



## PHRF PERSPECTIVE July 2002

### PHRF Racing: Improve, Then Use Your Assets!

With so many different types, designs, styles and generations of boats, it's impressive that the PHRF system can encompass all of them.

There are the new generation of large and small sport boats (i.e., Melges 24 to J-120s), cruisers that were not necessarily intended for racing, cruiser-racers, racer-cruisers, old IOR and recent IMS designs and one designs from Solings to Farr 40s, 12 Meters, AC Boats, Maxis, Sleds and Open 60s round the world racers. And each has a rating!

### The boat's rating

When a new boat appears, it can be quite an undertaking to rate it accurately. Research by PHRF handicappers can range from looking at similar, like kind boats that have very close ratings, comparing IMS measurements, consulting with the designer and looking at the ratings other areas across the US assign to sister ships. Modified sister ships may not be a picnic either. Take your pick of tall rigs, short rigs or fractional rigs. Try deep draft, elliptical, winged, Scheel, shoal, standard draft or modified keels.

It all has to start somewhere. In order to get a more accurate rating the first time, the Request For Rating Form asks the applicant for various significant dimensions, the model, builder, keel, rig, etc. Try to provide the most accurate data. Other wise, "garbage in-garbage out." Don't rely on the broker (usually inaccurate). Verify the data from the designer or builder. You can always ask your area PHRF representative for help or have your sail maker measure your rig.

### The challenge of your rating

Your boat's rating (initially) may seem harsh or difficult to sail to. But there is a good reason for the rating given. Many Board members have 15 to 20 years experience racing and are familiar with the performance of all kinds of boats, large and small.

So before you start complaining about the assigned rating, LEARN the boat, SAIL the boat, be one with the boat (oops, sorry, counterculture flashback!), PRACTICE with your crew and make sure the boat is prepared for racing. You should have new or recent racing sails (lose the roller furling headsail unless you are in the Cruising Class), the bottom should be race prepared (Hint: Do not roll on paint over a bumpy bottom!) and the deck hardware should be functional to allow enough adjustment to power the rig up or down in varying sea and wind conditions. Then go race it a bunch of times. In different conditions.

You must be willing to practice and learn techniques and tricks in order to start climbing up the race results.

Most boats are oriented to a specific wind range in the way they are designed and set up. Some are "light air boats." Some are better in heavy air. Most are oriented to 12 knots and are adjustable enough to cover most extremes. Figure out what you have and, if you have-let's say a heavy air boat, try to get as fast as you can in light conditions to maximize your results in conditions NOT favorable your boat. Hang in there during the light stuff...it will, most likely, blow later. You may have to invest in a very narrow range light-air genoa that you might have to change once the wind gets to 6 or 7 knots or so. Speak to your sail maker for techniques and suggestions.

Remember, some of the people you are competing against may be exceptional sailors and others have great gobs of experience. Most would be receptive if you wish to speak to them about your boat or the way you are sailing it. You should also speak to your area or club's PHRF representative if you feel inclined or are having difficulties.

### Upgrade crew for better speed and performance

Be prepared to improve or replace crew that is "slowing you down" or wiping out the brew supply before your first leeward mark rounding. You are racing, not playing cards or hosting a debate. Chatty Cathys on the rail are a distraction to driving and tactical considerations. Moreover, they are usually slow to react to boat handling demands. Ask them (nicely) to save the Bear or Bull market discussion for the Club afterwards. If that doesn't work, leave 'em on the dock. And a crew member who will not follow directions (like getting off the bow) is a liability for boat speed and needs to be replaced.

### Making it better

Last month we discussed ways of making PHRF racing better through narrower rating bands and getting more racers out for certain events. PHRF ratings seem to work best when the difference of rating is about 30 Seconds per Mile. The larger the difference of ratings, the more that difference becomes apparent. As an example, a Santana 20 (rating 222) will NEVER correct on a Santa Cruz 50 (rating 0) in any normal race longer than a mile assuming both boats are sailed similarly.

Call your racing pals to get them to participate in certain regattas with you for a greater turnout. Try to persuade your Cruising class friends to give PHRF racing a try (it won't affect their Cruising Class rating!) The bigger the turnout, the better chance you have for more classes with narrower ratings bands. That is, assuming you and your fellow racers make your desire for narrow class splits known to the Race Committee before the event. It also helps to be on the Race Committee to influence the other R/C members.

However, if there is an event that is lightly attended, who cares! Try to do your best and practice maneuvers that need more practice. The point is, have fun and try to improve!

Practice to improve your starts and performance

You might try to organize a practice session where you establish specific goals to achieve. I just participated in a "STARTING CLINIC" held by South Bay Yacht Racing Club in Marina Del Rey. Wow! In the morning, some of the more experienced racers spoke on techniques to find the favored end, starting tactics and discussed the starting rules, etc. Afterwards, on the water, we practiced several times going up to the line and signaling when we thought our bow was on the line. Then the committee boat told us (by radio and bullhorn) if we were over or short of the line by how many feet! Our calls got better each time. Next, we had several practice starts with several boats in each "class." Experienced coaches were available for boats that wanted them.

You might try to organize a similar Starting Clinic like this from your club or clubs in your area. Drop an inflatable mark in the water, anchor and set a line and you're ready. Get some of the hotshots and sail makers in your fleet to help out as coaches and to give a talk. Trust me, it's a great way to improve by practicing multiple starts.

Using your assets and your competition's weakness at the start

The more you race, the more you will learn your boat's best conditions and your competition's worst. Use this knowledge:

If you can't point well in certain conditions, do NOT start to weather of a boat that can point unless you want to tack right away!

If there is a breeze, starting to leeward of a longer, bigger boat will result in you quickly getting rolled-not a good idea.

If you accelerate better than another boat, get under his lee bow before the start, luff him, then crack off to start...you will leave him in your wake if you do it right.

If you are fast in light air, start away from traffic in CLEAR AIR and just go! Use your speed to get ahead and then to the favored side.

Anticipate. You can predict, from where he is, what a competitor may try to do. He may duck to leeward and try to force you over the line or tack from port under your lee bow. Luff, slow or bear off to foil his plans (within the Rules).

Sail better, smarter and faster and soon that rating will be an asset, not a liability. Contact PHRF at 562-438-6712 or by e-mail - [fleetoffice@phrfsocal.org](mailto:fleetoffice@phrfsocal.org)

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