

Tips from Phipps

by Brian Phipps



Taking a front line position from the start!

We have heard it before and you will hear it again many times. There is only one reason to even consider a second row starboard tack start on a busy start line and that is when you plan to start at the committee boat and tack straight off onto port. But even in that instance the boat in front of you may be just waiting to do the same thing.

So making a front row starboard tack start line start provides you with the best opportunity to capitalise on what you have achieved. Getting into that position is the challenge and is built on a number of important can-do factors.

1) Boat handling

If you want to hold your line position, manoeuvre through the fleet in control and defend your place on the start line, you need to know your boat and be confident what you can do with it in the space available at slow speed but with the ability to put the pedal to the metal when time comes. How do you do that? Pure practice outside of racing is the answer by using a mark or another training partner to test and hone your techniques and turn them into skills.

2) Current information

Before any start you need to know how your boat reacts on the start line against the current/tidal flow, waves, wind angle. How do you do that? You go to the start-line well be for the start sequence and you sit on the line and experiment. This is best done near the ends of the line so you have something to measure against i.e. committee boat or pin end flag. Using these reference points you can experiment with how your boat is affected by all the above on the start line and how it will feel to turn on the boat speed when the start signal is made.

3) Other boats

Of course, other boats are also looking to do the same thing and it is natural that the boat/sailor that does it best will create control of the area they are in. How do you do that? Practise by creating space to leeward to accelerate into and defending to windward to prevent being sailed over. It's all about boat handling and boat control.

4) Acceleration

You can be one of the best at being in the front row but if you cannot accelerate quickly and efficiently you will get spat out the back or sailed over by the boats to windward. How do you do that? Practise again. In the last few moments before the start, and that will vary depending on conditions, the angle of your boat to the wind, how you sheet in mainsheet and traveller, where you end up sitting or trapezing and how quickly you can settle down all combine to make the fastest acceleration and gives you the jump on others who take just a few seconds longer!

5) Overview. If there is room for say 20 boats on the start line you want to be one of them. You may not select to start at the most favoured end of the start line but you need to be in the front row and preferably towards that favoured end. If you get it wrong or end up second row in the last few seconds of the start, your whole first leg race plan is compromised and it is likely your only option is to tack off looking for clear wind. When that is forced on you, the likelihood is you will be driven out to the right-hand side of the course away from the majority of the fleet. If that is the way to go you just get lucky but the risk is high and forced on you by consequence and not by design.

Successful racing results is about a well maintained boat and good boat handling because that gives you boat speed but it is also about percentage sailing, making calculated decisions rather than taking enforced flyers.

Anyone can get lucky and win a race but only those with a combination of the skills above win an event or series.

Keep practising, keep learning, keep thinking but most importantly keep enjoying!

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