

# Limerick's Ger first Irishman to win famous Fastnet race

By ANNE SHERIDAN

LIMERICK man Ger O'Rourke will be crowned the first ever Irish winner prestigious of the Rolex Fastnet Race, this Friday in Plymouth, after his yacht beat off competition from 300 other entries this Wednesday night.

Speaking to the Limerick Leader this Thurs-

day morning, the 46-year-old skipper from the South Circular Road said the victory was made all the more special as today is also the day of his and wife Majella's wedding anniversary.

"It's fantastic to win such a prestigious race and it was a bit of a record to do it in the time we did it in. It's great for Limerick and it's great for Ireland. The Irish flag is flying high now," said Mr O'Rourke, who was accompanied on the 608-mile race by his daugh-



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ter Deirdre.

The 50-footer Chieftain is currently the toast of Plymouth at the end of the bi-annual race, which saw half of the entries pull out at the start of the race due to gale force winds.

Speaking from the Royal Western Yacht Club in Plymouth, Mr O'Rourke, who was one of only 50 skippers who made the finishing line, described the race as the highlight of a two-year tour of the world's best races.

"We started out with a class win in the Sydney

to Hobart and are now ending with hopefully a win in the Fastnet - two of the most iconic races in the world of sailing," he said.

Crew member Thomas Whelan, Clare, said there was never any chance that the Chieftain would withdraw from the race.

"Not a hope - this boat just loves those conditions, it's built for this weather."

"It's just unreal here at the moment; there are a lot of very happy people that an Irishman has won. We're going to take

it easy for the rest of the day and just have a few beers," he said.

However, in spite of an historic win, Mr O'Rourke conceded that it was all not plain sailing.

"We sailed in very disturbed seas with rough wave angles that meant one minute we'd be surfing and then the next thing we'd be basking into the waves," he said.

Mr O'Rourke was joined on the arduous biennial race, by a 12-man crew, including four Limerickmen, a Dutchman, two English-

men and four sailors from New Zealand.

But local yachting enthusiasts will have to wait until Saturday before the Fastnet Challenge Cup will be brought home to Ireland for the first time.

The Cup and a Rolex Yachtmaster timepiece will be presented at the prizegiving this Friday, August 17, at the historic Royal Citadel in Plymouth.

Back in Limerick, the managing director of the multi-million euro firm Chieftain Construction Ltd, based on

Upper William Street, was also the toast of the office.

"We are all just delighted - it's really wonderful and a great achievement," said a member of staff.

The Farr-designed carbon fibre yacht finished this Wednesday at 19.43pm local time, with an elapsed sailing time of just over 55 hours and four minutes and averaging just under 11 knots over the race.

However, the Chieftain's time narrowly missed the 1999 course record.

The single biggest threat to their victory was the French entry, the 44.7 footer Courier du Cour led by sailing supremo Gery Trente-saux.

Above left, Ger O'Rourke.

Above, The Chieftain yacht which won the prestigious Fastnet race



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