



Tips and Tricks - Starts in the Weta

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October 2013

Hi Everyone,

For this edition of tips and tricks I'm going to go over starting when racing. I'll begin with the starting sequence and go into some helpful tips for positioning, timing and what you can do to practice and get better.

The first thing to know is the start sequence - There is a standard 5 minute start sequence although many clubs also do 3 minutes so I have included that as well. Every club is different so make yourself familiar with the local rules.

5 or 3 minutes - Class Flag up (for the Weta this is a black W on a white flag).

4 or 2 minutes - Blue Peter up

1 minute - Blue Peter down

Gun - Class Flag down

Individual Recall - Race Committee know who is over and will score them OCS (on course side) if they don't re-start.

General Recall - Race Committee can't see everyone who is over so will re-start the race.



Blue Peter Flag



Individual Recall

For more on basic racing rules see <http://www.yachtracing.com/technicaljournals/sailing101.html>

It really helps to have a good watch, I use Ronstan clear start, but there are lots of good options out there, ask at your local boat shop.



General Recall

I always have a loose routine which keeps me on track and well set up for the start. Also I do my homework before the start, I figure out the laylines, I do a practice acceleration and I practice my time on distance and check the tide.

5 minute start routine

5 minute - get the gun and sail over to the start boat

4 minute - sync watch to perfect timing and accelerate off start line, do a last minute settings and wind check.

3.30 to go - turn around and head behind line to get ready to line up.

2-1.30 to go - find a spot where you have enough space to slowly sail towards the line so that when there is 10 seconds to go you are 1 to 2 boat lengths from the line.

5-15 secs - accelerate

3 minute start routine

3 min - get the time and have a really quick look upwind and at settings

2.30 - turn around and sail behind the line ready to set up

2 - 1.30 - final approach - get yourself inside the luffing lays with plenty of space in front to sail slowly towards the line.

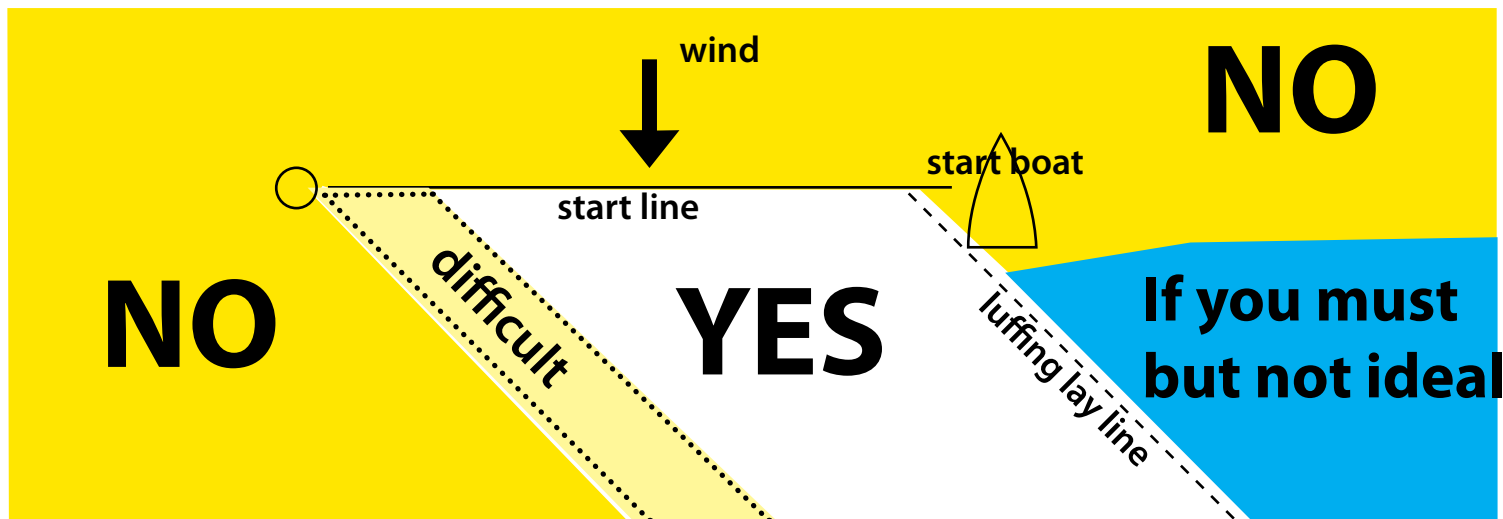
5-15 secs - press go for a full acceleration as quickly as possible.

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Step One: Positioning with 1 minute 30 seconds to go

The drawing below illustrates where you should be when the start has less than 1 minute 30 seconds to go. The dotted lines are the luffing lay lines (laylines are the lines upon which you can sail close-hauled and just make it around the mark, in this case it's the line which you can sail slowly along and just make it to the boat).

You need to judge how much space in front you'll need to creep forward over 1 minute 30 seconds before it's time to accelerate. You want to put the boat in a place where you won't need to tack or dip, so you need to figure out your time on distance, that is how much distance to the line and how much time it will take to sail that distance so that you have a boat length or two to accelerate in with 10-15 seconds to go.



If you set up in the Yes area you will have a lot of rights when it comes to the rules. Windward boat must give way, so if anyone tries to barge over the top of you from the blue zone, they will be in the wrong. People may sail in and set up tight underneath if you, if you are uncomfortable with this you can stop and sail behind them. Also if you keep the boat moving forward you will have a lot of control.

Step Two: Controlling the boat in a slow creep forward towards the line

This is the hard bit, you want to creep slowly forward, but you don't want to accidentally get into irons or stop and not be able to get going or accidentally tack. You also don't want to be going too fast and use up all your runway, it is a balance!

Tips for controlling the boat at slow speed

- Keep moving forward very slowly, sail very close to the wind to wash off speed. When you feel like you might stop or get into trouble, bring the bow down and build speed so that you have control. You want to always be slowly moving forwards and you never want to be stopped.
- Have the jib half on so that you are not going fast but you have some control.
- Use the main to control the speed and angle of the boat, pull it on to head up into the wind and let it out to pivot the bow down and build speed.
- The rudder won't be much use at very slow speed, so you need to get used to using sail trim to manoeuvre.
- Make sure the centreboard is totally down.
- Sit on the main hull, with the leeward hull in the water.
- If you find yourself in irons accidentally, reach forward and back the jib to windward to get yourself out.

Step Three: Accelerate well and at the right time.

How long does it take to get a Weta up to full acceleration? 5 seconds or 15 seconds? How much forward space will you need? How much sideways space? This is a question that will vary depending on wind speed and wave state, so have a practice before the start so that you know how long it will take and how many forward boat lengths it will take.

Tips for accelerating

Pull the jib on first, then pull in the mainsheet as you move outboard. Sail for a few seconds with slightly eased sheets and with the bow slightly down to build speed, once you are confident that you are up to speed bring the bow up and pull the sheets all the way in.

Starting takes nerve and practice, but it's the only way to do it, get in the habit now and don't let yourself back off halfway through. Better to be OCS occasionally than have half pie starts all the time.

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Two simple things that you can practice to help your starts

2 minute drill

This is the best drill that I know to help with timing and positioning and it is very simple and can be done on your own. I try to do it every time I sail, just 10 minutes before the start will really help in the long run.

- Find a mark in the harbour and set your watch to two minutes. Pretend that the mark is the start boat.
- At start time you must be accelerated to full speed and be able to reach out and touch the mark if you wanted to.
- Sounds easy, but it's actually quite hard.

Learn to sail backwards

This really helps for when you inevitably get tangled up on the start line. If you know what way to put the rudder to get out of the situation, life will be a lot quicker and easier! The best way to do this is to go out on a nice day and get into a clear space with plenty of room. Point the bow directly into the wind and wait for the boat to start drifting backwards, then try to keep it going backwards, the rudder movements will be the opposite to going forwards. Play with giving the jib slight backs on either side to make yourself sail faster or to get yourself out of it.

Small tips

- Know when to bail out of a bad start - if you're shut out and it's all looking bad with 30 seconds to go, bail out and start working on your catch up/recovery - if you can sail backwards you greatly increase your ability to bail out!
- Don't pull out of an acceleration once you start it, get your brain trained that once you pull the trigger that is it, it is much better in the long run for consistent and fast accelerations.

Key points to start well in the Weta:

1. At 1.30 to go, put the boat in such a place that you can slowly sail towards the line without tacking or dipping and still be one to two boat lengths behind the line with 10-15 seconds to go. If you can do this well half the battle is done.
2. Practice a controlled creep forwards and never stop the boat completely.
3. Practice accelerating and do the same technique every time so that it becomes automatic.

