Summary

This is an Article by Gilles GLUCK which was published on the French Laser Associations web site, francelaser.org, in March 2020. At the time of writing Gilles was a Grand Master who has been sailing Lasers ever since they first arrived in Europe over 40 years ago. The translation was difficult so please excuse any errors. In some cases there was either no direct literal translation, or, it was not appropriate. Some of the sentences may seem convoluted, this is because they still have their French constructions as I simply did not have the time to rewrite every sentence. Throughout the piece he contrasts the Laser with other boats and products and sets the scene by including anecdotes of life at the time.

He refers to the baby boom generation born in the 1950's as Boomers and the millennial generation, or generation Z, born after 2000 as Zoomers.

On pages 2 to 4 Gilles first looks at the history of the Laser. He talks about how the Laser was so different to other boats of the time because of its simplicity, and low price, which made it an attractive product for people who did not want the cost and complexity associated with many other craft.

Pages 5 & 6 compare the price of a Laser today with other goods and demonstrate how it has become more expensive in real terms. Pages 7 and 8 then investigate the reasons for the price increase as the boat evolved and how the evolution has stressed the design. Pages 9 & 10 discuss how the members lost control of the class and how the various problems with the builders led to falling demand and higher prices. Pages 11& 12 consider the impact being an Olympic Class has had on class politics, and, the construction of the boat, as competitors seek the fastest craft. Pages 13 & 14 consider the impact of the selection trials for the 2024 Olympic Games and conclude the trials were a farce.

Page 15 discusses ILCA, its constitution, the lack of democracy and the autonomy of ILCA and its paid executive. Page 16 explores ILCA's role in enforcement of the construction manual and how it introduced changes which may have been detrimental to the principle of the "one design" and put some builders at a disadvantage. It then moves on to discuss the validity of the recent vote and whether ILCA has been an independent arbiter.

Page 16 explores how the quest for competition at the highest level and the search for increased profit margins is turning the Laser into a rich persons sport and then discusses how other industries and classes have followed this route. In the case of sailing dinghies Gilles believes this has led to the demise of many classes. Pages 18 and 19 draw the argument to a close by discussing the different views of ILCA and EURILCA and whether or not the survey monkey ballot was a fair outcome.

Gilles is very critical of all the main players in the class, the builders, ILCA and ISAF. In seeking their own objectives, whether it is profit or the quest for elite competition he fears for the future of the Laser, hence the title "**The future of the laser: sorcerer's apprentices and the goose that lays the golden eggs".**

I do hope Gilles is wrong.

Andy B

The future of the laser: sorcerer's apprentices and the goose that lays the golden eggs

We don't hear much about it in the dinghy park.
We no longer receive a paper review published by ILCA (Laser World in four colours that many lasers sailors will remember) and moreover, the French Laser Association (AFL) has spaced production of its magazine and abandoned paper copies (that is the great Greta Thunberg, it lowers the associations expenses, but it's more volatile and easy to forget).
The nautical press (Voiles et Voiliers or Voile magazine, with their readers averaging 70 years of age), does not care much about dinghy sailing (for them dinghy sailing only exists for one month every four years during the Olympic Games).

As for the sports press, sailing (including ocean racing and solo round the world trips) occupies a postage stamp at the bottom of the penultimate page once a week, while football is spread out daily on pages the size of a double sheet for a wedding bed and rugby on the equivalent of one or two kitchen towels.

To find different views on the crisis that threatens the Laser and its regattas, you must speak English and look around on websites that are not really objective, not really generalist or independent (Sailing Anarchy, Scuttlebutt, Daily Sail. ... etc) or by chance collect very fragmentary information from the few people who are a little bit in the secret of the Gods
And yet, the crisis is here, time is running out, the writing has been on the wall for quite some time ... and this wall, we are rushing downwind towards it at fifty knots.

Before going into detail, for those under thirty, the Zoomers, a little reminder about the Laser and its history may be necessary ...

Its fortunate that I'm an old idiot (62 years, a Boomer), nothing to boast about: When I started to sail the Laser I was a young, stupid and in addition one of the worst kind, self-confident and ready to take on anything, and when you're a young idiot, you just have to wait: you inevitably become an old idiot, something the Zoomers do not understand as they become impatient with us old idiots the Boomers.

I experienced the Laser before it arrived in France and radically changed everything in competitive and recreational sailing, and I have raced on this wonderful and simple beach boat since its beginnings, four decades without interruption (I just missed the first French Open's held in 1977 & 1978 in Loquirec and La Baule)

In 1972/1973 I was between middle and high school and, like many sons of the French bourgeois, I had been sent to England to perfect my English during the summer holidays.

It was not like the De Funès' film "the great holidays" (I was too young to find an English girlfriend and get married secretly away from my parents in front of Gretna Green's blacksmith)….Or the current language exchange trips where French students stay with nice people but there is a lack of conversation and they are forced to take part time work to survive.

Although I was very small, I was a furious sailor (my parents met each other through Glénans, a group of sailing clubs in France) and under my father's instruction I helmed a power boat full of trainees in the port of Camaret at the early age of 4, in the summer of 1962.

In England I stayed with Mrs Olga Marshall, a good ex-WREN (Uk Navy for ladies) an English lady and the English always remember their great Admiral Nelson, she noticed my passion for sailing and went out of her way to encourage me to improve my skills (in England boating is sacred and almost not negotiable).

We lived in a village far from the sea (Saffron Walden, near Cambridge in the middle of East - Anglia) but this was not a problem, in Great Britain, you sail everywhere ...

There were two sailing clubs within range of our Mini Austin, The first was on a narrow irregular disused gravel pit, we raced in groups of 4 boats because there was so little space ... I did not win, but with my experience of the Seine and the roll tacking techniques we had learned, my sister and I made it to the semi-finals.

The other venue was a large reservoir the lake of Grafham Water (almost 2000 acres or 800 hectares, it is more than five times the size of the lake of St Quentin en Yvelines). There I crewed for a nice, but slightly grumpy man who helmed a plywood gem, a GP14, kind of 420 with double chines, old-fashioned compared to French boats which had been GRP since 1960, but well fitted out with equipment and sails, varnished and well maintained. (In Great Britain, there are no wrecks in the dinghy parks ... If someone abandons their boat without paying their fees, either it is claimed for the club or, if it is rotten, it is given a Viking funeral, they burn it after recovering the salvageable parts ...).

It was at Grafham Water (where the dinghy park contained hundreds of boats from several dozen different classes) that I saw a Laser “for real” for the first time (At Southampton Port I had bought a boating magazine to read on the train in which there was talk of the “Astounding success” of this brand new “singlehanded dinghy”, but there was no photo of this then unknown craft in France) . The first thing that struck me about this blue robin egg laser, placed upside down on two carpeted railway sleepers was the purity of the taut lines of the hull, it looked like a mini Flying Dutchman, The Olympic and superlative dinghy of the time, and the perfectly profiled aeroplane wing shape of the dagger board (at that time all French dinghies, except some thoroughbreds like the 505 had flat wooden dagger boards with the leading and trailing edges vaguely chamfered).

Once sat right side up it was even more bizarre, it did not look like a "real boat", it seemed more like a beach machine, it was similar to the Sunfish, it lacked all the settings and other complex and mysterious magic spaghetti that is supposed to make other boats faster and unconquerable such as the OK, Finn, or European Moth.
Three clam cleats in plastic (aluminum was optional) with bad teeth to grip the rope ... in 6mm stranded orange polypropylene, the kind of awful cheap floating rope which fishermen use in abundance for their lobster pots.

It didn't work too badly because the clam's (and the antique “whistle” cleats) griped better on stranded than on braided pre-stretched.

This three-strand polypro (which stretches like a bungee cord) was also used for the vang, only a three to one purchase using the blocks from Holt Allen economy range.

The dagger board and rudder were beautifully profiled (at that time most lasers had a finely varnished solid wood blades but there were also polyester composite ones)

The boom was a round aluminium stick, with strange looking attachment points the back evoking the memories of the original French dinghy the Vaurien, already a very old-fashioned design, the original mainsheet delivered with the boat (8mm white) was very low specification Marlow braid, the sail was in a fairly fine fabric but still looked pretty good (it was still Dacron 3.2 ounces at that time), it was manufactured by Elvström and had the emblematic crown on the tack, but the outhaul adjustment was a little odd (in reality it is very effective for adjusting the foot of the sail) and the mast sleeve (which is a marvel of aerodynamics) was new to us (we were in 1973 and windsurfing did not really take off in France until five years later).

In short, a mixed impression: a superb hull, very light for the time, you could see high quality GRP, which gave a strong impression of "speed" and "planning", almost no wood to rot (the two handrails on the sides cockpit were still in teak, they went to plastic two years later) ...
But the rest of the equipment seemed to be cheap beach gear, a toy for the holidays, no mast settings like you have in an OK boat or a Finn, just a simple hole to put the mast in.

I did not know until later that the designers of the Laser had tried many different mast settings - position and rake - on the prototype, tested the boat, then frozen the settings for everyone ..... but of course, I should have realised ...

Moreover another oddity, the mast was in two pieces ... but, I knew why, I had read in the Sailing Magazine that the English were big fans of Car-Topping, very common at home in France, even with their extreme version of a car the-unstable-three-wheeler-for-broke-British-who-can't-afford-an-Austin-mini, the plastic snail and blocker of Great Britain’s roads, driven by old and broke motorists with a death wish, the Reliant Robin ... at that time there were still plenty on the roads, sometimes topped with a boat or a hundredweight of luggage.

The hull and the colored sails confirmed the view of a beach machine (very bright colours which proclaimed loud and clear that psychedelia and the recently disunited Beatles were still in fashion).

In short, mixed impression of the new boat ... I couldn't try the Laser (I didn't have the size anyway, especially for the 7.2 metre sail, the only one available at the time) but I saw that those who sailed with us (racing was a handicap series based on the Portsmouth Yardstick) were damn fast for beach gear. They were losing a little upwind compared to the OK dinghy made by Yoles, but ridiculed them downwind.

The Laser, designed in North America by a Canadian, as a boat for less than 1000 dollars, was, casually, changing everything in dinghy sailing ... it arrived in France in late 1974, a bit slowly at first, and then everyone wanted one.

There were many imitations at the time (the most notorious being the pile rubbish called the X4 which the French Sailing Federation and the French nautical industry tried to impose on us when the builders Lanaverre, the manufacturer of the 420, could not agree a licence with the Americans to manufacture the Laser in Europe) but we quickly realized that the Laser was a much better dinghy than it seemed to be, and, that it was very difficult to design an improved copy, even for Lanaverre-Yachting France, which at the time, had some of the leading industrial tools best suited to the mass production of light dinghies.

In my club of Mazières in Draveil Juvisy, today disappeared, there were authorized series and it was necessary to have a fleet of 3 lasers at any given time in one year to be a recognised fleet. Yves Lamour, brought the first Laser to the club, two and a half years later there were easily two dozen, bought by owners of 470 or 420 dinghies tired of trying to find a crew, and me, who had started to race in an OK using a club boat then later with an old-fashioned boat (N ° F3) which I bought cheap from a guy who came back broke from a hippy commune in Larzac (it was the time). I started with the club boat at Glénans and we were like friends.

Laser numbers were already almost 40,000, in 1978, when I bought my first laser, with one of my early salaries (the very first salary was spent on a thundering and characteristic motorcycle of the day a Norton 750 Commando ... second hand of course). My first Laser was 17802 a vintage in late 1974 (its first owner had been a Voiles et Voiliers journalist, Eric Vibart ...)

That's roughly 22,000 boats in less than 3 years worldwide, the European factory in Waterford (in Ireland) was rushing the boats out at full speed at the end of the 1970s ... and it maintained this frantic pace for a long time. My second Laser, bought new in 1980, was numbered 85632 (there, we were on 40,000 in two years, pure delirium, never seen before or since).

The Laser also revolutionized the art of racing, all of a sudden it was no longer the sailor with the best equipment or the latest cut of sail or with a boat from a bespoke manufacturer of overpriced hulls who won but simply the guy who, while being careful with his equipment, was able to anticipate the gusts, the wind shifts and the close tactics, and, to make the best use of the simple but essential adjustments the boat has, and while beating able to use the tiller to negotiate the waves and hang his body out at the end of the hiking strap with maximum efficiency.

Reaching a really high level was potentially within everyone's reach and for an incredible number of years Laser sailing has become in a fantastic reservoir of talent, not just for the other Olympic boats but also ocean races and the America's Cup.

There was a good reason for this explosive and viral success: The machine was "Cheap", at least on the rigging side, even if the mast tubes were made of good old aluminium, stiff, very nervous and well anodized, not like the glories of our French industry, the "Zspars" masts and especially the awful golden "Structural" used on the 445 dinghy made at La Baule by Gouteron/Brémaud, which always snapped at high speed due to electrolytic corrosion.

Yes ... cheap as it can be (but only in appearance), but above all cheap to buy: at that time it cost (inflation is a devil) about 4000 Francs. I am not an economist, but 4000 francs from 1978 does not relate to young people now, so it is difficult to compare and you should especially not try to apply the conversion Franc/Euro at 6, 55957F for a Deutschsmark (sorry, 1 Euro) which would give 610 Euros ....

Sorry Zoomers, this calculation is worth nothing, it is 2020; the Euro/Franc conversion dates from 2000, a time when you were still only a glimmer of lust in your fathers eyes, and in addition, we speak about Lasers twenty years before this at the time when Mr Mitterand had just ousted Giscard and when we still believed in the success of the Concorde.

Let's just say that you could afford a new Laser while working for two months of your vacation in a summer job that was well paid but mind-numbing, such as taking payments in a motorway toll booth.

Sorry Zoom in, the toll collectors have been replaced by robots and you now work for free, or almost, in the summer as a company intern during your long lazy French vacation ... even if university vacations have been unwisely shortened, in the old world of lazy French ways abhorred by Mr. Macron, it was back to school on October 1st.

The price of the Laser was quite comparable to that of a new 125cc motorcycle not too sophisticated, a little more expensive than a bike from the communist world (The East German MZ or the Czechoslovakian CZ), yes, Zoom in, it does seem amazing, there were in the past two Germanys and Czechoslovakia was still in one piece ... and was a little cheaper than a sexy little number made in Hammamatsu Japan and able to hit 130 kph on the speedometer with a screaming engine, the rider pressed flat on the tank and the rev counter at the maximum 10 000rpm.

Nowadays, the equivalent, a Korean 125cc motorcycle (made with copies of the moulds and the tools designed in Japan in the 1990s with a few minor changes to meet emission standards ... and a lot of plastic disguised as real- chrome plated metal) or perhaps a 125cc scooter from the same country, new they cost about 2500 Euro while the Laser (always a bit more expensive new) has long since broken through the 6000 Euro price bar and can be 7000 Euros or more when you add options.

The production rate of the Laser has plummeted to a few thousand per year, the exact number is not important. Young people race on club boats, not on their own, only old pensioners who shamefully have too much money thanks to their fat pensions (but it won't last, Europe and Mr. Macron will put an end to this scandal ...) can still afford the fantasy of an almost new boat (usually a boat that has been pre-amortized by rental during a World or European Championship or even a boat that is part of the participation pack for the Olympic Games.)

As for those who are neither young nor old, the 30 to 50 year old group, we hardly see them at regattas anymore; sailing is time consuming and a passion, completely out of step with life today. The 30 - 50 year olds work like crazy, they always need to be connected to their job by dozens of wires and to keep checking their social media. When they play sports it is always in a practical way, to keep fit, to stay beautiful and attractive and burn even more energy (jogging, swimming and

mountain biking) and anyway the laser, at 6,500 Euros or more is an economic nonsense when you already have wife, children and debts to pay on your house and car. You are very happy to have a regular salary and a roof over your head ... There are quite a few who, at thirty, have neither.

We can wonder how we arrived at such a price difference (keeping in mind that the Laser remains most people's first choice boat to start competitive sailing and that other classes of dinghies have become even more expensive on the pretext of improving the initial design).

The arms race? Not really. About ten years ago, I made a history of the various different popular boats, I called it popuboats, boats designed and launched to make sailing available to everyone (rather than the sport of the kings and of the powerful and the wealthy since the 18th century when the first Yacht Clubs were founded across the Channel in England).

The Star, the Rascal, the Optimist, the Mirror Dinghy, the 420, the 470, all originated as popular and relatively inexpensive boats ... but with the addition of gimmicks, sophisticated sails, enough ropes to make spaghetti, cleats more numerous than the keys of a concert piano, construction methods optimized because of the pressure to win at regattas, all their prices have skyrocketed and sadly sales of new boats have reduced dramatically.

Normally, the Laser, the popuboat of popuboats (even if this title is disputed by the rustic Sunfish) should not have followed this fatal slope, it is an extremely strict One-Design and even a SMOD (Single Manufacturer One Design , Monohull).

No sails made by a great nautical designer, no need to buy the fashionable mast that won the last worlds ... everything is standardised to death and supplied by the builder, no "optimization" is possible (or almost none or you will fail measurement) ... then why this price increase, and what are all the previous Laser sailors doing now???

In fact the laser of 2020 is not quite the same as the laser of 1974 (even if all the parts are strictly compatible and adaptable). Towards the end of the 1980s, the factory which produced lasers in Ireland because of the low labour costs (the headquarters for Europe were in Switzerland) went bankrupt (market saturation, somewhat, but above all a huge problem with the epoxy glue (Ciba Geigy, the inventor of Araldite) which is used to assemble the pot and the lid of the Tupperware (R) ... oops, sorry, the hull and the deck of the Laser, the hull and deck were separating at the gunwale.

Warranty issues, attempts to salvage boats already finished by removing a deck and hull from two boats, destroying them in the process and making one boat with the good parts left over with an improved glue .... and then finally the destruction of all the manufactured stock (an entire field with more than a thousand boats all badly glued together) with bull dozers and JCB's, bankruptcy proceedings followed, imported boats arrived from other locations and the distribution was restructured. (Before this there were at least fifteen retail outlets in France, in addition to the main importer).

It didn't make the headlines in the nautical press at the time and I only found out about the destruction of the Irish stock in 1995 when Association France Laser asked me to attend a meeting

held in Tenerife after that years Radial Worlds. Production then resumed in England with tighter manufacturing procedures, significantly lower production quantities, and a much higher retail price.

Certainly there had been discreet improvements: reinforcement of the mast foot with a stainless steel cup embedded in the GRP to limit wear and stop leaks, better manufacturing processes, a bronze bailer through the hull (and of course more plastic), a longer curing time in the mould ... but the increase in price was far beyond the improvement in quality.

On the rigging, things have also changed, small touches, the three rivets which held the top mast collar (and made a dotted line of holes which fractured under the bending forces) became two, then only one, with small red arrows added to make sure you turned it backwards.

The vang fitting on the boom was modified, then an internal reinforcement sleeve was installed (we had allowed customization of the 3:1 vang with an additional block and extra purchases which increased the purchase from 3: 1 to 6:1 or even 8: 1, in addition you could add a swivel joint which cost a fortune), the sail fabric changed to 3.8 ounces instead of 3.2 because manufacturers no longer wanted to produce it and it was unsuitable for smaller sails, the radial rig was launched, after the successive failures of the M rig and the Hawaiian sail without battens on the leach.

All these modifications were not expensive and should not have had such an impact on the price of the boat, but with reduced sales volumes and only to the race market (more suitable boats, often made of polyethylene, were starting to come out for specific markets such as sailing schools and rental clubs, not to mention “compatible” sails and spars that are not allowed in regattas but are much cheaper), the temptation was irresistible for the European manufacturer to increase the profit margins to make up for what it was losing on the reduced volume of sales.

At the time, the 90s, the Laser had already become Olympic, the candidates for the French team and the Olympics had started to analyse hulls and rigs held in stock at the importers to find the fastest boat (with mass production, there are always some differences in weight and rigidity compared to the target figures) ... and buying used Championship boats became the norm for most as new boats became too expensive for the average sailor.

Subsequently, after 2004 games, the crude but robust Laser radial became Olympic women’s boat replacing the Europe which was charming but as fragile as a china ornament (unusable in a sailing school), the Europe was the first singlehanded dinghy specifically designed for Olympic females (before this, the Laser was actually a mixed Olympic singlehanded class but the girls were rarely able to compete with the guys using a Standard Sail). This was also when the XD controls were introduced which allowed everyone to set up the rig in a repeatable way, especially those who do not have the grip of a lumberjack.

A very practical control for trimming the outhaul, not much changed on the cunningham, the XD controls also had a very powerful and very expensive vang (I boycotted this and was one of the last to adopt it), very easy to adjust (in the Harken version, less so in the Holt-Allen version) but with the purchase increased to 15:1 so that it savagely twists the boom if you have a heavy hand (the fragile boom is a product of the original concept "in English" it comes straight from the “cheap” design of

the boat: you only need one die to produce both the mast top section and the boom, the unexpected benefit is that a broken top section is perfect for making a boom with a few fittings and some pop rivets).

Towards the beginning of the 2000s, the manufacturer also tried to introduce a carbon top section, horribly expensive, not really a one design (because there were large variations in flexibility) and not as solid or durable as the aluminium part. The adoption of this pseudo-progress was put to the vote of the members of the Laser class ... and they refused to allow it by a comfortable majority despite the manufacturer's comments claiming that carbon was the technology of the future, and despite the claimed benefits it was withdrawn.

It was the first big clash between the owners association and the builder (I say builder, but there were in fact several, one in Japan, one in the USA, one in England and one in Australia, linked (or not) by opaque commercial agreements shrouded in mystery like the old London smogs (thick fogs) and all secret like the Mac Guffin (an Alfred Hitchcock phrase for secrecy, mystery, spying which often leads to an apocalypse) an approach taken by all the leading characters in James Bond films.

Relationships between builders and racing classes owners association have always been complicated, even incestuous ... when sales decline it is often the owners association who collects the moulds and tries to continue with a class that has one foot in the grave (the Jet, Ponant and Windy dinghies, boats that Zoomers will only have seen as wrecks in the dinghy park covered with green mould).

Very rarely (as was the case with the Vaurien dinghy in the beginning), is it the owners association who has control over the class rather than the builders who then construct boats on the basis of a minimum production volume and a maximum sale price ... Young Zoomers , can you imagine that I remember when a dinghy was sold for the price of Vélosolex mopeds(Zoomers - Google if you do not believe me and this piece gets longer as I ramble on about the past ...) and sold in department stores (There weren't many Hypermarkets in my time, Zoomer, no Decathlon or Go sport).

If the builder has the upper hand and controls the class and if the boat is successful, there is a great temptation to try to control, in one way or another, the owners association which is the builders best source of publicity. (It is not uncommon to find that it was the builder who initially helped the class to form and association and start a calendar of racing regattas.)

As for the famous carbon mast, it ended up being imposed without the members of the laser class (members of any national class such as our AFL are automatically members of ILCA, the international class) being given the opportunity to vote against it, thanks to a very Anglo-Saxon and very hypocritical trick, the choice of materials is no longer specified in the class rules, which are the responsibility of the members, but in the construction manual, a reference document which is controlled by the builders and ILCA.

We had already had the carbon tiller, because in the rules, the tiller material (originally a lump of wood 25X25mm) was not specified ... everyone took the opportunity to promote the part saying it was much better (lower and stiffer for a better feel and a few decigrams lighter they said) in any case it guaranteed the builder would receive another 200 to 250 Euros (a fortune for an average

student) from your wallet ...

They say the carbon mast is more durable, we will see, since the boat I have just bought second-hand from the French Laser team has one. What is certain is that the retail price is three times that of the aluminium equivalent, and, that it introduces a disparity between the boats, in complete contradiction with the strict one design of the Laser.

The weight and the static flexion curve are the same, but in dynamics, in a strong wind and a chop, the glass + carbon has more spring, a nervousness, which gives an advantage to the sailors who can afford it ... in contrast, on flat water in a steady wind, there is not much advantage ... Certainly the aluminium mast can twist a bit and even break at the joining collar, but I used a pair of aluminium top sections for ten years without a breakage ... I just took care to end to end them (2 hours of de riveting and re riveting work, a fairly simple DIY task which doubles their lifespan) and I always rinsed them very carefully after using them in salt water.

Once changes were allowed, the way was open for the future. What followed over the years was a restructuring, yet another, of the Performance Sailcraft conglomerate: regrouping of the English and American branches, it is owned by a fairly tough industrialist, Fazad Rastregar, CEO of the Mac Laren group (nothing to do with Formula1 , this is the Mac Laren which made baby strollers and had Lawsuits brought against it in both the US and British Courts and took on an army of highly paid lawyers after a bad stories about folding strollers which were deemed dangerous ... a dozen amputee babies because of a poorly designed hinge).

After this merger followed the rationalisation and closure in 2012 of the site of Peter Harken, the brother of Olaf Harken and manufacturer of quality blocks, Vanguard Boats, who built the Laser across the Atlantic in the US and was a large producer of sailing dinghies, including the 420 a typically French dinghy which is widely used by American universities for inter-university championships.

The USA was therefore supplied by the English builder, the Japanese, led by the indefatigable Tadao Otami, who has built Lasers from the very beginning, and has a talent for satire, continued without making waves but the situation was starting to heat up with the Australian builder.

First there was the legal dispute between Bruce Kirby, (formerly an Olympic sailor during the Olympic Games of 1956 in Melbourne and 1960 in Rome, 90 years old, wrinkled and the last survivor of the trio of Ian Bruce, Hans Fogh and Bruce Kirby, co-creators of the Laser) and the new Laser strongman of Performance Sailcraft, Fazad Rastregar, who unlike Kim Stephens or Kirby, does not have any past experience of racing or sailing.

Kirby, who designed the hull of the Laser (and quite a few others including the Byte, Lasers 13, L16 and Sonar), and even the Canadian 12M JI of the America Cup, believed he was entitled to royalties and held the intellectual property for the design of the Laser but the tough businessman Rastregar cut the royalties (which were paid promptly and on time when Performance Sailcraft Europe still belonged to Kim Stephens, an English businessman and former Olympic medallist in the Tornado) , the situation resulted in a lawsuit which, as is usual in the English-speaking world, made business lawyers rich and dragged on for some time. Kirby even threatened to create a new class apart by renaming the Laser the Kirby Torch, with an Olympic torch in its sails.

Kirby lost the trial in 2016 the situation calmed down except with the Aussies who continued to push the boundaries of the construction manual. Boats manufactured down under in the antipodes had a

reputation best paraphrased by using George Orwell (The Animal Farm): “All lasers are equal, but Australian boats would be more equal than the others."

An ILCA inspection later revealed an irregularity in the construction of these kangaroo boats (two pieces of glass mast, large like large fish plates, which stiffen the boat a little behind the bow). Bizarre all the same, for a serious one design with a manufacturer's manual which is allegedly a sacred writing, as untouchable as the Roman vestal virgins.

One can wonder if two pieces of resinated glass stiffening the shell of the hull made such a big difference ... probably not for the club sailor or at a National Regatta, but on the other hand, for the very top level, the aspiring Olympic champions, who have become quasi professional sailors and spend tens of hours every week improving their boat speed with tests in training, it's not the same.

The very slightest benefit from the equipment can be good to have, especially if in addition, it gives you a good mindset and confidence, you think like this: "I have a boat from the antipodes, the rumours in the dinghy park are that they are fast, therefore, I am convinced that I am going faster and with a good mental attitude and some cheek I can push the line to get off to a good start, if I am ahead and in clear wind I can use the speed to be smart, this is a well known fact, I’m not pumping, I am only finding the gusts and playing the shifts correctly ”.

It is quite obvious that with an absolute one-design, there is an essential need for tighter control of the manufacturing tolerances as the level of competition rises and the sailors train harder and longer.

When the Olympics are looming, everything turns into delirium and psychodrama with the merciless (and sometimes opaque) selection of sailors which is not always devoid of favoritism, but also the selection of equipment through committees in opaque meetings held in corridors at World sailing, ex ISAF, Ex IYRU. There is lobbying of selection panel members and knives are drawn and there are fireworks and dirty tricks, and sometimes stupid decisions such as the famous one over the Yingling, a female keelboat unknown in most countries except Scandinavia and the Dutch flat lands (and yet certified as an " international " class by ISAF), only chosen and retained to please a behind the scenes veteran of the international federation, Ian Linge whose male keelboat with three crew members, a weight similar to a truck full of blacksmiths anvils, had just been dropped from the Olympics

For the 2020 and 2024 Olympics, the selection of classes was even more painful and byzantine (excessively complicated) than usual. The IOC threw out Paralympic sailing (which is silly because sailing on an adapted boat is one of the most affordable sports for an amputee or paralyzed person) and started to tighten rules on “valid” Olympic with, in addition, an obligation of absolute parity between men and women.

The costs and organisational complications of running an Olympic Regatta are enormous: already the host country must have either a sea front or a large lake, then it is mandatory to build an Olympic marina (theoretically it is not mandatory, but everyone knows that the Olympic Games make construction companies happy as they lay mountains of concrete, and, the misfortune of taxpayers

who are always have to pay the bill).

It has calmed down a bit in recent games because keelboats like the Soling and especially the Star, previously backed by a formidable nest of self interested lobbyists, were dropped from the games but keelboats are coming back with the introduction (contested by Anglo-Saxons who see it a medal offered to France) of the Mixed and gender neutral Offshore Race.

The sailing event is, except in special cases (Sydney, Rio, or Barcelona), relocated from the rest of the Olympic competitions. In addition, sailing is, in comparison, a minority sport despite repeated attempts at making it more popular which have always been thwarted, and what more, sailing is a sport for practitioners and not a sport for spectators. *(like so many of the best things in life "doing it is so much better than watching it")*

The average club sailor does not care about an audience: when he takes to the water to mess around in his little boat (messing about on the river, a charming British scout song of the 60s), he does not need spectators (especially if he is a beginner at windsurfing and makes fun of himself by repeatedly splashing around in the water). Does the sailor need spectators -NO, but the IOC, YES it does, because they live (very handsomely) off of television broadcasting rights and therefore they select sports for their media exposure, synonymous with streams of cash flowing into safety deposit boxes in Switzerland.

Sailing has many races which are far from the shore (it was not the same in the past when we had races between the pilot cutters of Le Havre or Bisquines or the fishing ports of Granville and Cancale and the regattas à la Claude Monet and Gustave Caillebotte on the Seine). Offshore racing strategies are very complicated manoeuvres which require a great deal of effort to try to explain the tactics to a potential spectator.

The possible onlooker, unless they are perched above the course (not possible except in Tenerife or from the high ferries of Sydney bay), has no view of the stadium, does not understand anything about sailing, and unless you deploy an incredible technical paraphernalia of on-board cameras, drones and helicopters, add a competent commentator and have the luxury of informative inlaid graphics to show a virtual regatta to explain what is happening (it has happened several times, the America's Cup tried this, but with little beneficial result), it is very difficult to make sailing a multi-media sport for viewers, who prefer football, or the insipid parades of wooden horses which Formula 1 races have become.

Suddenly, and especially since the former Olympic Finn sailor Belgian Jacques Rogge left the position as the head of the IOC, sailing is (more or less) on an ejector seat and World Sailing management are left in a quandary, they must create something simple and spectacular, hence the new format with finals and the introduction of medal races, the magic of speed on foils and somersaults with kite surfing (which is legitimate for the Olympics, this is a sport in full development) rather than the intrigue of tactics on slow boats. Suddenly, in a world that is accelerating (towards who knows what end ??), the old glories like the Star and especially the Finn are pushed out, the 470 only saved its skin by selling itself as two person mixed boat (and because the "small" sailing nations refuse to reinvest in new classes dominated by Anglo-Saxons).

The Laser, with its worldwide distribution should have escaped this sweeping change, since it is both the boat of everyone in the world (Mr.Toutlemonde) and has many high quality competitive regattas ... but here is the logic, the show must go on at all costs and be as modern and snappy and concise as possible, therefore the Laser also felt the wind of change.

A number of small boat builders who construct luxury dinghies made like jewellery (and who have always had the privilege of supplying hand crafted boats for the Olympic's) saw what was formerly a beach boat become an Olympic class, and are pleased that the builder of this toy is no longer at the centre (heart) of the class. The owner, not a sailor but a businessman completely ignorant of the peculiarities of dinghy sailing and the subtleties of the market, which is like no other, has through his company Performance Sailcraft Europe committed masterful errors of mismanagement over the last 20 years.

There were attempts by Laser Performance to launch new boats and some were particular failures, the Laser 5000, the Laser EPS from Loday, The Laser Vortex ... and a few new skiffs which seemed to have a little potential like the 4000 or the Laser keelboat the SB3 which was not very well supported and the moulds were finally transferred to smaller constructers (The 4000 went to Rooster and the SB3 to Rondar, while Vandercraft took on the manufacture of the Laser 3000, the skiff version of the good old Laser 2 so loved by the sailing centres in Brittany ...).

There is the Italian ex Finn sailor Luca Devoti, in the complete tradition of Italian craftsmanship, he produces a very small number of classes all very well optimized, and, extremely expensive Finns (production will have to be changed to something else as the Finn is no longer an Olympic class), there is also a better equipped competitor, the builder RS Sailing which, ironically, was previously the biggest reseller of Lasers and Lasers accessories in Great Britain under the brand name LDC and who, for the past twenty years, has launched itself in all directions in boat manufacture using many different moulds to create small classes of dinghy, first surfing along with a skiff when it was a craze, then manufacturing in polyethylene and producing a catamaran, with an excessive range of boats but where the classes cannibalize each other by sharing common parts, to the point that recently RS has churned out a second double handed dinghy which is duplicate of the polyethylene model intended for sailing schools, the Zest, whilst still in the range, there is another double hander of 12 feet in soft plastic, the Feva, which is selling well and has the unique quality (rare nowadays) of being able to be used both for racing and in sailing schools.

RS boats in now manufacturing the Aero, a well-thought-out anti-laser weapon which has the privilege of benefiting from forty years of progress in the field of composites, and, which weighs twenty-four kilos less than the Laser.

The use of carbon, this great material which signifies modernity is not the only reason, there is the lightweight construction of the hull which caused so much concern to the materialistic sailors at Glénans (Glenans – similar in concept to the Andrew Simpson Foundation in the UK with five national centres), who let themselves be tempted, and the fact that it is about thirty centimeters shorter than the laser all contribute to make the Aero as light as a feather, pleasant in the dinghy park and to launch in a medium wind, but much less pleasant on a beat against the chop, which,

however, is not a strong point of the Laser.

Melges also produced a one person boat which is supposedly better than the Laser (Melges 14) and which was present at the World Sailing tests in Valencia.

There has been an attempt (by Devoti, who have apparently have political support from the Italian government) to break the laser manufacturer's monopoly based on European “free and undistorted” competition laws, all the world knows that these laws are sinister and a silly nonsense which never prevented cartels from getting together to control sales and prices such as the one to sell yogurt or the illicit agreements of the washing machine manufacturers... we hardly talk about these problems any more in spring 2020.

There was a series of tests under the aegis of World Sailing, to definitively select the singlehanded class for the Olympic Games in Paris/Marseille, tests which turned out to be a bit of a farce and where the participants (most of them were laser sailors) had to sign a confidentiality document.

It was during this series of tests that “new and alternative” rigging which was supposed to represent the future of the Laser, the C5, C6 and C7 designed by Julian Betwaite (the architect of the 49er), carbon spars, with a composite sail and a GNAV (skiff style push down vang) as well as the ARC rigs developed by Laser Performance with a carbon mast, composite mainsail and a classic vang.

These wonderful alternative rigs for the Laser were not used for the WS tests in Valence, they just stayed on display but, on the other hand, some people who thought they were being clever (their identity half hidden behind nicknames) went wild on the English speaking forums saying that not using them was a crime because it stopped progress.

Among those unmasked, a person to note was Julian Betwhaite, of Performance Sailcraft Australia, who has been working on composite rigs for 9 years (the C5, C6 and C7) and sees a great future for the C5 laser rig in China where, it seems, the average size of the young sailors is a problem (they cannot right the boat after a capsize or step the mast using a 4.7 rig) ... and he claims like a Papal address from the Pope in Rome that his C5 rig is a hundred times better.

What's more, he tested it in Australia and says it's the darling of the young Australian sailors. The only problem with his assertion is, he promoted it in a very exclusive part of the country where there are 10 times as many Porsche’s and top of the range Audi’s than there are Kia’s or Daewoo’s.

In this area, parents are quite happy to spend more than 2,700 euros on a rig for their beloved children to play with. I am not sure that this approach will work in France and it is even less likely to work in emerging countries that are short of money (and where there are only a few sailors but where participation is slowly increasing as sailing is becoming more popular).

As far as we know from the Valencia selection tests for the Paris 2024 dinghy, the result was that the Laser champions (notably the Laser sailor Kontides from Cyprus) won easily and that on the race course the Aero proved to be the best of the bunch by a very small margin when compared to the Laser, Devoti D1 and Melges 14, (but do not dream that the Aero is supersonic missile, it is a normal singlehanded dinghy with a boost, lightened to death and with no foils, trapeze or wings). Based on

the trial the WS Technical Selection Committee recommended the RS Aero as the boat for the Olympic Games to the WS Management Committee which chose ... the Laser because it has a much better worldwide distribution and the abundance of Laser regattas.

What a beautiful farce! You might as well launch an expedition around the world to discover the tip of your nose, probably an exercise forced on us to pay wages to ambitious politicians in the sailing world, but the real threat to the future of the Laser is of a completely different nature, and the heart of the threat is the poor relationship between the two main constructors and the owners associations.

The international association of the owners is ILCA (International Laser Class Association), but my friends it is you the readers of this article who pay for ILCA (be in no doubt about this) through your contributions to the Association France Laser, you are, by right, active members of the ILCA.

You should not however believe that ILCA functions in a 100% democratic-one-man-one-voice way: In order to be able to include the countries where there are no organised class associations (the national federation, or an important sailing club, takes its place) some delegates to ILCA's General Assembly are appointed and not elected ... It is a bit like Georges Washington's 1776's democracy which presides over the destinies of the USA: certain pivotal states are crucial and too bad for the others. The value of votes is not the same across all states (the current president of the USA received fewer individual popular votes than his opponent and yet he is one who is constitutionally elected).

ILCA is very similar: although 70% of ILCA's voluntary contributor members are in Europe, the European Zone has had a minority of votes for a long time. The President has been an American, Tracy Usher for some time, flanked by a very permanent paid interventionist. In International Meetings, like the recent EURILCA meeting in December in Rome, it is this famous permanent paid Vice President (or as we sometimes say; the executive), it is this person, a man named Eric Faust, who very often leads the class in place of the elected President.

A Permanent - or Executive – position at ILCA, it is a very well paid job, the salary is higher than the much disputed 72,000 Euros annual (6000 monthly net) of the former President of the French National Sailing Federation (FFV). A situation which the former laser sailor Nicolas Hénard ended when he was elected - disputed - as the head of the FFV. Also well paid was another ILCA "executive", Jeff Martin, a British man who was part of the furniture (he had been there since 1974) and worked as European coordinator before his untimely death (a heart attack followed by a fall from the top of a chairlift in Méribel at the end of January 2019). Jeff Martin, however, was a realist, having been involved with the Laser from the beginning; he at least had a vague idea that not all sailors are as rich as a king.

I would add that ILCA congresses are generally held in upmarket hotels and that the journeys of the ILCA barons are often made in business class.

The Laser or the goose that lays golden eggs, what !!! The gold eggs come from a share of the fees on new boats (but given the quality (correct) / price (delusional) ratio of the Laser and the competition of other water sports, there are fewer buyers. .. apparently we would have fallen below

1500 in 2019) and then ILCA receives a share of the contributions to the National Members Associations (mine, yours, in the same way as church goers gifts of money to local churches also pay for Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome).

The key point is that it is ILCA which has the power to issue licenses to builders around the world who want to manufacture Laser's (since the closure of Harken-Vanguard, there are only three left : PSE in England which manufactures the bulk of the boats and belongs to Fazad Rastregar, PS Australia and PS Japan, remember this detail to understand the following paragraphs.

ILCA, supposedly the guarantor of the one design, has the power to inspect the builder's sites to verify that construction is in accordance with the "sacrosanct" Construction Manual, a large ultra-detailed bible which in principle guarantees the one design. I say "in principle" because when ILCA finally realised that the Australian lasers were "more equal" than the others (the rake of the mast step adjusted at the request of the buyer and therefore not as close as it should be to the recommended average value, layers of reinforcement on the bow, prolonged drying in the mold (PS Australia can afford it, with a low production volume) and some other more minor details), well ILCA endorsed the Australian fraud (which lasted from 2006 to 2015) by incorporating the changes into the Manufacturer's Construction Manual, which de facto disadvantaged Laser's built in England.

Recently; It took an even more worrying turn: the English builder (the "largest" producer of Lasers, let us remember) saw its builders licence withdrawn after refusing to be inspected by ILCA, thus triggering a shortage of new boats which PS Australia immediately took advantage of to introduce (semi-smuggled, under the ATA Carnet arrangements for temporary customs and import) a large consignment of Lasers, manufactured in Australia into Canada, for the Laser Radial World Championship held in Kingston, Ontario in summer 2019.

Also; these boats were not Lasers but ILCA Dinghies (the "sunburst" logo - the star of the laser beam - was absent from the sail and the hull, replaced by the 4 letters ILCA and for good reason : the intellectual property rights of the Laser name and the Sunburst logo belong to another company, the MacLaren Rastregar group, also called The Velum corporation and, in addition, Rastregar has at his disposal a battalion of lawyers, who as Jim Croce's said in his song "Bad bad Lee-Roy Brown", can be more mean than good old King Kong and more stingy than the dog of a scrap metal dealer, to enforce the distribution and sharing agreements on the use of intellectual property rights.

As we read on the various forums, this "temporary" export from Australia to America seems destined to become final (The customs officers of the Canadian mounted police are apparently busy dressing their horses) and in the circumstances ILCA, supposedly a not-for-profit organisation, seems to have acted as a commercial intermediary for PS Australia; the various Anglo-Saxon Laser forums are buzzing with rumors of ILCA Dinghies boats being sold across the Atlantic in North America.

Around the same time, at the beginning of August 2019, ILCA launched a "consultation of members" to authorise additional official manufacturers of the Laser (it seems that there were 29 expressions of interest, of which 18 which were considered serious, 5 in Europe , 4 in North America, 3 in South America, 5 in Asia and 1 in Oceania).

This consultation was, like joining political parties in the new French world, breathtakingly modern:

no scrutineers, no control over the legality of the votes, no appeal procedure (no, that's all old world my friend !!!) it was all cooked up quickly using a Smartphone application called "Survey Monkey" (literally the Investigative Monkey) with "YES" as the only obvious choice (to vote no you had to dig into the small print and the subtleties of the software) ... and ILCA started trumpeting a big "YES" vote and a victory for the introduction of new builders, an outcome similar to the Communist Romanian President Ceausescu elections, before backtracking and saying that the ballot was "under scrutiny " (being verified). Apparently after 6 months, and during this period many different sailing websites have mocked this Survey Monkey vote (literally the Survey Monkey), this famous election is still being verified, even in African democracies, even at the town hall of Boccognano (South Corsica) on municipal election day, they are quicker, but hey, as long as it is carried out with an app and on a Smartphone, it is modern, so do not ask questions!

As well as ILCA, there is EURILCA (whose president is none other than Jean Luc Michon) EURILCA brings together 42 European countries (and 70% of practitioners / contributors to the Laser) and is managed on a much less lavish basis than ILCA, EURILCA is an organisation suitable for running the Laser class in Europe but as part of ILCA it has a voting minority, as explained above.

From the posturing of the many apprentice sorcerers around the world our goose, which has laid golden eggs and generated money for many years, is now sick and we can reasonably infer the following.

Performance Sailcraft Australia wants to sell more boats and the Australian market is already saturated, it is happy to expand its market share by any means, especially as PS Australia (and to a lesser extent PS Japan) are eyeing the Asian market (the sport is developing in China). To do this, it is essential to "kill" Performance Sailcraft Europe using the supreme power of ILCA which has amongst its arms the ultimate lethal weapons of revoking a manufacturer's license and not issuing the all essential ISAF licence compliance plates.

Performance Sailcraft Europe owns the intellectual property name Laser and the “Sunburst” sailing logo, its owner has little knowledge of the leisure sailing market and the constraints specific to a one design, in particular the fact that when a class is well established, equipment changes are frowned upon by owners and can lead to disaster.
LPE/ Rastregar are mainly interested in profit margins and cash flows, and always impose tough conditions on their ever decreasing numbers of retail outlets (ask the Weiler brothers of Nénuphar !!!) they give retailers the cash flow problem by making them pay for boats way in advance of the delivery date.

However; both companies are interested in imposing, by any means, a pseudo modern rig in Carbon and Mylar (because, as everyone keeps telling us, the future is Carbon and Mylar, except for the Boomers who are stuck in the past!), The Australians with the C5 6 and 7 and Rastregar with the ARC rig (neither of which are yet class legal for racing, and both of them cost a fortune, approximately 2700 euros each) are happily destroying the complete concept of the Laser and the reason for its existence, that it is a strict one design class.

Indeed, when a company’s main product does not sell very well or does not generate significant

profits, one of the best known business models (or one of the commercial tricks) is to sell accessories and options with larger profit margins for the ageing product.

Three motorcycle manufacturers are using this business model: Harley Davidson in the USA, the newly resurrected Triumph in England and Ducati (bought by Audi) in Italy.

Harley sell to rich customers who want to play Hell's Angels or Peter Fonda in "Easy Rider" but who have neither the time nor the skills to build their own Hog but have enough money to choose from an incredible catalogue of options, mostly cosmetic so the Hog can be customised to make sure it is truly unique.

It's the same at Triumph where the customization bears the so British name of bespoke and where the style of accessories looks more towards the rockers and the Ton'up boys (street racers with a short life expectancy) and who terrorised Brighton in the 60s and the boys who had a few beers at the legendary Ace Café (a transport cafe on the North Circular Road in London hence the expression Café Racer) before embarking on challenges such as a timed race through the streets.

At Ducate they are targeting the racing market by offering accessories which transform the already fast Mostro into a rocket machine fit for the motorcycle racing ace Valentino Rossi in person, they offer Testastretta brand high compression cylinder heads, dry full clutches and the mechanical noise from the engine almost covers the noise from the roaring exhausts all made in very expensive titanium and carbon.

Needless to say, this kind of thing applied to the Laser is an a complete change from its founding principles, its core market and is robbery. The current Dacron sails are already shockingly expensive: made in Sri Lanka for a cost price around 50 euros in a factory with very low operating costs (as JP Vogstensperger has very well narrated in the AFL review) they are sold at around 600 euros to racing sailors at regattas. With the C5,6,7 or the ARC Mylar and carbon rigs it will be even more expensive, but the great ayatollah of ILCA has decreed in a one sided discussion: "Nobody wants to race with white Dacron sails anymore" (since we tell you Mylar is MOOOODERNE, what a load of rubbish!)

As far as I'm concerned, I'm not at all convinced: Mylar sails are really 2 or 3 times more expensive, they keep their competitiveness a little longer but they are completely useless once they delaminate whilst Dacron sails and aluminium masts have a second, third and fourth life (in an activity centre, or a sailing school, then finally taken out in good weather by leisure sailors who do not race and are happy to buy a laser over 20 years old for around just over a thousand Euros, or perhaps even less).

In addition, a Dacron sail is much easier to repair in a lasting way than a Mylar sail ... Mylar is not woven but made in layers like a Kleenex tissue and in certain ways Mylar has similar qualities to a Kleenex tissue, look at the OpenBic sail which sailing schools never use.

Switching to a Mylar sail did not save the Tornado, it did not improve the sales and distribution of the Byte (a mini laser for teens designed by Bruce Kirby and very few were sold in France) and even worse, the L'Équipe, the last dinghy designed in France as a complete double hander for teenagers and for export, it self-destructed by adopting composite and a Mylar mainsail.

ILCA claims introducing many small manufacturers is the way forward, this is another aberration: you just have to see what happened with the 420 in the 80s: before this the 420 was a SMOD (Single Manufacturer One Design), the property of the builder Lanaverre it was an excellent one design for the time and had a light weight construction, this was acceptable for club and leisure sailing, but which started to suffer from problems and failures when this boat, designed for the sailing school, was used for serious competitive completion as a route towards the Olympics.

When exports started through the use of manufacturing licenses, it was the bérézina(a compete disaster/ beginning of the end *from Bonaparte's crossing of the river)*: Snapir in Isaraël, Vanguard in the USA, Nautivela in Italy, Rondar in Great Britain, Poliglas, then Roga, then Lenam in Spain, Henriksens in Denmark , then later Zigelmeier in Germany and BlueBlue in Poland (without forgetting the ineffable Boatique in France) all of them exploited the design tolerances (they were not really tight enough) to build more efficient hulls than the basic Lanaverre / Yachting France design. The class never really recovered, neither did the Lanaverre yard, circumstances were also aggravated because the masts and sails were not controlled by the builder.

If Lanaverre had continued to control the masts (at first they were made of wood and homemade) by buying tools to manufacture their own masts and had integrated with a sail maker (as NewMarine did at one time) and if the sales had been better controlled, with fewer and more prudent license agreements, this brilliant little double-handed dinghy would probably have passed the milestone of over 100,000 boats constructed without any problems.

The arms race delirium and price spiral has gone so far that in the USA, that a simplified, reinforced version of the 420 has been produced called a Club 420 for use by university sailing clubs (it does not pay a penny in royalties to the owners of the intellectual property rights of the architect Christian Maury) in order to remain affordable to some of the less well off American universities who have constrained budgets.

With the withdrawal of license from Performance Sailcraft Europe, ILCA, which had to grant them a temporary license due to a shortage of boats, ILCA intends kill off LPE as a supplier and pursue ILCA's preferred solution.

Currently, the English builder, markets boats without the official plate but brand new and manufactured according to the specification laid out in the manufacturer's manual, called "Club Lasers" for just over 5000 Euros, or 1700 euros less than "official" lasers. Officially they cannot be used in regattas, only to practice, but except at high level championships, they will always allowed at club level because of the lack of control.

At the EURILCA meeting in December 2019 attended by Tracy Usher (who, it seems, hardly said a word) and Eric Faust (who held the spittoon), the European delegates of the classes, notably German, pleaded for EURILCA to secede, adopt Lasers made in England, and above all stop funding ILCA, by virtue of the good old British proverb which says, whoever pays the pipers chooses the musical tune (Who pays the Piper calls the tune!).

Finally, and following Jean-Luc's intervention, a short deadline (mid-January) was given to ILCA, with polite but firm diplomatic guidance, to return to better feelings, become more democratic and find a compromise which we hope will save our one design and the sporting activity without changing the name of the boat and breaking the delusional spiral of costs which everyone complains about.

Do not be fooled, the sorcerer's apprentices of supposed modernity, in their pursuit of fashion, are at work to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs, with a good chance of cutting manufacturing and effectively sinking the boat on which we all sail.

The latest news is that EURILCA did not win the argument; ILCA has just deleted the words Laser, Laser Radial and Laser 4.7 from all its literature, including the handbook and measurement documents.

The matter is not over, contrary to the anonymous messengers from Laser Performance Australia who write on the various "social networks", but if you are ever asked for your opinion, dear member of the AFL, whether you are Boomer, Zoomer, compete at the highest levels or are a club sailor, or a Club Commodore with a limited budget to renew the flotilla, at least will you now have some information to clarify your judgment, if by chance you are ever again asked your opinion, in a meaningful way rather than given the choice of two bad outcomes on Survey Monkey or through another modern confidence trick.

Gilles GLUCK
March 2020