

Falmouth Working Boat Racing Seamanship

The following is a transcript of a talk given by John Peters at the May 2025 Pre Season Rules and Safety talk. The meeting was attended by 99% of the representatives from all the fleet. At the meeting, each boat represented was issued with a '2025 to 2028 Rules in Practice' book and a laminated what to do and who to contact in case of a serious incident on the water.

This is intended as a guide to working boat crews to give some pointers to sailing these beautiful and majestic boats, which because of their configuration can be a tricky craft to sail in a safe and seamanlike manner.

Most of the following may seem obvious to experienced sailors and a bit long winded, but it is preparation which may save the day!

Before getting on board. Check the weather forecast, especially wind predictions. Charge the VHF radio and ensure at least one crew member is a licensed operator. Up to date race instructions and tide times. Emergency procedure and contact laminated sheet supplied by the Association. (See attachment)

Muster the crew and after getting on board. Ensure safety equipment as specified in the rules are all on board and in date. Lifejackets to be readily accessible, as a very general rule, if there are white horses running. Crew to put them on before leaving the mooring. Note, some race committees will fly a lifejacket flag, others do not, it is the skipper's call.

Is the bucket, preferably buckets, handy, for bailing and the pump is working and handle tied in.

Crew positions are paramount, the helm is the conductor of the crew, preferably experienced in boat handling with a good understanding of the Racing Rules.,

One crew must take on the role of course reading and timekeeping leaving the helm to concentrate on steering.

A key position is the mainsheet, they must work in unison with the helm, knowing when to trim in, when to ease off and when to dump!

The boats have different winch layouts so the rest of the crew will take on the jib and staysail sheets and halyards and backstays,

It is a huge advantage if one of the crew can call the wind pressure, gusts, and downwind lanes so the helm has full all-round information. If the helm is steering from one side then a lookout is absolutely necessary on the other side.

The main thing is' time on the water 'acting as a crew, knowing what each other does, and is capable of managing. Manoeuvres should happen without any shouting to each other and be seamless. Which only comes with time spent together on the water.

Choose which sails are right for the conditions, if white horses, possibly no topsail, small jib? Boats with furling jibs and staysails make it more awkward to change sails but those with halyard rigged topsails can easily drop a topsail if conditions require.

As the boats are all slightly different with varying degrees of ballast/righting moments it is down to the skipper to know their boat and what works best. As with the crew work it probably takes a season to train and understand the boat.

Attach a burgee to the topsail pole, sailing upwind it is not too relevant, but downwind it is the helms main indicator of the wind, it is interesting to watch the fleet, and the slowest boats down

wind are those without burgees and those who have sat back and relaxed. Cottons on the shrouds give very little help in wind direction as they are disturbed by the boat .

Mark every sheet rope and halyard with electrical insulation tape in where you think is the optimum setting. It doesn't matter if it's not in exactly the right place, but it gives the helm or trimmer an instant reference at a glance. This makes trimming for the crew much easier.

Tape up around all the shackles and pins on the rigging, then, even if the shackle undoes itself the pin stays in and the rig up!

Replace the bungee on the runners regularly, if it fails the leeward runner can go around the front of the spreader and when you tack the enthusiastic crew will winch the spreader off!!

A tip is to fit two bungies one slightly longer than the other so when the primary fails the second one comes in.

Boat rigged and ready to go, A brief Working Boat tuning guide ' Setting up for Speed ' by John Peters (Rita 2010-2023) is available in the Seventh Association Handbook

Also, in the same edition is a concise explanation of the Rules by the late Bill Handley who was a National Judge and sailed on Florence for many years.

Get out early to the race area, get a feel for the weather conditions, sea state, tidal runs, and changes. Sailors who have sailed in places like the Solent will be very conscious of the influence of the tides, and they are just as important in harbours such as Falmouth and Fowey. Tides running at two knots can help or hinder the boats immensely.

In order to understand how the tide will affect the boat you need to know what is underneath you. If you are not sure, a chartlet of the harbour with the channel and buoys taped to the boat can aid this at a glance. If you get the chance to go out in a boat with a screen echosounder/fish finder, study it as you track around the harbour noting where you are and try to memorise the topography of the bottom.

Once in the race area the Staysail must be down on the deck or furled. This is an Association Rule to enhance vision and avoid collisions. This also applies as soon after, as practical, crossing the finish line.

In order to get a good start a simple approach is.....

When clear and safe to do so, sail from committee boat down line to the pin end and time the distance. Or from the pin to the Committee Boat.

Then check the line bias,,if clear sail to middle of line from leeward and round up head to wind using the burgee, then site along bowsprit to see if windward mark is offset to one side. Then immediately take a right-angle line through your boat to the committee boat and the pin buoy, this will show which end of line is bias, Then depending on any tide influence you know which end to start.

You can also do this by compass bearings, but this will need crew used to working out right angles. If you can't see the windward mark the committee boat will normally display a compass bearing on a board.

If you decide on a Committee boat end start which is normally preferred as you are on starboard tack and have right of way.

Sail downwind behind the Committee Boat to where you gauge the optimum line in to just skim the Committee Boat, this will take practice. If possible get a transit on the shore to aim for or take a compass bearing on your desired course.

Whilst working out your angle to the line ,if there are any markers crab pot, time a run into the line or find a transit reference point and time your run in. This is one of the most tricky manoeuvres to get right, time on distance to the line. If you get it right you will be commanding the fleet!

While all this is going on your designated crew should be giving a time count down to the gun whilst another should try to estimate distance to the line and watch other boats close to you.

Nerves of steel!!

As you line up for the start try to assess if you have boats to windward and are likely to try to bear down and barge in between you and the Committee Boat/ Inner distance mark.

If there are, on your approach in no uncertain terms hail them and tell them 'You have no rights' 'Go up' 'Do not Barge In'...if as with 'Club racers' they do not respond, you have no option but to give them room. Immediately hail Protest at them and fly your red protest flag.

If you established that there was a line bias at the pin end, this is where your time taken sailing along the line comes in. A good move here is to hang around the Committee Boat end until your time to run the line matches the time to the start, the fleet will think you are doing a Committee Boat start then pick a clear spot and head for the pin. The staysail is now up so the boat speed will be faster than your time, so a slight compensation is required. As you are now on Starboard you have right of way except over boats below you who can push you over the line, similarly if you hook your bow under a boat in front of you then you can call him up over the line. The crew should be watching and telling the helm how far you are below the line and time to the gun.

Once the gun goes settle the boat hard on the wind. If there is a boat under you trying to push you up try another wind on the runner, hard in on the staysail and up track the mainsheet and hard in, this is not fast but might be enough to claw to windward. If still being pushed up then if clear tack off. The one thing you need is clear air, these boats with up to one thousand square feet of sail suck a lot of air!!

The next leg is upwind to the weather mark. All crew alert to boats on opposite tacks. It is surprising how many crew cannot see if an opposite tack boat will pass ahead or behind or is on a collision course.

It might be obvious to most but to reiterate.....When you site a boat on an opposite tack watch to see if their forestay is visually moving across the background. If they are moving across the background they will pass ahead of you. If they appear to be going backwards against the background then you will pass ahead of them. If however, the background is stationary or moving slowly, draw the helms attention and lookout because you could be on a collision course. Take action in good time.

If you decide to pass behind their stern, this is dangerous. As Working boats don't like bearing away. This calls for coordination between helm and mainsheet if you don't ease/dump the mainsheet the boat will not bear away.

In a tight situation and a quick avoidance is necessary the safest way out is to tack to the same direction as the right of way boat.

Depending on the particulars of the boat it takes between 7 and 12 seconds to tack a Working boat and a minimum of 2 boat lengths. This means forward anticipation of situations is critical.

Approaching the weather mark,

Here the helm must have knowledge of the rules, The golden rule is try to avoid approaching the weather mark on port tack, this goes right back to the pre start when you lined up to gauge any bias from the start line, but wind /tide variations will have probably dictated which way you

went upwind. So, If you end up close to the mark on port and can't comfortably cross starboard boat/s ... much as it hurts! Take transoms, don't risk going in on port.

If bearing straight away or going to a spreader mark the crew should have discussed whether it will be a jibe or bear away and, if needed, which side the booming out pole will be needed.

On the rounding ,if bearing hard away make sure the mainsheet is dumped right down to allow the bear away, if the crew are in tune they can ease the headsails through the bear away to help pull the bow around.

Now we are off downwind. This is where you can gain big time,

Ease the topsail sheet, ease the peak halyard. ease the runners right off in light airs and just nipped on in a breeze. According to the shape of the hull the crew weight should be moved to suit. Most boats in light airs go faster with the crew weight forward to lift the transom to reduce drag.

Get a competent crew either up on the boom or by the mast looking aft, get them to call the gusts to the helm, bear away in the gusts and up in the lulls, try to get into any lanes of wind. Bearing in mind the tide. Try to avoid running by the lee, this collapses the poled out headsail and depowers the main, watch the burgee all the time. loses

Try to time gybes so you approach the leeward mark on starboard. Remembering to pull the peak halyard back up and a timely drop of the pole. Check the runners are all set up for hardening up.

On approaching leeward mark check if any boats will have rights inside you, if clear to do so sweep as wide as possible to come into the buoy as hard on the wind as you can.

If you go too close to the buoy the working boat turning circle will take you probably 2 to 3 boat lengths to leeward of the buoy allowing other boats to shoot in on top of you.

The danger of going wide is the boat/s behind you will say There's a big gap I'm going in there!

Unless they had established their overlap outside the 3 boat lengths from the buoy they are in the wrong, but they are now in there and you've got to give them room and protest. Immediately.

Hail 'Protest' and wave your red flag,

The Association did issue everyone with a red flag, have it to hand at all times. Avoid boat contact at all costs.

The over-riding thing to say about all this is ATTITUDE if everyone goes on the water for enjoyment and no agro , a little bit of give and take when applicable, would be the answer.

We are not a formula one keel boat racing fleet; we aim to embrace traditional wood boats and brand-new grp boats together.

We have the premier fleet in the area. Let's all work together to show what a beautiful spectacle we are and be proud.

FALMOUTH WORKING BOAT ASSOCIATION INCIDENT PROTOCOLS

SERIOUS INCIDENTS (MAJOR COLLISION/FLOODING/INJURY/ILLNESS/MAN OVERBOARD)

MAYDAY IF THERE IS IMMINENT DANGER TO LIFE

Assess damage and injuries, administer First Aid.

On VHF Ch16 broadcast a **MAYDAY** call (If radio is DSC fitted depress red distress button prior to the VHF voice Mayday and include the MMSI in the broadcast).

Call Race Control on VHF race channel and advise of situation and that Coastguard assistance has been requested. (The Coastguard will dispatch Search and Rescue units, Lifeboats and Helicopters).

If on a lee shore and boat disabled, anchor and drop all sails, await rescue.

MINOR INCIDENTS (MINOR COLLISION/GEAR FAILURE)

Assess damage and injuries, administer First Aid.

On VHF Ch16 broadcast a PAN PAN (**URGENCY**) call if Coastguard assistance is required. (If no race safety boats are provided).

Call Race Control and advise if Coastguard called --or if assistance is requested from race safety boats.

RULE INFRINGEMENT/COMING TOGETHER OF BOATS WITHOUT DAMAGE

Call to protest to infringing vessel(s). Fly red protest flag immediately.

Make a VHF call to Race Office/Committee Boat on appropriate race channel and register protest.

THE FOLLOWING IS FORMAT FOR A MAYDAY CALL ON VHF CH16

MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY,

THIS IS FALMOUTH WORKING BOAT (YOUR BOATS NAME AND MMSI NUMBER IF DSC RADIO) X3,

IN POSITION (LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE OR A BEARING AND DISTANCE FROM KNOWN LANDMARK OR BUOY),

SITUATION (BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT)

NUMBER OF PERSONS ON BOARD

I REQUEST IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE-----OVER.