



7/18/25

IMCA Technical Committee recommendation regarding changes to rule 3.5 for optional equipment and instruments

SUMMARY:

The following updated language is proposed to be adopted for the 2026 sailing season:

IMCA Rule 3.5: “Optional allowed sailing instruments and navigation equipment include the following: mechanical masthead wind indicator, tell-tales, electronic devices for tactical or navigational functions, mechanical compass, depth sounder, knot meter, log, GPS, and VHF. Aside from the mechanical mast-head wind indicator, there is no restriction on the location of any of the instruments. The following equipment is explicitly disallowed: electronic wind instruments, rigging load cells, camera-based sailing instruments, and equipment utilizing Artificial Intelligence (AI).”

The IMCA Technical Committee welcomes fleet input on this proposal through 9/30/25. After this time, the Committee will meet to finalize the rule change and incorporate into the published rules for use in the 2026 sailing season. Please direct any input to your local Fleet Measurer.

Why is a change being proposed?

- An informal question was posed on whether electronic wind instruments were allowed and/or currently used within the Martin 242 community.
- As written, [IMCA class rule 3.5](#) does not seem to currently restrict sailing instruments and navigation equipment.
- Technical Committee members present when this class rule was last updated ~15 years ago (Yumio Dornberg and Michael Clements) recall that the intention was to not restrict instruments *except for masthead electronic wind sensors*. While this may not be clear in the class rules, the inclusion of “mechanical” and omission of “electronic” next to “masthead wind indicator” was intended to omit use of electronic wind instruments in one-design (OD) classes/events.
- A May 2025 discussion by IMCA Technical Committee members representing Fleets 1, 2 & 3, followed by several emails from absent members, generally agreed that we should not allow electronic wind instruments. Discussion also included whether to restrict more advanced position-based calculations, including time-to-line (TTL), time-to-burn (TTB), and to a lesser extent distance-to-line (DTL). Further discussion occurred and the Technical Committee generally agrees that we should proactively restrict equipment not currently used in our class and/or not currently available at the club level, including load cells (i.e. Cyclops), camera-based sensors that could read wind shifts or sail shape (as is starting to be used in ocean racing), or AI-powered (learning and informed guidance) instruments.

Background research—language from other class rules:

The following similar one-design small keelboat classes all restrict electronic wind instruments:

- [J/70:](#)
 - C.5.2 (b3) (optional equipment): Tactical and navigational charts and instruments, excluding masthead electronic wind instruments.
 - C.9.1(c): Telltales, Windex and other non-electronic wind indicators.
- [J/24](#) C.7.3.a (fittings optional):
 - (2) Any mechanical non electronic wind indicator may be positioned in the masthead, sail and/or rigging
 - (4) Electronic devices for tactical and navigational functions, excluding wind instruments.
- [VX-one:](#)
 - C.5.2 (b) (optional portable equipment): NOT FOR USE (1) Electronic wind reading devices
- [J/22](#) (optional equipment):
 - C.5.2.a(i): Electronic or mechanical devices, for timing, tactical and navigational functions without external batteries and excluding wind instruments.
 - C.7.3.a(vi): Any non-electronic wind indicator may be positioned in the masthead, sail and/or rigging.
- [Express 27](#)
 - VI(a) (prohibitions): Integrated electronics. Masthead navigation lights, masthead fly light, strobe light, VHF radio, position location devices, and non-integrated knotmeter, log, and depth sounder, and electric compass are allowed.
- [Viper 660](#)
 - 8.5(e): An electronic device must not be capable of displaying information about wind speed, wind direction, or lay lines
 - 8.6: A wind indicator vane may be attached to the mast. A wind indicator shall not be electronic. Ribbons, tape, wool, or similar wind indicators may be attached to the sails and shrouds.

Other classes:

- [Melges 24](#) does not restrict electronic wind instruments, although the class does not currently use them. Per the [North Speed Guide](#), “The boats have no wind instruments.”
- [Santa Cruz 27](#) makes no mention of instruments or instrument restrictions of any kind and by inference seems to allow wind instruments

Rationale for proposal:

The Technical Committee has discussed and is proposing the following:

- Explicitly restrict the use of electronic wind instruments
 - *Rationale: no similar small strict one-design keelboat class allows use of electronic wind instruments or polars and allowing use now potentially creates unfair advantage while also enabling more advanced AI-powered functions in the future.*
- Do not restrict use of position-based navigational aids, including DTL, TTL, and TTB today.
 - *Rationale: DTL has been widely used within the fleet for more than a decade. TTL and TTB are functions that use the same GPS-derived data for the starting line matrixed with the starting time, which we also allow. TTL and TTB will be re-evaluated by the technical committee in 2027.*
- Explicitly disallow certain other equipment.
 - *Rationale: While we don't know what will evolve in the world of sailing instruments over the coming years, we do have opinions on existing and potentially near-term technology we don't want to allow, including load cells, camera-based sailing instruments that may read wind or sail shape, and AI.*
- Do not differentiate between class events and non-class handicapped events.
 - *Rationale: No other class rules set this precedent. Leave the choice of whether to use a prohibited item (e.g., electronic wind sensor) in a non-class handicap event to their local PHRF rules and rating certificate.*

The general consensus of the Technical Committee is that we do not want to become a “checkbook” fleet where there is an arms race for the latest technology. Likewise, we do not want to be regressive and ban electronic equipment that many members have invested in over the past 10-15 years. Our aim is to maintain the status quo and increase clarity on what that means.

PROPOSAL

Our current IMCA rule 3.5 (equipment and instruments) reads:

“Sailing instruments and navigation equipment such as the following are not restricted: mechanical masthead wind indicator, tell-tales, electronic or mechanical compasses, depth sounder, knot meter, log, GPS, VHF. Aside from the mast-head wind indicator, there is no restriction on the location of any of the instruments.”

Proposed changes to rule 3.5:

“Optional allowed sailing instruments and navigation equipment ~~such as include~~ the following ~~are not restricted~~: mechanical masthead wind indicator, tell-tales, electronic ~~or mechanical compasses~~ devices for tactical or navigational functions, ~~mechanical compass~~, depth sounder, knot meter, log, GPS, ~~and~~ VHF. Aside from the ~~mechanical~~ mast-head wind indicator, there is no restriction on the location of any of the instruments. ~~The following equipment is explicitly disallowed: electronic wind instruments, rigging load cells, camera-based sailing instruments, and equipment utilizing Artificial Intelligence (AI).~~”

Final wording without edits shown:

“Optional allowed sailing instruments and navigation equipment include the following: mechanical masthead wind indicator, tell-tales, electronic devices for tactical or navigational functions, mechanical compass, depth sounder, knot meter, log, GPS, and VHF. Aside from the mechanical mast-head wind indicator, there is no restriction on the location of any of the instruments. The following equipment is explicitly disallowed: electronic wind instruments, rigging load cells, camera-based sailing instruments, and equipment utilizing Artificial Intelligence (AI).”