
Merlin Rocket Rudder Fences – March 2020

In late November the RYA, as the Class Rules Authority for the Merlin Rocket Class, was asked by the Protest Committee of the Blithfield Barrel to clarify the meaning a number of Merlin Rocket Class Rules, in accordance with RRS 64.3(b). The requests related to the legality or otherwise of a feature on the rudder, commonly known as a “rudder fence”, and the use of personal digital equipment.

The request was considered by the RYA’s Technical Committee who provided the following reply to the Protest Committee:

Q1. The Merlin Rocket Class rules are silent on the 'fence' feature found on the rudder approximately 50mm below the bottom of the stock.

Please provide an interpretation of the class rules as to whether or not this fence feature should be described/defined as a 'winged rudder or other contrivance' and therefore not compliant with class rule C.8.2

A1. The RYA Technical Committee have determined the ‘fence’ feature to be non-class compliant under CR C8.2 and also in consultation with The Equipment Rules of Sailing (ERS) E1.1 and E1.2, and is therefore prohibited.

Q2. The GPS capable wrist watch although not used by the sailor, is capable of breaching class rule C 5.1(a) Please provide an interpretation as to whether being equipped with such a device infringes the class rule, or whether its use is required to infringe the class rule.

A2. It has been concluded that the GPS Watch is a breach of Class Rule 5.1(a). The rule does not mention that the device has to be used or not, just that it is prohibited.

Q3. The Tactik compass device used in 'Tactical Mode' does appear to breach rule C5.1.(a) However the protest committee does not feel technically competent to absolutely determine with the evidence available whether this is the case. Please provide an interpretation/clarification on this issue.

A3. On the Tactick compass question, the RYA Technical Committee feel there is insufficient information to provide a definitive interpretation, other than to say if the device is capable of performing the prohibited items (any device which correlates and/or stores any of the following: heading, time or vmg is prohibited) then it is prohibited to be carried regardless of whether it is used or not. It would be up to the Protest Committee to find further facts about the capabilities of the specific compass used.

Following this protest the RYA was made aware that the presence of a rudder fence was not a standalone case and that it affected a significant number of boats. The Merlin Rocket committee on behalf of the members has requested that the RYA look to allow a dispensation to these boats to allow them to race.

There is no mechanism under which a 'dispensation' can be issued to a specific boat or group of boats. All boats racing as Merlin Rockets are required to be in compliance with the class rules as published by the RYA. The options the RYA had were therefor limited to two:

1. Refuse the request of the MROA and insist any boats currently racing with a rudder fence remove the device;
2. Change the class rules to allow the use of rudder fences

As the Class Rules Authority, the RYA has the ability to amend the class rules. The class rules require the RYA to co-operate with the MROA in all matters concerning the class rules but do not require the approval of the MROA.

Normally the RYA would not consider a request to change a class rule unless it had the clear support of the class which would be demonstrated by an AGM vote in accordance with the MROA constitution. However, in this instance the ability to wait for an AGM decision would leave a significant number of boats with illegal rudders. . In the interest of not wanting to disrupt the Merlin Rockets planned events with reducing the number of entries the RYA has therefore issued a temporary set of class rules, based on wording proposed by the MROA, which will be valid until 31st December 2020. This will allow the MROA to vote on this class rule in July and if it is a positive response the RYA will implement the necessary changes. Should the ruling be that the class do not wish for these Fences to be on rudders then it will give a period of grace to sailors with these devices to take them off.

Whilst it would not be illegal for anyone to purchase or build a new rudder with a fence, anyone considering doing so should bear in mind that come the end of the year the MROA could decide at AGM to request the RYA to amend the rules for an outright ban.

RYA Technical Department – 12th March 2020



Suzie Holland, Technical
pp RYA Technical committee