

Pre-Start Routine

While I understand racing isn't for everyone, it's a bit part of our sport and as this year has shown the Sprint 15 is one of the most popular one design racing fleets in the UK. As I have explained in a lot of my coaching there are 3 main pillars to a good result, Boat Speed, Boat Handling and Race Craft. Of course, all of these can be broken down, but I wanted to use this article to talk a little around one of the race-craft elements that I think has a big effect over a race result.

For me race-craft begins before the race has even started, gathering information and using to put together a good race plan is key part of having consistent, strong results. I'm sure it is no surprise to you to hear that the start is without a doubt the most critical part of a race. Until that moment everyone is equal so getting the jump on boats at that time will make a huge difference to your position. Gaining 10 boat lengths near the start might be the difference between 1st and last, whereas further into the race you will be lucky to gain a few places.



So, let's have a think about how to get the best out of the race start.

Ultimately a good start means being in the right place on the line and being able to get up to speed efficiently. There are a number of factors that affect those things, and here are my prestart checks to try and get on top of them.

Positioning on the line, this comes down to a few things.

Line Bias

It's unlikely the start line would have been set exactly perpendicular to the wind direction, and this creates an advantage to starting at one end rather than the other. Effectively positioning one end of the line closer to the wind. On top of that it also makes it easier to cross the line on one tack than the other. When the committee boat is positioned closer to the wind that end becomes bias, and it is also easier to cross the line on starboard. Equally when the pin end is closer, that end has an advantage and it is easier to cross the line on port

NB. starting on port is very high risk due to any starboard boats having right of way, so that might not be a sensible option however this does imply that getting on to port as soon as possible will be a more efficient tack, so look for that early tack!

The simplest way to check the line bias, is to position yourself in the middle of the line and point your boat directly into the wind, if at that stage you notice you are pointing more towards the committee boat that is the favoured end, equally if you are pointing more towards the pin that end is biased.

Course Skew

Similar to line bias only this time it's the relationship between the windward mark and the start line, If the RO has laid the windward mark offset from the wind direction that will mean you will have longer to sail on one tack than the other. From a general strategic perspective, it's normally better to sail the long tack first, so that you can take better advantage of any wind shifts/changes. More often than not the skew on a racecourse isn't noticeable, but occasionally particularly when you are club racing around fixed marks it can play a part in the race.

Drift check

For me this is a measure of how fast the boat slips sideways to leeward when holding position, it will vary every single day, depending on the tide, sea state, wind strength, holding ability (boat handling). It is important to know because it will influence where to position yourself before the start so that you are in the right place when you come to accelerate for the gun. Lots of leeward drift will mean needing to set yourself further to windward to take into account the extra sideways movement, less drift means you can be closer to your final acceleration spot. It also has an effect of how the fleet behave, when there is lots of leeward drift you often find bunching at the pin end and more space to windward, less drift creates the opposite.



Transit

I'm sure most people would have heard the word transit, but I bet there is a lot less that actually use one. I accept the fact that a transit isn't always possible or relevant, but for a lot for the time it is. A transit is a visual fixed reference point that will help you judge how close to the start line you are. The first thing I would mention on this point is to take a realistic transit, by that I mean accepting the fact that there is a good chunk of boat in front of where you are referencing from. When you sight down the line for your transit make sure your bow is on or just behind the line (not your body). The simplest way to do this is to set up right at either end and approach slowly until your bow reaches the starting mast on the committee boat or the pin end mark, take your transit reference at that point. On top of that security, another thing to be aware of is the further away from where you took your transit from the less accurate it becomes. By that I mean if you sighted through the pin from the committee boat, the closer to the pin you move the bigger factor of safety you will want to build into your transit.

Once you know where you want to position yourself is all about the getaway, clean air and the space to sail your boat as freely as possible is everything off the line.

Trigger Pull

The trigger pull refers to the amount of time it's going to take you to go from a parked state on the line (prestart) to fully up to speed at the time of the gun. This is a really important manoeuvre to get right, if you can gain even a meter at this stage in the race it will reward you 10 fold as things progress, conversely a bad trigger pull and you will be fighting for clean air before you even begin.

For this reason it's something I suggest practicing a few times just before the race, over and above your normal trigger routine of moving the bow off the wind and sheeting in,

knowledge of where to put you downhaul or whether or not to trapeze and getting the adjuster set correctly are just a few of the simple things that will come out of this exercise. By knowing these things, it will enable you to more efficiently get the boat set up and sailing fast. The quicker you can be in your normal upwind mode and settled the better. If you are sailing fast and someone else is still trying to get their trapeze height sorted, you will be past them before you know it and they will be stuck in your wake.

Before my race I make a point of meticulously checking these 5 variables,

- Line Bias
- Course Skew
- Drift Check
- Transit
- Trigger

They all go towards creating your race plan. But be sure to keep an eye on things and be prepared to check and recheck. Race officers have a habit of moving marks around and the wind tends to shift a bit too so things can change very quickly.

So, before you next start have a go a looking at all these variables, begin to build a picture of what you want your start to look like. It might not pan out like that exactly but as your starting develops your plan execution will begin to go up and I can assure you that will lead to better results.

For any further questions on anything to do with your Sprint 15 sailing, please get in touch with Windsport.

Cheers
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