

# Winning Races: Picking Gybes on the Run

John Heyes · BDA Magazine 1995 Christmas, p. 8

**Summary.** A short review of John Heyes's book *Winning Races* (Adlard Coles Nautical, £12.99), followed by an extract from it on picking gybes on the run. The extract gives a rule of thumb for the first gybe – if you were lifted into the windward mark, gybe onto starboard (for a port rounding) – and explains that the spinnaker trimmer is the best detector of downwind shifts. It advises spending as little time as possible on the layline, not running too low into the bottom mark, and thinking through how nearby boats will respond before calling a gybe.

“Winning Races” is the latest book from John Heyes whose “Sails” is required reading for many. John describes the book as one “written for sailors who have been racing for some time and are now ready to make their impression on the front of the fleet”. Certainly I would highly recommend it to anyone who wants to get a bit more out of their sailing and results – and that’s not just because the BDA is selling it. Don’t be put off by any ‘big boat’ bias; there is plenty for the Dragon sailor, the principles are of course the same and can be usefully applied, in fact there are plenty of references to Dragons, a tuning guide and even some rather well-worn photographs!

This book has much more than others of its kind and price including an interesting final chapter on attitude and approach. It has sensible advice on all aspects of winning races from hull preparation to crew work and sailing each part of the course. As you would expect from John the advice is practical and down to earth, drawing on his experience in various classes. I found it a very approachable book with each chapter broken into bite sized chunks, such as the extracts which follow, which makes it easy to pick up and read when you have a moment to spare but without taxing the grey matter too much after a hard day’s racing.

*Winning Races* is published by Adlard Coles Nautical, price £12.99. The BDA is able to supply it at £12.99 including postage, and will be taking a small profit on each copy sold.

## Picking Gybes on the Run

Every sailor should know that ‘windshifts do not stop at the windward mark’, yet few racers gybe as often as they tack upwind. This is surprising in view of the fact that a yacht loses less speed gybing than it does tacking. Choosing the right shifts on the run simply means that you end up sailing less distance to the bottom mark.

If a tactician is unsure which gybe to come away on from the windward mark, there is a useful rule of thumb. If the boat was lifted into the mark you need to gybe onto starboard to take advantage of the shift and run lower and closer to the next mark (assuming a port rounding). Tactically you may

wish to work towards a particular side of the course to pick up or cheat the tidal stream or because there is more breeze on that side. Depending on the degree of benefit to be had, wait for a favourable shift to take you that way if possible, rather than sailing further distance to get there. Otherwise you may lose just as much as you gain.

Detecting windshifts downwind is a lot harder than upwind, with no headsail or tell-tales to telegraph the fact. The best source of information is the spinnaker trimmer, who just like the genoa trimmer upwind should feel and react to every gust or shift that hits the sail. When a lift arrives the trimmer should be the first to spot it. He checks that it is not just the helmsman steering low for a moment, and then informs the tactician in case he is looking for an opportunity to gybe. Time your gybes to spend as little time on the layline as possible, just as you would on the beat, to keep the options open and be able to make use of any useful windshifts that might come down. Avoid running too low into the bottom mark, as it places you at risk from boats reaching in from astern and leeward with more speed, who could easily establish a last minute overlap.

Before he calls the gybe the tactician needs to think through the 'What if' scenario of what other boats are likely to do in response to your stern. Is the boat behind just about to gybe and come across your stern, in which case it would pay to go before them to prevent them taking your wind and – more importantly – to stop them getting inside you and then claiming the inside berth at the mark? Tactically the game is to pick the gybes to give you the fastest angles for the boat down to the mark, arriving as the inside boat and all the time sailing clear air. Simple really!

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