

IRC COMMON CONFUSIONS

The RORC regularly receives questions concerning compliance with IRC Rules. We also often hear anecdotally that boats are (generally inadvertently) infringing IRC rules. Commonly recurring issues are looked at below.

1. Furling Headsails - Dos and Don'ts

Probably the most commonly 'misunderstood' IRC rule is Rule 26.8, Furling Headsails. Based on your application for rating, the Rating Office will determine your eligibility. It is then your responsibility to comply while racing. If you have applied for the rating credit but your certificate shows 'Multiple headsails permitted', the most likely reason is that rated LP is less than the qualifying limit of 130% of J.

On your boat's certificate, you will find one of the following:

Multiple headsails permitted means: You are not receiving the furling headsail rating credit and may carry and use any number of headsails.

Or Single furling headsail only means: You are receiving the furling headsail rating credit and may use only one headsail during a race. No other headsail may be used.

Or Single furling headsail plus H/W jib: means: You are receiving the furling headsail rating credit at the reduced rate and may use only one headsail or a heavy weather jib during a race. No other headsail may be used.

For boats receiving the rating credit, other points to note are:

- Your boat must be fitted with a complete headsail furling system.
- There is no restriction on carrying additional headsails on board, just in not using them.
- A #3 headsail is NOT a 'heavy weather jib'.
- A heavy weather jib is defined as a headsail of area not greater than 13.5% height of the foretriangle* squared and without reef points. 'Height of the foretriangle' is the vertical height from the sheerline abreast the mast to the forestay attachment point on the mast.
- A boat rated for a single furling headsail but no heavy weather jib may nevertheless carry a heavy weather jib aboard without infringing IRC Rules. If however she uses it while racing, she infringes IRC Rules and must retire.
- A storm jib (See IRC Definitions) may be used by all boats at any time.
- If you are competing in a series of races, you must use the same headsail for all races in the series.

2. Changes to Boats

IRC Rule 9.6 notes that physical changes which might affect the performance of the boat automatically invalidate the rating certificate. Apart from obvious changes to rated data, sail dimensions, keels, rudders, etc., this also includes removal of furniture or any other fixed item aboard the boat when she was weighed, measured, or on which the rating has been based. Additionally, Rules 27.1 and 27.2 specifically address fitout noting that Hull Factor may be affected by any changes. So, removal of for instance the saloon table, floorboards, locker doors, watermakers, galley units, or any other fixed item is not permitted without first reporting the change to the Rating Office and requesting an amended certificate.

In a similar vein, each boat's IRC rating certificate notes whether the empty weight includes bunk cushions and batteries. If these are noted as included, then they must be carried. 'Loose' items (bunk cushions, bunk boards, etc) aboard the boat when she was measured must be carried in their normal positions when racing.

3. One Valid Certificate Only

Rule 9.2 now says: A boat shall not hold more than one valid IRC rating certificate at any time except as permitted by Rule 9.2.1. Rule 9.2.1 then describes a short handed IRC certificate. It is thus now possible to hold more than one certificate at a time BUT the second one may only be used for short handed (ie maximum of 2 crew) races. It is still NOT permitted to hold a number of certificates and to pick the best one for the conditions of a particular race.

4. Non-Spinnaker TCC

Certificates include a second, non spinnaker TCC for all boats normally rated to use a spinnaker. This second TCC is only valid for races for which the Notice of Race includes a non spinnaker class. What is definitely NOT permitted is calling up the race committee 10 minutes before the start of a windy race asking them to use the non spinnaker TCC!

5. Crew Number And Crew Classification

Except for the special case of boats holding either short handed or 'one design' certificates (which must comply with their class rules in respect of crew), unless a notice of race specifically includes crew number limitations or requires boats to hold an endorsed certificate, there are no crew number or weight limitations when racing under IRC. Similarly, there are no restrictions on crew classification, again unless invoked by notice of race. For these issues therefore, boats need to refer to notices of race for compliance issues.

IRC Crew Number is not variable by a boat and has no effect on TCC.

6. Sail Inventory

Rule 26.1.5 summaries the limitations on sails that may be carried. A particular point, often 'misunderstood' is the restriction in paragraph (d) of this Rule on changing sails during a regatta run on consecutive days. Paraphrasing this, the meaning is that the sail inventory that you carry for the first race is then the inventory for the whole regatta. So, no leaving the heavy sails ashore on light days and vice versa, swapping spinnakers for different weather or course conditions, changing to an 'offshore' mainsail, etc.

The only exception to this is significant damage. While there is no formal requirement to seek approval for a change of inventory after damage, a prudent skipper might wish to advise the race committee to avoid potential future problems.

7. Accuracy of Rated Data

Rule 19, Rating Review, defines the limits of accuracy for the various rated data parameters. In the case of protest, these limits then define the validity or otherwise of the certificate. These limits are NOT tolerances to be used when rating a boat. They are solely for the purposes stated in the Rules: rating reviews and protests. Boats must not therefore be measured and then the tolerances deducted from each measurement. That could lead to the withdrawal of a boat's certificate under Rule 9.7 and possible further action under the RRS.

8. Change of Ownership

On change of ownership of a boat with a current IRC certificate, it is prudent to check that the certificated data is correct. For instance, it is not unknown for internal ballast to 'disappear'! Similarly, while the boat may come with a full inventory of overlapping headsails, the boat may not be rated for the largest of these. Or it may be rated for a single furling headsail. Check!