sure. And a couple of days later, I spotted the crack in the hull."

"We've got optical fibers in the foils and loads of electronics and sensors, but it's the skipper who knows when they're asking too much. Sometimes you just know. You've got to listen to your boat."

For all the care Dalin was taking of the boat, he didn't leave himself much room for error. He and his team predicted that he could finish the race in 70 days—four days faster than the 74-day world record that had stood since 2017—so to be safe he brought 75 days' worth of provisions.

### Looking Forward

Dalin's offshore racing career has been skyrocketing in recent years, and it's hard to imagine what's next for someone who's already got a trophy in all the biggest events in the most-watched offshore circuit. He says a Route du Rhum win is still on his



### THE 2024-25 VENDÉE GLOBE BY THE NUMBERS

**Greatest distance in 24 hours:** Sébastien Simon (Groupe Dubreuil) at 615 nautical miles.

**Fastest recorded speed:** Nicolas Lunven (Holcim-PRB) at 29.02 knots.

**New course record:** Charlie Dalin (Macif Santé Prévoyance) at 64 days, 19 hours, and 22 minutes. This bested the previous record (Armel Le Cléac'h, 2016) by nine days, eight hours, and 12 minutes.

**New fastest female circumnavigator:** Justine Mettraux (Teamwork-Team SNEF) in 76 days, 1 hour, and 36 minutes. This bested the previous record (Clarisse Cremer, 2020) by 11 days, 48 minutes.

bucket list, since Thomas Ruyant edged him out of a win in 2022.

It's also possible we'll see him back in more crewed IMOCA races. Midway through the 2023 Ocean Race when it seemed Holcim-PRB was unbeatable, 11th Hour Racing Team drafted Dalin for the all-important double points transatlantic leg. Their gamble paid off. Without that win, the American team likely would not have been able to secure the overall title—a first for any American team in the event's 50-year history.

"I really enjoyed racing with 11th Hour Racing Team, and I enjoyed that the boat was constantly pushing. There were no compromises for sail changes. When they do happen, everyone's on deck together and it happens almost instantaneously. I enjoy the intensity. And of course when you sleep, you can rest pretty peacefully, which isn't the case for solo sailing because you need to have so many alarms. I like knowing that the boat is in good hands when I'm off watch. But I also really enjoy being master of my own decisions, just living my life, sleeping when I want to sleep, not waiting for watches to end."

"I think one day I would really like to lead a campaign like the 11th Hour campaign. You've got a big team, and the race is long with so many logistics. It's a big challenge, and I think that would be a really cool experience."