

## **STARTING TIPS II.**

Simply put, the START IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE RACE!!!!

Before each race, I try and ask myself, "What do I have to do to get in phase with the first wind shift and how do I get on the tack that takes me closest to the windward mark as soon as possible"? The overriding goal, no matter where on the line you choose to start, is to attempt to put yourself in the most flexible position possible. This means keeping as many of your options open as you can and most importantly, putting yourself in a position to get on the favored tack as quickly as possible.

In my previous article, I focused on the optimum way to start at the leeward end (pin-end) or the weather end (committee boat end) of the starting line. What I failed to discuss in any detail are the advantages of a good mid-line start.

A mid-line start can have several strategic advantages. Many times the weather and leeward ends of the line tend to be more congested. The reason for this is that it is often easier to gauge how close you are to the starting line at the extreme ends of the line so boats tend to congregate there. Often, the middle of the line is fairly open and the possibility of a good start exists without having to fight as hard as you would at the other two ends of the line.

The advantage of a mid-line start is that you are generally able to either hold starboard tack (if you are in the lifted starboard phase at the start); or due to less congestion, you may have the opportunity to get over on to port tack more easily if you feel you are in a headed (left) phase at the gun. The key to a mid-line start is being confident with exactly where the starting line is.

A common phenomenon, especially in big fleets with long starting lines is that the fleet often misjudges where the line is, and many times the boats in the middle of the line are several boat lengths shy of the starting line at the gun. This is known as mid-line sag.

One of these days after the races, ask a race committee member how far the fleet was off the line in the middle of the starting line. I bet you will be surprised. It is very common that the boats in the middle of the line are 2 to 3 boat lengths below the line. The middle of the line is rarely over-early. So how do you know where the line is to take advantage of this sag?

The best way is to try and get a line site of the starting line. This entails sailing just to the right of the anchored race committee boat and looking over the top of the race committee boat while trying line up the starting flag with the leeward starting pin. Then, try to pick out a feature along the shoreline such as a house, boat dock, building etc. that is in line with the starting line.

Once this is accomplished I like to sail to the location on the line where I am most likely to start. When I reach this position, I will have one of my crew go to the bow and sight down the line as I sail on starboard tack, close-hauled across the line. Using the object on the shoreline to the left of the starting pin, I ask the person on the bow to tell me when the object on shore lines up with the leeward pin. When we reach that point, we are theoretically on the line.

As helmsman, I also like to have my own visual as I am sailing for the line. As we are crossing the line on starboard tack, when my crew on the bow tells me that we are on the line, I immediately look to leeward in my normal upwind steering position and try and get a visual on shore immediately in line with the leeward pin. In this case, my line site on shore will be slightly different than the perspective my bow person will have due to the distance between us. I will usually defer to the bow person in the final seconds but it is really nice to be able to make a quick visual check myself.

On larger keelboats, don't hesitate to have your bow person up on the bow pulpit telling you or sending you hand signals as to where you are on the line. Practice this process with your crew and then listen to them! The bow person's perspective is going to be much better than yours and when they start waving you to go, go!

In addition, keep in mind where you are relative to the boats around you. As a rule, I try to never let the boat that is to leeward of me have their bow forward of mine. I don't want them to be in a lee bow position off of the line. I don't worry so much about having the boat to weather of me covering me up a little at the start. It is always safer to have the windward boat blocking the view of your boat from the race committee. I will try to stay covered up until the last possible second.

Usually, by being slightly to leeward, you can eventually work your bow clear and hopefully get yourself in a good lee bow position and start pinching off the boat that you used for cover.

If the boats to leeward and to windward are ahead of you, even if you think you are close to the line, you have to trim-in and accelerate with them, even if you are all ultimately over-early. You simply can't afford to be rolled from above and pinched off from below. Nine out of ten times, you will either be safe, or the race committee will call for a general recall.

The only time that I would suggest that you stay away from the middle of the line is after several general recalls and the race committee has put up the "I flag" indicating that the around-the-ends rule is in effect. This means that if you are over early in the middle of the line, the only way to exonerate yourself is to round one end of the line or the other and restart. If you are over early in the middle, it could result in a long sail to get around one end of the line to restart.

Sometimes in large regattas with really long starting lines, a mid-line boat is anchored on the starting line. Usually, the folks on the mid-line boat are not sighting the line and calling boats over early. Sometimes these boats are not even

situated perfectly on the line. If you have done your homework, you can determine how close to the mid-line boat is to the line and use it as a great reference point. In fact, whenever a mid-line boat is anchored, I like to start just to weather of it. It can provide you a great buffer from boats trying to get on your lee bow, and if you use it correctly, you ought to be able to get yourself very close to the line.