

# The Leeward Mark

Jamie Lea · BDA Magazine 2004 Annual, p. 28

**Summary.** How to round a leeward mark when there is a boat just in front of you. Rounding nose to tail leaves you in her dirty air, forces you to ease and sail low, and lets the boats behind block your tack, so you lose the chance to attack or escape the cover. Instead, anticipate the problem: drop the spinnaker slightly early, sail lower before the mark to open a gap, and round wide in, close out so you can climb off her or tack away with better speed and height.

“**When approaching the leeward mark** with a boat in front of you, try not to round the mark directly astern of her. By doing so you will limit your choice of attacking or escaping the cover. If you round nose to tail, you will be experiencing the dirty air being exhausted from the sails in front. Speed will be seriously affected and you will lose the ability to climb off her and attack. To gain the speed needed, you will be forced to ease sheets and drop to leeward slightly. By doing this you will more than likely have lost the opportunity to tack off and escape the cover, because boats behind will now have rounded and could be holding their height, blocking your escape route.

You are left with only one option – to continue to sail a lower angle to break into clear air. Sailing further distance and in dirty air is not a good idea.

In the build-up to the rounding, try to anticipate if you are going to round too close to the boat in front and act in order to prevent this from happening. Possibly drop the spinnaker slightly earlier to drop back off her. This also gives you more time to tidy the cockpit and ensure you are completely ready and set up for the next beat.

Just prior to rounding, put some distance between the two of you by sailing lower. This will enable you to execute the perfect rounding of wide in, close out. With distance to play with, you can now concentrate on trying to climb off her.

If this is not possible, you should be able to escape by tacking off because you have better speed around the mark and have held height, stopping boats behind getting inside you.”

— *Jamie Lea*

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