

The Leeward Gate

Martin 'Stavros' Payne · BDA Magazine 2005 Annual, p. 10

Summary. Choosing which buoy to take at a leeward gate, which need not be the nearer one. Four questions guide the choice: which side you want for the next beat, whether the wind has shifted on the run so that one buoy is to windward, whether you are the inside boat or should take the other buoy in less traffic, and who you are following. The tip explains each point, including the reminder that every extra length sailed downwind towards a buoy has to be sailed back upwind, and advises taking the spinnaker down early and going wide if you must give water.

Leeward gates are becoming ever more popular as Dragon fleets increase in numbers. Making it work for you is not as easy as it looks.

Choosing the correct buoy at the leeward gate – this may not necessarily be the nearest buoy to you as you make your final approach.

Things to consider

1. Which side do I want to go up the next beat?
2. Has the wind shifted on the run? So which buoy is to windward?
3. Am I the inside boat? Or shall I take the other buoy in less traffic?
4. Who am I following? Can I round up better?

Point number 1 is very important if one side of the course paid big time on the first beat. It is better to round the buoy that will take you towards the paying side than to take the other buoy and tack, which will sail you through the fleet of spinnakers slowly, in bad air.

Point 2 will make you watch the wind carefully towards the end of the run. Remember, for every extra boat length you sail downwind towards the buoy, you also have to sail upwind away from it!

Point 3 – don't be rafted up on the outside of a three or four boat rounding. Why not reach over to the other buoy, for clear air and a tighter manoeuvre? Giving you a better lane instead of bad air.

Point 4 – if you have to give someone water, take down the spinnaker early, go wide, stake your claim to any other clear astern boat and make a better/tighter rounding. This will give you a clear lane to continue towards your previously-thought-out preferred side of beat.

— *Martin 'Stavros' Payne*

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