



Sailing Tips by Chris Kitchen

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Series 4 – Racing Basics

Racing – What’s the big deal?

Like I have mentioned before - racing is a fantastic way to improve your skills, give you a sense of achievement and have something to talk about at the bar afterwards or tell your grandchildren. From my experience with hundreds of people almost everyone who has given it a go (regardless of whether they thought they may enjoy it or not) has been pleasantly surprised. I am keen to share this with everyone.

Before I get too carried away - those who are seasoned racers looking for the finer art to racing a Weta skip to the bottom for a few advanced tips.

I have talked to a lot of Weta owners about racing and a strong theme that comes through is an aversion towards the word ‘racing’. For me it is hard to grasp as being ‘intimidating’ because I have been racing since I can remember.

I had a rethink from the other side and can see parallels to me doing something like a triathlon. I enjoy the basic elements of the sport, but to be honest would be a little hesitant in entering a competition. Whether it be doubt that I am up to standard, worried I am going to get in the way and spoil someone else’s race or just that the whole vibe is a bit intense – I get it.

When I have spoken to owners who really enjoy their boat and mention the word ‘casual racing’ they quickly make excuses that it’s not for them and they don’t enjoy it. Digging a little deeper I found that this translated to ‘I am not so confident and am a bit scared to join a race’. My aim here is to strip away some of the barriers to racing and get more people enjoying their sailing with a greater sense of satisfaction.

First time racers

Most sailing clubs are experiencing declining memberships and are keen to take in people that want to sail. Of course there are some exceptions but everyone should be welcoming! Most of you probably have already contacted your local club – if not say hello and see what activities they have going on. It’s a great way to get some support for sailing not to mention a great resource and network of people.

The best way to learn the racing ropes is to get someone to do a race with you and talk you through its various stages.

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This way you can experience it and ask questions along the way. Ask someone at your club if they can come out with you and talk you through a race, that way it is a win for everyone. I have actually done this recently and learned some things myself!

Also read the Racing Basics I wrote a few years ago which are still applicable http://www.wetamarine.com/images/stories/weta_owners/Racing_Basics.pdf

If I was walking you through a race these would be my key points

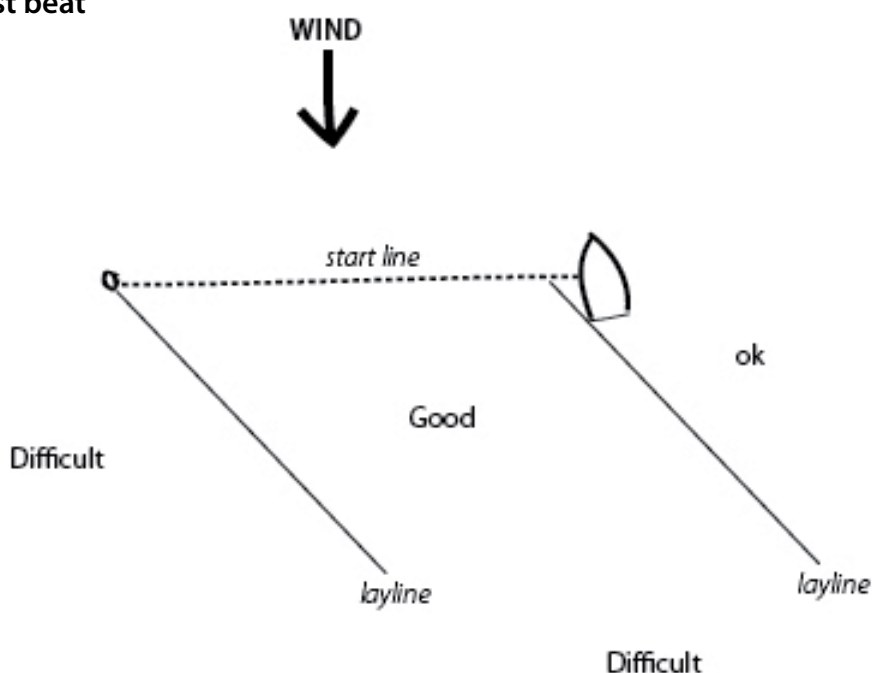
Before the Start

1. Get to the venue in plenty of time to rig and find out the course.
2. Orientate yourself with the surroundings and any hazardous areas and make a note when they may come into play (i.e. On the downwind or the starboard side of the course.)
3. Give yourself plenty of time on to check out the race course before the start. Coming in at the last minute throws even the best sailors off.
4. Do a practice 2 minute start to figure out how fast you drift and approach the start line so you know how far from the line to set up at one minute to go.
5. Sight the top mark and any other marks if possible and take note of any landmarks that may help you to locate these during the race.

The Start

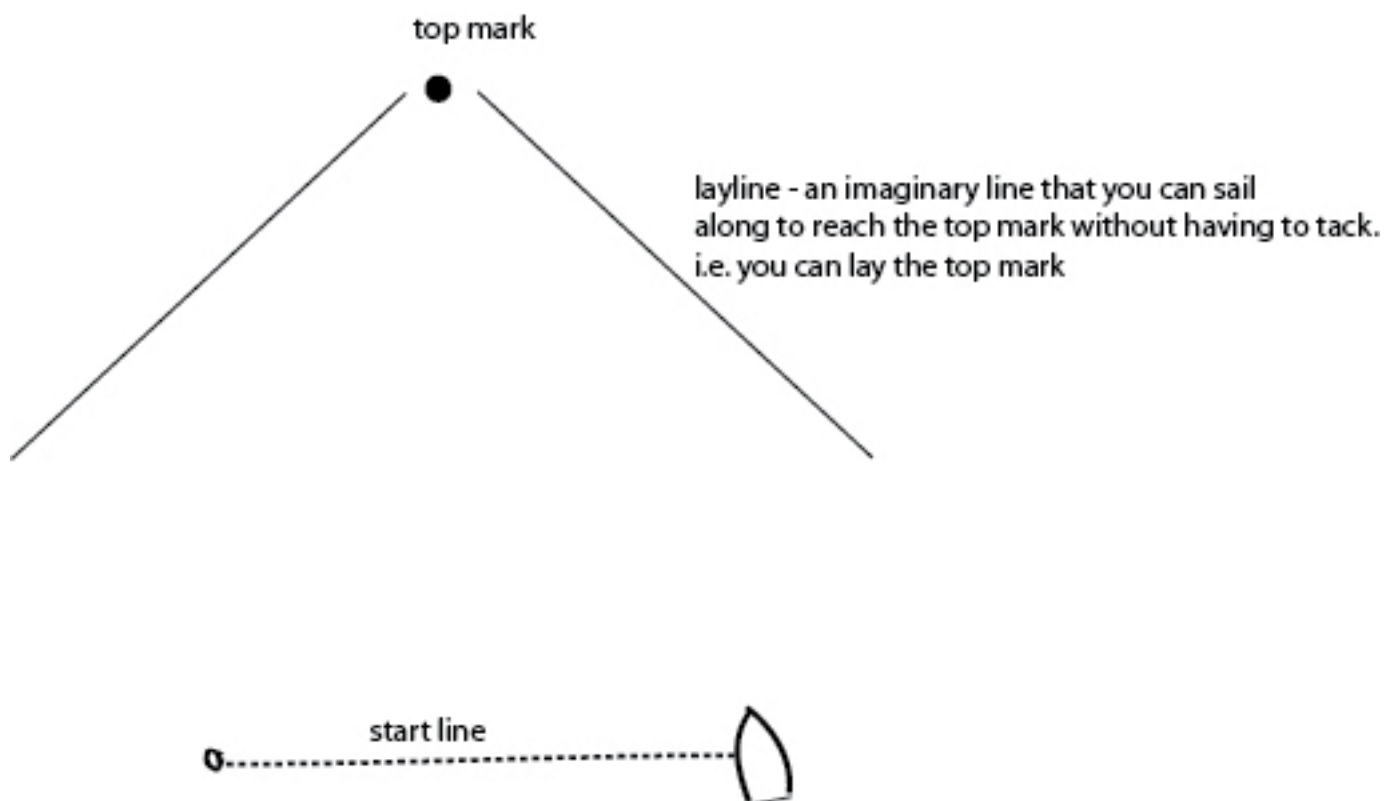
1. Bring a watch and use it!
2. Hang around the start line. Check out the diagram of the starting area below - if there are heaps of boats around hang about at the ok section of the drawing below or further to the right of the start line.
3. The first couple of times hang around to the right (starboard) of the boat and bear away and duck the boat to start a little bit later than everyone else. This has little risk of getting tangled up in other boats and you will only be a few seconds behind the other boats.
4. Do a practice start to get a handle on how far you will drift when stopped and how long it will take to accelerate.
5. Keep moving forward very slowly to maintain flow over the foils and control of the boat.
6. Never barge over the top of leeward boats. Just wait for them to go and go after them.
7. As you get more confident you will want to start in the 'good' zone pictured below. At any point in this zone you could sail to the start line on a close hauled course on starboard without having to tack. You should only be a maximum 20 seconds sail away.

First beat





1. Keep an eye out for starboard boats if you are on port. It is not a bad idea to put a port and a starboard sticker on your boat so that you get it right. Even some top sailors do this just to be sure.
2. Try to spot the top mark before the race starts or early on in the beat.
3. If your bow is pointing towards the top mark, this is good, you are probably on a lifted tack, if it is pointing quite far away from the top mark, you may be on a knock, consider tacking.
4. Try to sail in clear air, that is air that is undisturbed by boats in front of you. If you are in 'dirty' air consider tacking.
5. However try not to tack too often as each tack will slow you down.
6. Give yourself plenty of room to approach the top mark if there are lots of boats around. Approach the top mark on starboard if possible and try to over stand the lay line a bit until you become confident picking the lay line.
7. If you underlay and can't quite make the mark don't stress, just bear away, gybe around and have another go at approaching the mark with a little more room. Until you are confident with boat on boat action give plenty of space to other boats when rounding marks.



Downwind

1. Very similar to upwind – keep an eye out for boats on starboard as port starboard rules apply! This is when your port/starboard stickers really show their usefulness.
2. When approaching the bottom mark furl your gennaker away early to allow plenty of time to round the mark.
3. Give way to people who are closer to the mark than you are when inside the three boat length circle.
4. In more crowded fleets try approaching the bottom mark on starboard so you have right of way, remember mark-room applies. For more info on the mark (buoy) room rule see PDF intro parts 1-7, section 18 of the rules.
<http://www.sailing.org/1986.php>

For more info check the tips on sailing downwind fast from the last newsletter. Once you have nailed the basics of right of way and sailing the course you will be looking at going fast!
<http://www.wetamarine.com/sailing-tips-by-chris-kitchen.html>

Double handed

Try doing your first few races double handed, this will make things much easier. Assign jobs to the crew – Someone looking out for other boats and locating marks – the other focussing on sailing the boat. When I race on the 18 foot skiff we all have our specific role and talk aloud to keep communication high. A commentary on what is happening is always nice to have as when you are focussing on sailing the boat fast you can easily forget what is happening around you. You may be surprised how people enjoy commentating on their race – the perfect excuse to try it!





Seasoned racers looking for more from their Weta...

Here a few Weta specific tips for the racers with a little more experience looking to get more from their Weta. There are plenty of general race strategy resources available which are all probably better than I could explain which are worthwhile to read. What I can help with are a few Weta specific tips that definitely help with racing.

Starting

1. When lining up for the start keep some way on to keep control and manoeuvrability. Give yourself enough space to sail very slowly towards the start line in the last minute of the start. As soon as you stop and lose steerage you will lose your edge and likely get yourself in trouble.
2. At the last 10 seconds begin your acceleration up to the line. Be sure to allow enough space to leeward to dive down if necessary to hit the line at full pace. This will slingshot you into a great position.

Upwind

1. Tacking – practise these in your off time. There are massive gains to be made if you tack well in a race as the acceleration out of these manoeuvres varies hugely. Avoid doing too many tacks as you lose more time than you would on a mono hull, but don't be scared to tack and get into pressure/lifts as you don't lose as much time as you would on a catamaran.
2. General speed – go for pace. The Weta does not like being 'jammed' or 'pinched' don't be afraid to bear off a little get some speed before coming up again. The boat can be sailed in a 'high mode' but you will go slower and end up with a low VMG.
3. Top mark - do not underlay it – this is generally race over in any fleet. You do not lose much by slightly overlaying the mark as you can ease sheets slightly and reach at a fast pace to get to the mark. Underlaying a mark resulting in either having to pinch or double tack is very costly.

Downwind

1. Practise your gybes. There are massive gains to be made in the gybes in a race, especially single handed.
2. Look behind you and stay in the gusts. Pressure is king sailing a Weta downwind. Check out the tips for downwind speed from the last newsletter <http://www.wetamarine.com/sailing-tips-by-chris-kitchen.html>

Bottom mark

1. In light wind - slightly overlay the mark and furl the gennaker up late. Sailing high with no gennaker is not very slow. Sailing low with no gennaker is SLOW.
2. In high wind - slightly underlay the mark while sailing under gennaker to allow a few boat lengths to bear away and head dead downwind while you furl the sail away. Sailing downwind past the mark while you sort the gennaker is a fast way to go backwards. Allow yourself enough time to properly furl the sail away because if you don't quite get it right (and I am sure you have all experienced this before!) It is painful having to bear away, unfurl, re-furl and round up before continuing!

Strategy

1. I think of racing as being like chess on water, you always need to be thinking a few moves ahead. For instance if you are approaching a crowded mark you need to know what way you want to go on the next leg so that you can approach the mark with an idea of what you want out of the rounding - i.e. Do you want to be to the left or the right of the group?
2. Learn from previous legs what worked and which boats gained/lost by going to different parts of the course. Factors like tide, current, headlands, waves are always changing and need to be monitored as to how they affect your race.
3. A good warm up always helps to get an handle on what is going on, take time to observe the wind and tide and establish any patterns that you can take advantage of.

Hope you all found something in there to take away with you.

Good luck and see you on the race course soon!

Chris



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