

SHOREHAM SAILING CLUB

MAKING RACES HAPPEN – TIPS FOR RACE OFFICERS

Introduction

This is a set of notes to help you run a race that people can enjoy and complete safely in. It's not a detailed recipe – that would be much too long. Please read it in conjunction with the club's Sailing Instructions. Also many of the club's boats and other equipment now have guidance documentation provided. However on the day, you are the one in a position to take the decisions, and nothing written here overrides that responsibility.

1. Beforehand

Contact your team

Two weeks before the duty, ensure key team members will be available – if not, you (or they) need to make alternative arrangements. If you need to get phone numbers for anyone listed, contact the membership secretary, Karen Festing on 07904 182257 or at sscmemsec@hotmail.com.

Check roles and responsibilities as necessary during the week before the race – e.g. if you want anyone to move Sentinel off its moorings (note all race starts are now 11.00 regardless of tide times).

Get a weather forecast. People have their own favourites – but try the Met Office Inshore Waters forecast (North Foreland to Selsey Bill). You can get it on the radio or via the web under www.met.gov.uk. The SSC website has various other web links. Weathercall on 09068 232 772 has a menu of local (and hour-by-hour) forecasts with options including Worthing - useful for a check on the day.

2. On the day

Arrival. Aim to arrive by 9.00 for an 11.00 sea race – by 9.45 for a river race.

Choice of boats (Sentinel, NAB, Yellow Peril and Jaffa)

Jaffa and Yellow Peril are the ideal sea support boats. The NAB is a good mark layer, but high freeboard makes it difficult to pick up people from the water. So if all are available, the real choice is whether to use Sentinel or NAB as committee boat. If Sentinel is aground due to low tide, there's no choice. Otherwise it's a trade-off between speed and having some shelter.

Preparation

Confirm that your assistant(s) and support crews have arrived (or are on their way). The support crews should prepare NAB/Jaffa/Yellow Peril and check fuel and equipment.

Write the weather forecast **on the board**, plus any special notes on the course etc.

To check shipping movements, especially if people are going to be going in or out of the entrance (or racing in the river) anywhere near high tide, call 01273 592366.

Short of people? Don't be afraid to ask around. If it's safety-critical, *insist* on volunteers – or no race! Often there will be people not keen to sail if it's windy, and happy to help out.

Sign on Sheets and **Race Officer's Time Recording Logs** can be found in the red trays in the Race Office.

Put out Sign on sheets in the lounge area. Signing-on is now compulsory - remind people if you can. If you can't find the proper sheets, blank paper will do. Note there is no need for anyone to sign back in after the races.

All under 18s must now be signed on by either a parent or guardian.

Radios. Fixed radios are fitted to the NAB and Jaffa. Hand helds can be used aboard Sentinel and Yellow Peril. A separate instruction sheet should be available: if you need further advice, radio "experts" include Jeff McTaggart and Bill Whitney. Do a quick radio check before going afloat and then again at sea. We use channel P4 for racing. It is good idea for safety co-ordinator to monitor channels 16 and 14 also.

Marginal Conditions? If in doubt, it may help to re-check the forecast... go and look at the sea from the harbour wall/beach... send out a support boat to look.... Go out yourself. Remember that the sea state can be as important as wind strength.

If you decide a sea race is "just" on, consider writing a note on the board to warn the less experienced. See if there are people who could man an additional support boat.

Racing in the river is an alternative, subject to tide. Whatever you decide is unlikely to be popular with everyone: best to ask for opinions, but then stick to your guns!

3. Getting afloat

To start a race at sea on time, aim to be on your way out **by 10:00** if you are using Sentinel only, or about 10:15 with the NAB. Check that you have with you:

- Watch, with countdown if possible
- Race Officer's Time Recording Log (failing that, blank paper) on clipboard
- Pencil / biro with at least one spare!
- Hooter (check it's working)
- Set of flags (there are now 2 sets in the white covers, 1 for each boat)
- Copy of current SSC Sailing Instructions
- Compass (useful, if not vital)
- Burgee to aid mark laying (should be in race box / boat)
- At least one assistant! (normally 2 are roistered)

Marks: The standard sea course requires

- 3 big orange marks, each with weight (or length of chain), line & anchor
- 1 small distance mark for gate (no weight needed)

Check with the support crew that you have all these between you.

4. At Sea - Setting the Course

General

Remember it's a club race, not a world championship – so better a **good enough** course and a start on time than long delays - unless the wind really is about to change dramatically. For every delayed race, people get cold (or hot!), tired, bored, fed-up and less likely to race next time. Or they launch late next time, creating a vicious circle.

Using Sentinel to lay all the marks will take a **long** time! One time-saver is to drop a Leeward mark, get Jaffa/Yellow Peril to lay the Windward, then lay the wing (gybe) mark yourself.

Make sure the course area is far enough West of the entrance to be clear of shipping.

Getting the course right

The beat **must** be roughly to windward – it's easiest to set this up first.

Sight upwind/downwind using a flag. There is no need for a huge beat - say half a mile in medium conditions, up to ¾ mile in a good breeze. As a guide, "Sentinel" will go half a mile in about 5-6 minutes at full speed – a bit slower if punching into a big sea.

SSC courses are normally "marks to Port", so people will be expecting this. If you do set a starboard-hand course, be very careful to fly a green flag!

In light-ish winds, aim for 3 legs of about equal length (giving 60-degree angles). In stronger winds, bring in the wing mark to give broader reaches (say a 90-degree gybe). The important point is to be roughly right – e.g. could good crews set spinnakers on both reaches? The exact angles will never suit everyone, but try to avoid close fetches, as boats just follow each other.

Be aware of tidal effects too. Is a strong adverse current going to make the beat longer? Will the tide set boats up to windward on one reach and drag them downhill on the other? This may call for a bit of compensation on the angles.

Start/Finish

The club Sailing Instructions use a **gate** start / finish line – to be crossed on **each** lap (windward legs) - about a quarter to third of the way up the beat. This means one more mark to lay, but because the committee boat stays put, it's easier to keep track of the race. It also reduces delay between races. (If you *really* want to set separate start and finish lines, you can – but post an amendment on the blackboard beforehand – fly flag L from club balcony!)

The ideal start line has a slight bias toward the Port (buoy) end. In practice, club races are usually OK provided you avoid any bias toward the committee boat end – in which case everyone will barge in there. So look for anything between "roughly square" to "clear Port bias".

You can get a good idea where "square" is by facing directly into the wind - with luck, you are looking at the windward mark! - and holding one arm out at right angles. Or use a compass if you are feeling technical. Or watch where boats are sailing.

Setting the line

Anchor the committee boat about a quarter to third of the way up the beat, and a bit outside the lay line. Spend a few minutes to check that the anchor is holding, then let some more line out.

Now get the support boat to drop the distance mark. There is a simple way of getting the buoy where you want it.

- Get the mark-layers to go past slowly into the wind, at the distance you want the buoy to be. Make sure they tow it on the full length of the anchor line - i.e. holding onto the anchor.
- When the mark is where you want it, signal them (e.g. by radio or a pre-arranged arm wave) to let go.
- The buoy will stop where it is, as the anchor drops to the bottom.

- Once the buoy has settled, if needed you can adjust your position by letting out anchor line or pulling some in.
- Note the line should be set so the Leeward mark roughly dissects the middle of the gate. That way boats have the option to tack off (go both ways) on rounding the Leeward mark.

All set up?

So you have a course, with a line. Now raise the orange “on station” flag plus either port or starboard flag (these will normally be flown on the starboard side of the flag mast). Next get the start **flags** ready to go – Class flag(s), Preparatory “P”, Individual recall (*attached to a stick for ease of use*) and General recall. These shown be flown on port side of mast so most visible to competitors on start line.

Are the competitors there? Unless there is some very good reason for people being late – e.g. the wind has dropped unexpectedly – it’s better to risk unpopularity by **not** waiting for stragglers. You need to be fair to those who were on time.

Have someone note down numbers of as many boats as they can spot, in any order at this point. It will be useful later, and in any case anyone sailing in the area of the start should be counted as a “starter”.

Does the line look **good enough**? At minimum, can people cross it easily on either tack? Does the outer distant mark end look at least as good as the committee boat end? Does the windward mark still look roughly to windward? If so, it’s time to get on with it!

5. The Start

This needs some concentration! Sort out who is going to keep time, do the flags, hoot the hooter and watch the line. Use a back-up watch if you have one.

If available, have a boat just beyond the far end of the line to help spot early starters.

1. **Sequence of flags** is as in the SIs: class flag up (5 mins), “P” up (4 mins), “P” down (1 minute), class flag down (start). Note that Fast and Medium handicap fleets are now to be started separately, a minimum of 5 minutes apart, in the morning race (unless the turnout is low, OOD to decide.) Ideally the start of the Fast fleet will be the 5 minute warning for the Medium fleet (i.e. raise the Medium fleet class flag when lower the Fast fleet class flag.) However the OOD may start the Medium fleet at a later point if required. Competitors must go by the flags and not assume always 5 mins from Fast fleet start!

The **class flags** are:



Flag ‘O’ Fast handicap fleet



Flag ‘Z’ Medium handicap fleet



Flag ‘4’ General handicap fleet

Use **individual recall** if you can identify all boat(s) over the line. This is one extra hoot and hold up flag X on it’s stick until the boat(s) re-clears the line. Yelling at individual culprits is not mandatory, but may be helpful. Note down the numbers in any case. If have multiple starts must drop flag X before the next start to avoid any confusion.

Use **general recall** if there are too many boats over for you to identify. You **must** fly the 1st Substitute, and give two extra hoots. It can be difficult to stop people tramping away up the beat regardless, so you may need to send a support boat in hot pursuit. If have a general recall for a Fast fleet start, keep the same order, i.e. Medium fleet to still start after Fast.

A strong tide taking boats across the line makes recalls more likely. (For some reason, boats never seem to over-compensate for a foul tide: you'll probably get a clear line.)

Using the **black flag** on the next start usually sorts things out. In theory you *can* use the black flag at the 4-minute preparatory signal, as well as or instead of "P". Or you can hoist it separately beforehand – this gives it maximum prominence, it may be best to "hoist early, and keep it flying". (You might also feel inclined to shout "black flag!!" to all and sundry.)

The other main reason for needing to recall is a poorly-set line, with everyone trying to crowd in at one end. If the start looks as though it's descending into more chaos than usual, you can abort it at any time. Simply give two sound signals and hoist the postponement. That can be better than an "inevitable" general recall.

Finally, don't forget to write down the actual time the race started.

6. After the Start

Keeping Track of the race

Boats go at very different speeds, and soon start lapping each other. This can be more confusing than you'd expect.

The easy answer is to write down a list of the boats in the order they first come through the gate. Then tick them off each time they come through again. So you can easily see – for example – that a cat is coming through for the fourth time, and that Solo only for the second. No need to time every lap, but it's worth taking times at least one lap before the intended finish, just in case something goes wrong later.

Finishing

As at the start, organise who is doing what. It needs at least two – e.g. one person watching the line, calling boat numbers, giving hoots and then calling the time, someone else writing the results down and keeping a further eye on boats approaching.

Remember to hoist the blue flag to signify you are the finishing vessel.

On 2-race days, the slower boats (PY greater than 1000) should do **one lap less on the first race**. So unless you shorten the course:

- **Cats, Fireballs, Merlins and fast handicap boats** (e.g. Boss, RS800/400, Javelin, 505, Iso, etc.) will finish at the **fourth** time through the gate (excluding the start)
- **Wayfarers, Lasers, Phantoms and medium handicap boats** (e.g. Albacore, Megabyte, RS200, Solo, etc.) will finish at the **third** time through.

This does **not** apply to the PM, Easter Cup, Wednesday or Cooler series. These are general handicap races, with everyone doing the same course.

If in doubt as to whether a boat should be finishing take its time anyway but don't give a finishing hoot (so it doesn't mistakenly stop racing.) Things can always be sorted out later provided you have the finish time.

When & how to shorten

Technically, you can shorten at any mark, but you'll normally want to keep the finish at the gate. When there are two races, the leading monohulls should be finishing after about 1 hour (time limit is 2 hours). On one-race days, say 80 minutes for the leaders.

Don't be afraid to shorten if the conditions deteriorate and/or it looks as though the support cover will struggle to cope. Better shortened than abandoned, and better abandoned than people getting into trouble.

7. River and Wednesday Races

River races can be set pretty much how you like. Note new building has made the traditional course up to SYC unattractive unless the wind is straight up / down the river. There is usually better sailing to be had in the Eastern arm, below the lock gates (set any marks away to the side of the locks.) But **be very sure to check for ship movements**, on the number given before – 01273 592366.

In most conditions, river courses seem to work best with a short leg up the river, then back round Soldiers' Point and toward the lock gates. Try to anticipate the tidal conditions – it can get horrid once the tide is really whooshing out around the point in light winds.

By default, start and finish is between the flagstaff at the top of the slip and the post with "bent over top" on the far side. You need to setup the orange transit mark to be in line on the beach. Alternatively you can start round the corner near the large tree for up river start.

Wednesday evening races have no set format, but it is important to set the right course for the conditions. If it's OK to go to sea, they usually start from the river line (top slipway across to bent pole). However at low tide be sure to place start line in deeper water by using a transit straight across from the white depth line on the far harbour wall (i.e. OOD flies flags up on the training wall). Use a suitable combination of the old sewer mark and the SYC East mark, laying an extra mark if desired to give better reaching. Unless the wind is good and tide is high it is best not to finish by the slipway (as boats will bunch up in the harbour mouth, and this can really spoil a good race!) In these conditions try finishing from the end of harbour arm, or onboard the support boat.

Remember if turnout or conditions dictate there should now be 2 supports boat launched on Wednesdays (OOD and AOD can launch after start, and finish the race from the boat.) As with any other race, don't be scared to insist on more "volunteers" if short handed.

8. Working out & posting the results

All being well, you will have a sheet recording the date and actual start time of the race, the finishing times of all finishers, and any others retired, disqualified, etc. You can cross-check any difficult-to-identify boats against the Sign on Sheets. **You now need to work out the handicap results – the club PC and web site have an Excel based program for calculating results automatically. Alternatively refer to separate instructions for calculating results by hand (a Results template is available).** If you have any queries, ask Ross Jackson (Merlin Rocket), Jeff McTaggart / Tim Jones (RS200), or any Committee member.

When completed please pin the final result sheet on the notice board in the corridor, along with the signing-on sheet. Results will be picked up from there, and the series results put together in due course. These will be posted on the notice board and the club website.

9. Afterwards

Accept the grateful thanks of the assembled multitudes - well, we live in hope: actually many club members do say thanks, and it really helps. Accept constructive criticisms, bearing in mind that no course ever suits everyone. If anything did go wrong, think about how it could be done better. If something failed to work or broke, please talk to Bill Whitney or any committee member so that it can be fixed.

Finally if you have any good tips please pass them on so we can put them into the next version of these notes. If you disagree with anything, let me know too.

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