

The results achieved by British Dragons over many years at overseas events have shown generally that we are sailing to a high standard but lack the flair or ability to match the best from other countries. Most of us are sailing boats that are far from new and next year should prove whether this is a major factor. My own view is that we suffer from a lack of participation in large fleet races where the quality of opposition in the top half is better than would be met in the U.K.

There is no real substitute for competing abroad to raise our own standards. The particular area where it seems to me that we are weak is at the starting line where so often we are left after only five minutes racing with a recovery situation. This poor starting is aggravated by the larger fleets now allowed in the major Championships and with the propensity for race officers to set an unduly biased line so that only a small proportion of the fleet can hope to get a reasonable start.

Unless we can match the ability of the better sailors who will be at the favoured end of the line, the result of the race for us is almost certain in that we are not going to win.

How then can we do better? Possibly a checklist may help.

1. Be out early so that there is no doubt as to how the sails should be set for the prevailing conditions and take note of the wind direction at regular intervals (in writing) to establish the limits between which it is swinging.

2. The often almost impossible decision should be taken as to which side of the course is likely to be favoured having noted the land configuration, the tide over the course, cloud build up, what happened yesterday etc. If the starboard side of the course is favoured and the line is biased to port, a start two thirds along the line will more likely allow an early tack onto port. If there is a considerable bias it may well pay to start at the pin and take the whole advantage.

3. Do attempt to identify a transit between the ends of the line and the land. Often in the middle of the line there is a concave bow and it is possible to find oneself a couple of boat lengths ahead of those around one and still be confident of not being over the line.

4. Having assessed the wind direction at probably six minutes to go against the bearing of the starting line, the amount of bias and therefore which is the right end will be apparent. Try to do this in the middle of the line clear of other boats to get a clear wind and have your options still open.

5. When the line is biased to port, rather than join a queue at the five minute gun it is often better to come in on port tack from the far side of the pin and tack into a gap at around one and a half minutes to go. It is all important to make a slot to leeward into which you can accelerate and to avoid the boat to port getting into a safe leeward position. If possible avoid being next to a former World Champion or similar hot-shot!

6. When there is a decided starboard bias many boats will be at the committee vessel early and thus be hardly moving, especially if there is a fair tide. Either start a little way down the line or come in late, say ten seconds going flat out. If you cannot keep above the boat going slowly ahead you can always tack away.

7. Start accelerating at between 45 - 30 seconds to go with the sheets not too pinned in. Sail as free as possible consistent with keeping well above the boat to leeward. Make sure that your crew don't disturb your concentration but keep you informed as to the progress of the boats near you.

8. If the news is disastrous pray for a general recall! If that fails don't fret but look for an opportunity to sail in clear air.
9. In conclusion, good starts are a result of a team effort, let your crew know what you hope to do and put the onus on them to advise as to how close you are to the line. You can't do everything but you must sail fast!

N.J. STREETER

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FLEET NEWS

BURNHAM FLEET

Overall, as is usual, the Burnham Dragon Fleet has been racing for more than seven months having started prior to Easter and finishing on the second weekend of November.

On a particularly stormy Saturday afternoon in early April one of the Dragons sank. This pointed to the clear importance of life jackets being worn as well as adequate sailing gear against the cold and also the problems of rescuing people from the water when no motor boat is available. Fortunately on this occasion Skipper and crew were cold but unharmed and the boat suffered surprisingly little damage.

Again, as is usual, the fleet went almost en masse to Levington where Terry Wade won the championship. As is often the case during the summer months the racing fleet at Burnham was reduced by trips to other regattas, particularly Edinburgh and Douarnenez. At Edinburgh, where most of the fleet stayed only one week, Mike Patten came fourth in the Edinburgh Cup itself.

It was very good news for the fleet that four members, Philip Tolhurst, Terry Wade, Mike Patten and Bob Melville, were amongst those chosen to represent Britain at the World Championship. Presumably the British on the whole were disappointed with their performance at Douarnenez but again it was pleasant to note that Terry Wade led the British contingent with a position of tenth finishing ahead of Borresen. Due to the number of regattas and the timing of Douarnenez the whole fleet was very under-represented at Burnham Week which was a great pity since after the storms of Cowes Week and the Fastnet, Burnham Week had some good weather and generally a large turnout of boats in other classes. The event was won by Tony Clare, a newcomer to the fleet, in his boat Green Cockatoo.

The season ended with two months of very pleasant sailing with some of the best wind and sun conditions of the year. We are pleased that Nick China of China Town and John Brim of Yankee Doodle were able to join us for some of the races.

For the coming year at least one and probably two new boats will be joining the fleet and we shall hope to start once again at Easter 1986 and have further weekends of racing so that the fleet is in good trim for Levington and we extend a welcome to anybody who would wish to join us for that period.

We would stress that in particular the four-day Easter regatta is an excellent moment at which to start tuning your boat for the year.

Finally, the stalwarts in the fleet expect to be sailing again in 1986. Some are beginning to suffer increasing stress as to whether they should sail in a plastic boat or a wooden boat, or perhaps both. They all hope that the argument does not spill over into metal masts versus wooden masts!

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