



PHRF PERSPECTIVE  
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### Boat Performance: A Lesson Learned

Last time, this column reported on the ULLMAN SAILS SoCal PHRF Championships held in Long Beach, CA and hosted by Long Beach Yacht Club. A wide variety of boats participated: There were older production cruisers, newer pole and sport boats, recent IMS designs, older heavier IOR boats of every size, ULDBs and custom and modified boats. Entries came from as far away as San Diego and Ventura, Newport and Marina Del Rey, just about every place that our title sponsor has a loft or a representative!

Handicapping a large number of desperate designs to race together is not easy. Yet, race they did (Oops, I sound like Yoda!) with no complaints. That may not always be the case on the local level.

Seems like there's some racer that likes to gripe about the rating of his or some other boat. While he has the option to go to the local Board to present his case, he rarely does. His problem actually may be racing with older sails, a not so perfect bottom or crew work or tactics that need improvement. Perhaps it's a combination of these factors. It's easier to complain than to practice and improve and cheaper too! The point is that sometimes the lack of performance may not be rating-based but a result of some *physical* reason.

One of the racers at ULLMAN SAILS SoCal PHRF Championships relayed their recent experience so, perhaps, everyone can benefit from it. Names are withheld to protect the innocent.

Some time ago, the boat's crew and owner noticed that the performance was not quite what it used to be. Over a period of time, they just were not placing like they used to. While they had good speed, the boat was not pointing well. They were now finishing with boats that they owed time to.

There was a very recent carbon #1 and a mainsail that, while not new, still looked fairly good. No changes had been made to the rig and the bottom was in great shape; professionally prepared and recently wet-sanded then cleaned before each event. When they raced in the larger events the best they could do was mid-fleet finishes despite some good starts and reasonably good boat handling. Any screw-up in the race was accepted as the reason for their finishing position.

Everyone had ten ideas why. "There must have been a shift on the other side of the course." Excuses were made; "Hey! Maybe the skipper is going senile and can't drive like he used to!" Other ideas: The rig must be out of adjustment. Perhaps the keel bounced off a rock and the damage is causing drag.

A new main was ordered for the Championship regatta (*not* from our sponsor Ullman Sails). Of course, it was late in arriving and so there was no time to try it out before the regatta. To complicate matters, the backstay system needed extensive repair just before the delivery up to Long Beach...so there was even less time to prepare.

Rig tension and the bottom had been checked and wet-sanded just before leaving. All the extra junk that accumulates on board was removed. Despite the complications, all systems were "go."

During the first of the five races, the favored side of the line was determined and they were positioned there with speed. "Crack" went the starting gun in a clearing haze and the regatta was underway with a winning start. And that's when the wheels came off. All the other boats in the class, including those that were owed time, were pointing higher and lifting away. They had speed too! The new main was shapeless and nearly un-trimable. No power, no speed, DFL.

The next two races were not much better despite the crew brainstorming the situation. Same deal: Good start, good boat handling, no pointing. Later, at the dock, it was discovered that the backstay was over tightened when reinstalled and the over-flattening was the cause of the flogging, shapeless main sail.

Next day, the crew really concentrated on sail trim and balance to try to coax the boat to point. The main was now a useful asset. Better results, but the boat wouldn't point up with the sistership that beat them.

During the last race, the skipper lined up his boat directly astern of the sistership and asked the trimmer to trim the genoa to match the course. It could not be done. As they tried to do it, the jib would start to luff before they could match the other boat's course. Now they were onto something.

One of the crew went forward to look up the headstay to see how much sag there was. The headstay was pretty straight (3-4" sag) but the crewman reported that the genoa was "rounded at the upper sections." Sure enough, it was inverting before the boat could get up on course. It was too full to go to weather! They were simply unaware of this condition. No wonder they couldn't point!

The sailmaker was called and the genoa recut. The fix included cutting off only about an inch and a half of material at the deepest part of the luff. The sail now is flatter where it had been full and the boat can now point up, as one of the crew smiled, "...like before."

I saw an old bumper sticker on the back of a VW bus that read "Question Authority" and I thought of this incident. By all means do. That doesn't mean you should call your congressman about your boat speed. What I mean is we have knowledgeable pros at each harbor. Sailmakers, riggers, dive services to check the bottom and your maintenance service to discuss topside and deck conditions. Your PHRF representative and winning skippers can help with rating and racing issues too. Making use of these resources can help you determine how to cure a problem. Don't be afraid to ask!

But use your head. There are those that will simply try to sell you something. A quickie: The skipper of this boat we are discussing asked the son of a well-known marine industry pro about the pointing problem. One of his responses was to suggest the purchase of a costly carbon fiber spinnaker pole!! True!

Make plans *now* to get to Marina Del Rey for the Championships next year. Be the best! Race the best! It's preliminarily scheduled for the second weekend in August, right after the Santa Barbara to King Harbor race...One hour to MDR. Del Rey YC will host next year's event. Expect their usual warm hospitality and the expertise of the Puerto Vallarta and Santana 20 Worlds veteran Race Committees. They've indicated it will be an event not to be missed! More news on this as it develops.

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