

# TGF France - Nautical Expertise!

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As Toll Today was going to press, Toll Global Forwarding's French operations were once again gearing up to handle the return of boats undertaking a transAtlantic yacht race – this time, the “Mini Transat 6.50”.

The Mini Transat 6.50 (also known as the Transat 650) is a solo transatlantic yacht race covering over 4000 miles, with a single stop in the Canary Islands. The first Mini Transat started from Penzance (UK) in 1977, and races have run bi-annually since, moving to Brest, France in 1985. Since then, it has started in Brittany or La Rochelle (as it does this year), finishing in the West Indies or (this year) Brazil.

The Mini Transat 6.50 yachts are very small for such a gruelling race. They are subject to only a few design restrictions: they must be no more than 6.5m long, no more than 3.0m beam, and draw no more than 2.0m. Skippers must qualify to take part by successfully covering one of two specified 1000 mile courses, and must have at least 1000 miles of previous ocean racing experience, much of it solo.

TGF France is the official forwarder for this year's event, and has been appointed by no less than 74 of the 78 entrants to handle the return of their boats after the race. The boats will be brought back to France on the deck of a conventional freighter, and will be offloaded in Lorient.

TGF's duties also include repatriating any vessels that fail to complete the race – for example, if they suffer storm damage such as unmastings, which is not uncommon in such competitions.

Handling the return of racing yachts is nothing new for TGF France: a typical year will see them involved in four or more such events, including big name competitions such as the Vendee Globe, Le Jacques Vabre, La Route du Rhum and the Istanbul Europa. The one thing these TGF-supported events always have in common is a start in France.

TGF is now the second largest French forwarder in this highly-specialised business; and it's TGF's Lille office that masterminds all these projects, headed by Daniel Segard, Branch Manager - who has been working with racing skippers and teams for 15 years.

TGF's MD France, Jean Claude Melin, says the key to success in this business is building a strong and close relationship with the skippers and their sponsors. That's not surprising when you consider that the largest ocean racers are worth millions of Euros – and this also explains why skippers are always nervously close at hand to oversee their treasured boats being lifted out of the water and safely stowed on deck after a race.

Says Jean-Claude: “We are present at the departure, the arrival - and unfortunately also when there is a problem in the middle of the ocean.” It's a fascinating and lucrative business, he says, adding: “I do hope that thanks to this story in Toll Today we'll find other stations in the TGF network that would like to promote this niche service in their part of the world.”