

BSC Race Training – An Idiot (Sean)’s Guide to the Start.

Key Points:

In general

1. Get a watch! If you miss the 5 minute make sure you are near the Committee boat for the 4 minute – you may be able to hear the OOD count down so you will get it spot on.
2. Get a china-graph pencil to note the course.
3. Practice boat-handling skills - slowing down, backing the sail as a brake, going head to wind, holding station, sailing backwards, accelerating away to top speed.
4. Have the basic rules clear in your head, port gives way to starboard, windward boat keeps clear (important on the start line as you should luff slowly to create a space to leeward to accelerate away into) and overtaking boat keeps clear.

Before the Start

1. Races usually start with a beat so sail up the beat and set up your sail(s) for the conditions – maximum power until you can’t keep her flat then de-power so you can.
2. Spot the windward mark so that, after the start, you can be on the tack that is taking you most directly towards it.
3. Check out the line for bias – which end is nearest the wind? This is where you want to be. Sail along the line and trim your sail. Whichever direction allows you to sail the freest, the favoured end is behind you.
4. Get a transit for the start line if you can – sit outside the pin end mark and view a line through it and the orange marker on the committee boat – don’t worry about the inner marker buoy just don’t go between it and the Committee boat. Try and spot an object that is in line on the shore then you can use this as a guide to how close you are to the line as the start approaches.

5 Minutes Before the Start

1. You should have made up your mind where you want to start – now you must use your boat handling skills (see above) to put you in a position to approach the place you have chosen in a controlled, timely fashion and close hauled. This takes practice so try and get a practice start on the 4 minute gun.
2. Do not sail off on a screaming reach and hope to arrive at your chosen spot as the gun goes – this is not a percentage tactic. If you are in a line of reaching boats approaching the start only one can possibly cross the line at the right time.
3. In the final 30-20 seconds (depending on wind strength) as you approach the line head up to slow your progress and create a gap between you and boats downwind so that you can bear away into it in the final seconds and hit the line at full speed.
4. Give it all you’ve got to achieve maximum speed and get away from the boats around you. Keep the boat flat – “flat is fast”.

Final Thoughts

1. Unless the line is 90 degrees to the wind one end or the other will be nearer the wind and therefore the favoured spot to start.
2. Only one boat can be there when the gun goes.
3. You will be better off on the front row, further down the line, than behind another boat – you must have clear wind or you will drop back in the dirty air created by the boats in front of you.
4. If you find yourself behind other boats tack off as soon as possible to get clear air.
5. Always start on starboard (you have right of way over port tack boats) unless a big opportunity opens up in front of you to get away on port. This can be very advantageous as you will be sailing in clear air and, when you tack and meet up with other boats, you will be on starboard.
6. Remember the three Ps of starting – Practice, Practice and?

I will be running a training day on Easter Saturday (weather permitting) preceded by a chat on the topic in the Clubhouse after racing on Good Friday. We will have lots of starts on the water then a race to count towards the Easter competition.

I look forward to seeing you on the water.

Sean Moore.
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