



PHRF PERSPECTIVE
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Improving PHRF Racing: How To Make Handicap Racing Better! Now.

We can make a major impact in improving PHRF racing! And it *can* be accomplished...this season.

Observations over the last twenty years has many Race Committees using a basic method of establishing class splits that usually resemble the following: Cut the entries in half and make the classes even. For the larger events, some RCs divide by three. (Please save the fan mail-this is NOT an indictment of all Race Committees—some do consider the quality of racing when establishing class splits, but not all.)

The result is two classes of, as an example, 9 boats each with numerical rating spreads of -54 to 126 (3 minutes per mile) and 129 to 222 (A Cal 25 rates 222 giving us a rating band of more than one and a half minutes per mile!)

So we may wind up with a Transpac 52 in the same class as a Santana 30/30! It's doubtful that a 30/30 is going to be able to sail a mile long course within three minutes of a TP-52. And in the B Class, in this example we would have a J-30 or a Santa Cruz 27 racing a Cal 25. The slower boats can't save their time in most any condition unless the larger boat sinks.

As you can see, classes with wide rating bands combine totally different *kinds and sizes* of boats. Vagaries of wind strength, etc. have a lot more impact when really dissimilar boats race together.

Here's the fix: Simply put, LET'S EMULATE ONE-DESIGN or LEVEL RACING! The closer the rating between boats, the more similar the performance characteristics and the better and more competitive the racing will be. Race Committees and event organizers need to be more sensitive to this issue for BETTER racing. So the idea is to have your local race committee establish more than their usual number of PHRF classes.

Let's be specific: Instead of two classes with 8 or 10 boats in each with the typical 0-120 and 123+ classes, The goal is to specify three, four or (assuming a larger turnout) five classes that represent typical "rating clusters" that are usually apparent. For example, we may see a group of -18 to 35 Sec/mi. boats (IMS-type 40' & 50'), 51-72 boats (B-32, Express 37, Schock 35), 90-120 boats (Olsons, Hobies & 3030s), a group of 138-159 boats (SC 27, J-30, Ranger 33) and 174 to 222 (J24, Cat 30/27, Sant 20, Cal 25). If each class has at least four starters, the plan can work. There are often other types of boats entered that need to be integrated into these classes so nothing is cast in bronze.

Even if the classes are smaller than what we are accustomed to, the competition would be better and the racing much closer. Racers in slower rated boats would be able to stay in touch tactically with the faster rated boats in their class. When the class rating spread is above 45 seconds per mile or greater, the faster rated boats just get too far out ahead for any tactical consideration and the race could degrade into a parade or drag race.

I'd rather race in smaller classes of boats with similar performance for fewer trophies than have a chance to win a 5th place trophy. Unless it's the Intergalactic Championships, my opinion is that winning a 5th place trophy is like kissing your sister.

It makes for closer racing to have 2 trophies each for 7 or 8 boats racing in two separate classes rather than four trophies for a larger 15 boat class with a much wider rating range.

We've touched on this idea before in this column and a few Race Committees have become aware of this issue. However, each season new people join Race Committees and should become aware of the potential for much better handicap racing.

So if this sounds like a good idea, then you are hereby recruited to help make this happen in your harbor. Let's, as racers (crew and owners) assume some of the responsibility to get what we want. Here's what we need to do:

1. As you can imagine, this whole idea goes into the dumpster if only a few boats show up to race...so get on the phone or drop by the club and invite every racer within 18-21 sec/per mile of your ride or your boat to come out and race! The secret is to help them overcome reasons not to race. Help them find crew, help with the repair or whatever it takes!
2. Speak to one-design keel boat classes and, if they don't have enough entries for their own start, invite them to race in PHRF. It's good practice and promotes camaraderie.
3. Mentor any newbies at the club and try to convert the more competitive Cruiser Handicap racers—they might prefer NOT having their rating changed just because they did well in a race. The bigger the party, the better the fun.
4. Contact the Sail and/or Race Committee Chairperson in your club (and anyone else that you think may be influential in this regard) to let them know what you want. Express your preference for NARROWER CLASS SPLITS and better, closer handicap racing.

5. Try attending the next Sail Committee meeting to discuss this narrower rating band idea. But beware of the argument that it's too much extra work to start and finish two more classes...this is sailboat racing, not a steamship cruise. Here's an idea: Use two start lines (S/F lines on either side of the R/C boat) to double the number of classes starting at the same time. Ask them to try this on the NEXT regatta they are running. Also, get on the committee and help out when you can...you'll be more influential!

6. Most importantly, discuss this idea with the other racers at your club and in the harbor. If they're sympathetic to narrower rating bands and better handicap racing, put them to work to help make this happen. The narrow rating band idea needs to happen at the club level. The more racers that want it and let them know about it, the better the reaction by R/Cs.

Even if the turnout is light for a race and the splits are not as you would like, don't be discouraged. We will have gained mind share on this issue! Work the phones to promote a bigger turnout for the next race...even if it's at another club. Keep at it. It will be productive!

No one disagrees that PHRF racing would be better with narrower rating classes, but a few have voiced a preference for larger classes to race in. As the racing improves, more racers will come out and the fleets will grow in size. Let me know how it's going through your local PHRF Board representative!

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