

Northampton Sailing Club

A Beginner's Guide to Racing

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When are races held?

Almost every Sunday of the year! The 1st race of the day will start at 12.00. During the summer there are generally 3 races each day, lasting about an hour each, spaced at approximately 1 -hour intervals. Starts are normally at 12 noon, 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm. This may vary slightly when there is also an open meeting at the club.

In times of shorter daylight hours, two races are held starting at 12 noon and 2.00 pm.

There are also races on Tuesday and Thursday evenings in the summer. The start times are either 6.30 pm or 7.00 pm (see NSC handbook for details). Tuesday's races are specifically designed to encourage those with less racing experience and a unique personal handicap system gives everyone (including absolute beginners!) a chance of winning.

What boat can I sail?

Virtually any monohull dinghy may be raced. We use a handicapping system to allow boats of different types to race against one another and still let the best sailed one win!

How good at sailing do I need to be?

So long as you know what happens when you waggle the stick at the back, you're good enough! Racing is by far the quickest way of improving sailing skills and every one of us started off knowing very little and we've all got more to learn!

How do I let people know I'm new to racing?

Jim Milroy (The Club Manager) will be happy to provide you with a coloured ribbon to fly from your boom or masthead to say to people "Be nice to me please, I'm new to racing!"

What rules do I need to know?

- A boat on Port Tack (the wind coming from the left, the boom on the right) gives way to one on Starboard Tack (wind from right, boom on left). A boat on Starboard Tack with right of way may shout 'Starboard' if you are on Port Tack and they think you are about to get in their way.
- A boat to windward (closest to where the wind is coming from) gives way to a boat to leeward (the boat further away from the wind)
- At a mark, the boat on the inside, nearest the mark, will usually need to be given room to round the mark without hitting it or you!

These basic rules should prevent most collisions. There are many more and as you become more experienced it is worthwhile investing in the latest copy of the Racing Rules book. (e.g. *The Rules in Practice* by Bryan Willis, pub Fernhurst Books)

If you're displaying your ribbon then the more experienced sailors will be prepared for the fact that you are not familiar with the rules.

How do I enter a race?

The Officer Of The Day (OOD), who is in charge of that day's racing, will put a signing on sheet in the corner of the clubhouse by the fleet notice boards. Fill in your name and the class and sail number of the boat you'll be sailing.

What course do I sail?

The OOD will set a course and display it on a board at the stern of the committee boat. The board will show a series of letters, which indicate which marks (buoys) are going to be raced around, the side of the dinghy on which the mark should be left and how many laps.

- A red letter indicates a mark to be passed to Port (i.e. on the left side of the boat)
- A green letter indicates a mark to be passed to Starboard (i.e. on the right side of the boat)

Take note of whether you need to pass through the start-finish line each lap, this will be indicated by a board saying "Line".

There is a large painted map of the reservoir showing the approximate position of the marks on the terrace just outside the galley doors. If you are still unsure, ask someone to point out the buoys to you from the shore or even on the start line (We've all had this done for us at some point!). When on the water, follow someone who looks like he (or she) knows where (s)he's going!

How do I start?

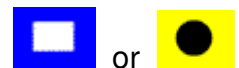
The start line is between the committee boat (which normally forms the starboard end of the starting line) and a dan buoy (a small orange buoy with a flag on top) marking the port end. Always start in the direction of the 1st mark!

The starting sequence goes as follows:

5 minutes to start - hoot of horn and **1st (warning) flag up**. For mixed fleet racing this will normally be a red flag with a yellow cross.



4 minutes to start - hoot of horn and **2nd (preparatory) flag up** this will be a blue flag with a white square in the centre or a yellow flag with a black spot. You do not need to know about the difference at this time, just be completely behind the line when the next horn goes.



1 minute to start – hoot of horn and **2nd (preparatory) flag down**

0 minutes - The start - hoot of horn and **1st flag down** and the race is on.



N.B. On Sundays there are occasions when the start sequence is 3, 1, go. Just ask before you go out on the water.

What about those horrible crowded start lines?

When you first start racing, you could hang back a bit at the start, crossing the line after all the keen ones have finished getting in each other's way. The Race Officers might even give you a special start, one minute after the others. This way, you'll not only have a quiet start, but be able to see what actually goes on at close quarters.

However there is another way.....Pursuit Races.

What's a Pursuit Race?

During the summer (from March onwards) the second race on a Sunday normally is a pursuit race. This could also be known as Hare and Hounds racing. Using the handicapping system, the boats taking part start in order of speed, slowest go first (e.g. Optimist or Topper) fastest go last (e.g. an RS700) and everyone else is spread out in between. The aim of the race is to overtake the slower boats and to prevent the faster boats overtaking you.

The race lasts one hour for the Solos, with slower boats having more time and faster boats having less.

The starts, because they are staggered, are much easier for the beginner. There will probably be only 2 or 3 other boats starting at the same time. The starting intervals are displayed on the notice board in the galley. The list is also printed in your Handbook and is available from the NSC web-site.

How do I finish?

In Pursuit Races, everybody finishes at once when the horn hoots, but keep sailing until the Committee Boat notes your position. Your position is when the horn goes, so no overtaking afterwards please!

In Handicap and Fleet racing, the finish line is normally the same as the start line. You'll either finish after the number of laps on the course board, or if the race was going to take too long, after the OOD has sounded 2 long hoots on the horn and put up the shortened course flag (a blue square on a white background).



Each boat home receives a hoot unless they were over the line at the start (OCS), have been seen not to have sailed the correct course, or have received outside assistance, that's to say, you have been rescued!

How do I find out where I finished?

In Pursuit and Fleet (except menagerie) racing the results are as seen on the water - the boat in the lead wins the race.

Handicap races, however, need to have calculations made by the OOD and club results team to make allowances for the different types of boat racing. This can sometimes be done on the day of racing (especially evening racing when there is only one race to calculate, and any way the OOD needs to fill his time while waiting for his dinner!)

We have a superb meal served by Elaine on both Tuesday and Thursday throughout the summer and this is a great chance to chat to other sailors and to seek advice or conduct an autopsy as to what went right and what went wrong. There is no point scoring (honest!) just a real enthusiasm to help those that want to learn. Otherwise the results are calculated regularly and posted on the club website and displayed on the notice board in the galley.

How do I qualify for a series?

Simply by sailing the number of races or more of a particular series detailed in the race programme as the number of races to count. For example to qualify for the 2006 Early Sunday Handicap Series, you needed to sail at least 7 races from the 11. If you do more, your best 7 results count and the rest can be discarded (the results software does this automatically).

Any other questions?

Just talk to anyone on the Sailing Committee or ask anybody dressed in sailing gear at the club! They'll help if they can. Promise!

For further information contact:

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or any other member of the Sailing Committee

Please check this page regularly as this is a new initiative that may develop in time