

Racing 101

For sailors still 'learning the game', coming along and joining our race events has a number of advantages ...

- The safety boat is on the water if you get into trouble
- There are plenty of experienced club members who can help you or give advice, both on shore and on the water
- You will gain experience and confidence quickly, by sailing with a supportive group of skippers

However, some club members are reluctant to move into an unfamiliar environment. I remember only too well how hesitant I felt when I first started competing. So this is a short article just to explain the steps and tell you what to expect.

After the first day you will find that it's great fun! So don't be shy ...

There are the 'rules', of course, but competition at LSWSA is fairly laid-back ... basic rules are given below and you will pick up on the others along the way.

Our 'Club Championship' races are handicapped by a system called the VYC Yardstick, an established measure of relative performance of different vessels. At present, LSWSA holds races in two catamaran divisions, C Division for Yardstick of 82 and above, and D Division for Yardstick less than 82. There are additional divisions for skiffs and trailerboats, and we will have a Junior division racing soon. The different divisions race over different courses, with the faster boats having a longer course.

Our 'A Series' and 'B Series' races are based on personal handicaps. Handicaps are adjusted after each race to give everyone a chance to score, no matter what their boat condition and skill level. Handicap races are held in the morning in the generally lighter conditions, Club Championship races in the afternoon where everyone is likely to finish in a closer time span.

Here is how things operate on a normal race-day, from the skipper's point of view ...

- You arrive with plenty of time to rig your boat before briefing time (10:15)
- You go to race control and sign in. If it's your first time in a particular series, you will need to write in the details of your boat .. in subsequent heats your details will be printed ready
- At 10:15 the horn will sound for briefing. Behind race control, you will be told the course, together with any other information you need, like points of danger to watch, etc. . Write down the course on a piece of masking tape, to stick on your boat for reference. You will be also advised of the different start times for the different divisions, usually just after 11:00 am
- After briefing, launch your boat and sail around, getting a feel for the conditions.
- There are five-minute, four-minute, one-minute and start signals by horn and by flags on shore. Until you are experienced, just follow the other boats in your division.
- Follow the faster boats around the course, leaving everything and everyone heaps of clearance.
- The shortened course flag is deployed on a light day when the race is taking too long to finish. If you see the shortened course flag on a buoy, this is a signal to go from there straight to the finish line. If you are in a multi-lap race and a lap behind, you must continue the lap until you reach the shortened course flag again, then go to the finish.
- When you have finished, do not re-cross the finish line. You will need to sail around the buoy on the Northern end.
- And that's it ... pull out your boat, enjoy some company at lunchtime, and get set for the next heat in the afternoon

Most heats are between 45 min and 90 minutes duration. Take plenty of drinking water, it's easy to dehydrate!

Help is at hand

If you are unsure of anything, don't hesitate to ask one of the more experienced members. If you need help to rig your boat, talk to somebody earlier rather than later, because everybody will be busy, but there will always be someone willing to give you a hand. Briefing time is good to ask about points of sailing, etc.

The Rules

Remember the over-riding rule ... **'Irrespective of who is in the right it is the responsibility of all skippers to take timely action to prevent collisions'**

If you give other boats plenty of room there's only a few rules you need to remember ...

- **The big one** is 'port tack gives way to starboard tack' ie if the wind is coming over the port (left) side of your boat, you must give way to a boat with the wind on his starboard (right) side. This rule applies whether you are both tacking upwind, or whether you are traveling in opposite directions.
Some beginners write on the sides of the boom 'Give way' and 'Outa my way', just to remind themselves!
If you hear someone yelling 'Starboard', that skipper is indicating that someone needs to give way .. is it you?
- If two boats are on the same tack the above rule cannot apply. In this case the windward boat gives way to the leeward boat
- The overtaking boat gives way to the boat being overtaken, whether overtaking to windward or leeward.
- If you are tacking or gybing, you must give way to other boats on any course... 'giving way' is a bit hard when you're turning, so the idea is to stay clear of other boats when tacking.
- If you realize you have broken a rule, or if you collide with another boat or a course marker, you may take a penalty 360 degree turn. Otherwise you may be disqualified.

There are more complex rules for rounding marks, etc., but it's fairly easy to just give other boats enough room and enjoy the event ... no need to get technical until you're competing elsewhere.