

Sail4All

Sat 14 August 2021

Racing Fundamentals

Racing underpins many of the activities we enjoy at Castle Cove Sailing Club - it can be fun, exhilarating, and is without doubt one of the best ways to develop your sailing skills.

Club racing is governed by the Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS), the prescriptions of the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) and Class Association rules, embodied in the club's **Sailing Instructions (SIs)** (printed in the Club Handbook).

Course

Most club racing involves sailing one or more laps around a buoyed course. The starting line is usually between the forward mast of Castle Cove's Committee Boat (orange flag flying) and a specially laid outer distance mark. Course shapes are many and varied, often mapped to the performance requirements of particular classes of boat. Sausage courses are common, featuring a series of upwind and downwind legs, though triangular and trapezoidal courses are also used. SIs explain how courses are briefed to competitors and displayed on the Committee Boat as a sequence of number and letter boards relating to the club's race marks.

Starting Procedure

The starting procedure at Castle Cove uses sound and visual signals within a 5 minute countdown sequence, as follows:

Minutes.	Signal.	Flag.	
5	Warning	Class flag raised	1 sound
4	Preparatory	Flag P raised	1 sound
1	One Minute	Flag P lowered	1 sound
0	Start	Class Flag lowered	1 sound

The [Start Sequence](#) is illustrated within this video clip (some of the other rule-based information is useful, but refer to Castle Cove SIs for specifics).

Starting Techniques

The start line is usually laid at right angles to the wind, the first leg of the course invariably a beat to a windward mark. Your starting strategy should aim to launch you from the start line at speed in "clean air" (the wind in your own sails being unaffected by the proximity of other boats) - achieving these two things alone is likely to see you well up the fleet at the first windward mark.

I like this short video from the University of Georgia on [Starting Strategies](#). The following analyses of different starting strategies from the Melges World Championships of 2013 help to illustrate the techniques:

- [the Dinghy Start](#)
- [the Port Tack approach](#)
- [the Full Speed approach](#)

Which technique you employ will depend upon the type of boat you are sailing, your close quarters boat handling skills and how confident you are in the cut and thrust of the start. If your boat accelerates quickly, the Dinghy Start technique may be for you. If you take an age to accelerate, something akin to the Full Speed approach may suit. However, if you are feeling confident (and lucky!) give the Port Tack approach a try. Whatever your technique and however successful it is, don't forget that, thereafter, you have to sail your boat efficiently and quickly - remember those "5 Essentials"!

Mark Rounding

A good start and some excellent sailing up the first beat to the windward mark will see you towards the head of the fleet. However, poor mark rounding technique will often lose you a place or two, so think about how you intend to round a mark well before you get there. Hear Shirley Robertson explain how to round windward and leeward marks with the assistance of an experienced Laser sailor:

- [Windward Mark rounding](#)
- [Leeward Mark rounding](#)

Other Considerations

A decent start, efficient sailing technique and good mark rounding skills will invariably make you competitive in club racing. This is, of course, only the start of it!

Once you have mastered the fundamentals, you will need to understand how to tweak your boat's rig and setup to squeeze out that extra fraction of a knot. You'll need to learn about your sailing environment - what, if any, affect do tidal streams have on the course; how does the weather and local geography affect wind direction and speed, generating those all important wind shifts. How can a detailed knowledge of the Racing Rules give you an edge over your closest competitors.

Good luck!

Top Tips

Get to know the club's Sailing Instructions (or those specific to any other club, event or regatta you visit).

Volunteer to do some duties on the club's Committee Boat - you'll learn a great deal from watching those who get it right (and others getting it wrong!).

Whilst starting techniques, mark rounding and course strategies are all key to racing success, never forget our old friend "The 5 Essentials" which underpin our ability to sail efficiently, safely and fast.