

CREWING: CONCENTRATION, COORDINATION & COMMUNICATION

Chris Brittain who has been a regular Dragon crew for over 10 years discusses good crew work - essential for success. Chris has been aboard winning boats for 2 Edinburgh Cups. He now most often seen aboard Danish Blue but started Club racing aboard Smug at Burnham. In this article he outlines the basic manoeuvres get these right and your results and enjoyment will probably improve.

When searching for those few extra boat lengths 'Crew' might not be at the top of your list. But, a well crewed boat with agreed, coordinated techniques will manoeuvre efficiently maintaining boatspeed and leaving time to concentrate on the important things - sail trim, wind shifts, tactics etc. There is no magic formula but practice, preparation and concentration go a long way to raising the standards.

When going through the TACK releasing the headsail is as crucial as pulling it in; backed for too long, the bow is pushed too far off the wind and there's more sail to be sheeted in; not long enough and the clew takes an age to clear the leeward shrouds and speed is lost as the sail flogs; get it right and the sail clears the mast and shrouds in one move and is down the side of the boat with minimum sheeting required.

In light weather ensure the sheet is off the winch and free to run before all three crew have moved to weather for the "roll-tack", remembering to sheet in slowly as the boat sails out of the tack.

In heavier weather the headsail will, naturally, need less backing and should be sheeted as fast as possible preferably by pulling - it is faster than winching. With one crew to leeward the other crew is hiking all they can to help boatspeed out of the tack. The helmsman and crew should coordinate the tacks to find the

balance between the amount of helm and the amount of backed sail needed to tack the boat most efficiently.

The DOWNWIND legs are no time for rest. On rounding the mark get the headsail pulling to maintain speed whilst the spinnaker is hoisted. Always make sure the leeward barber hauler is free prior to the hoist, a closed leach will only heel the boat. When it is blowing set the pole 12-18" off the forestay, this will flatten the sail and give you better balance and control. Remember to mark your spinnaker halyard so you can be certain that the sail is fully hoisted.



Basilisk makes it look easy David Pelly

The GYBE is about coordination and can be very easy. The fore-deck crew stands between the mast and leeward shrouds, facing forward so the sail can be seen, with leeward genoa sheet in one hand under which to pass the pole. By starting to leeward there is no

across deck shuffle halfway through the gybe - you will also be more secure, with the leeward shrouds to grasp! The pole comes off the mast as the boat bears away and immediately afterwards off the sail. The spinnaker is now free of the pole and it is the middle crew's job to ensure the sail is floated round, away from the rig, keeping it pulling all the time and not forgetting to free the new leeward barber-hauler to keep the leech open. The pole in the meantime has been set on the new guy and mast respectively, the fore-deck remembering to tell the boat when the pole is "made". The helmsman, must make every effort to coordinate with the crew in sailing the boat through the gybe and play the runners. What's the problem? On a running gybe the pole comes off the mast and sail simultaneously and is set on the new gybe as the main boom crosses the boat; set too early the sail will be trapped behind the main on the old gybe, too late behind the main on the new gybe. Again three way coordination is required to perfect the timing.

The RUN is no time to sit and relax. Keeping weight forward, the middle crew sits at the front of the cockpit not on the traveller and the foredeck crew by the mast helping the helmsman find the wind bands, wind shifts clear air etc behind.

When dropping the spinnaker let the halyard run and pull the retrieval line like mad - the

object being to get the sail into the chute before it hits the water. When dropping at the end of the run, run the guy forward (and maybe pull the sheet as well) prior to running the halyard. This takes the spinnaker to leeward so it drops down the side, not over the bow.

Think of **the COCKPIT**

as four corners - standing in the middle is normally in the way. The front corners are used to keep the weight forward unless both crew are hiked out or to leeward. Always keep the lines tidy and never have any that are too long, to add to the tangle factor.

Whatever way your boat is

sailed think what you want to achieve; talk it through and practice it. If nothing else you should avoid the daily idiots' prizes which proliferate now.

Finally and most important enjoy your racing, even if you don't win the race you might be one of those making the shy-to-shy gybe look easy.

RACING, THE RULES AND PROTESTS - TRISTAN NELSON

Picture this we are approaching the leeward mark at the Gold Cup, you are right up there, only problem is that due to the light wind so is everyone else. To add to the problems there are some boats approaching the mark on starboard, some on port; gusts are bringing the boats from behind quickly and some of the boats that have rounded the mark are coming back on the windward leg through the carnage. With 80 thirty foot boats on the same piece of water things get crowded FAST! Do you know who has what rights?

Anyone who races should have a working knowledge of the basic rules. The best way to learn them is to buy one of the many books written on the subject. Arguably the best for the 'beginner' is probably THE RULES BOOK written by Eric Twiname and revised by Bryan Willis. The first major rules section is a chapter dedicated to the "Rules everyone who races should know" giving a clear description of the rules with illustrations. This is essential reading.

Why is this important? The Dragon by its very nature encourages close racing, particularly during mark roundings and starts. With a good knowledge of the rules a whole new avenue of racing is opened up. Even so-called inviolable rules such as Port and Starboard bring in different tactical options. Being able to combine a good knowledge of your rights and slick boat handling can mean the difference between winning and losing.

Pushing the rules does have other ramifications, namely getting it wrong! I've done it, we all have, especially at mark roundings. All of a sudden the gap you thought was going to open up doesn't. You have nowhere to go, you hit the mark and probably other boats as well. It's circle time, one 720 clears you of both infringements. Here the protest raises its ugly head.

We all misjudge manoeuvres and from time to time we have collisions. The difference between a good seaman (as opposed to a sailor) and a bad one is how he deals with those collisions. I know people who happily infringe the rules and literally tell the offended yacht to 'Foxtrot Oscar'. If you are in the wrong why not do your turns? One person protesting you could land you with a dsq rather than a 1st. Is it worth it?

If you feel that you have been badly influenced by a boat's actions then you have no recourse but to protest and take that protest through to a protest hearing. After all a protest hearing is no more than a formalised version of the after sailing bar chat, with approximately the same level of truth, admittedly it has greater ramifications for the loser but it is there for a good reason.

As a nomadic sailor I have seen some of the best and the worst sailors and the rules. At a recent event I watched someone retire because he felt the damage he had caused to another boat was such that to retire was "the only honourable recourse". Others have a different view. The Dragons have a more cavalier approach to the rules than most. In the International 14 fleet we treat all collisions very seriously, the boats are exceedingly fragile and even a gentle bump will cause damage. There are very few collisions and when they do occur there is usually little question who was in the wrong.

Ultimately the rules are there to make racing safer, the idea expressed throughout the rules is to avoid collisions and prevent dangerous situations arising. On the whole they succeed, but there are incidents and individuals who believe they are above the racing rules. The final word lies with the sailors in the class, the class can be as good and bad as you want it to be. **Your choice**