

FILE

PERIHELION

Newsletter 17



Comet Class Association

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

CHAIRMAN

STEVE KIBBLE	SECRETARY	"Ivybank", Broad Street, Cuckfield, West Sussex R17 5DY (0444 454730)
MARTIN PRESTON	TREASURER	6 Tangmere, Heywood Avenue, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 3JA (0628 826101)
JACKIE HUDSON		33 Warland Road, Plumstead, London SE18 2EX (081 854 2861)
HENRY JAGGERS		43 Haymill Road, Slough, Bucks SL1 6NE (06286 64237)
STUART LINES	NEWSLETTER EDITOR	1 Portobello Close, Chesham, Bucks HP5 2PL (0494 771430)
ANDREW PEARCE		8 Wellingtonia House, Church Road, Addlestone, Surrey KT15 1SH (0932 859273)
JOHN WINDIBANK		2 Dogwood Close, Northfleet, Kent DA11 8PJ (0474 325653)
DEREK COLEMAN	AUDITOR	5 Agars Place, Datchet, Berks SL3 9AH

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## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

As the Comet Association does not currently have a Chairman, the Chairman's address is missing from its usual place in Perihelion. On this occasion (and probably for the last time), the editor has exercised his privilege and reserved the first page for himself.

As usual I would like to thank all those members who have contributed to this edition. In particular, my thanks to those members who submitted copy for early editions but who were held over for lack of space. Nevertheless, please keep submitting articles, even if they do not appear in print immediately. Not all the Class Association events get reported in these pages and it would be nice to see at least a brief note of the results from every venue.

Later in this edition, you will find the last article in Keith Lamdin's series on Racing Your Comet. Keith has put a great deal of work into this, so next time you see him, shake his hand and tell him how he has helped you to improve your racing technique. I imagine Keith will now be devoting some time to racing instead of writing, so we definitely need more copy to fill the pages he has been occupying in recent issues!

In the last issue, I mentioned the idea of an Exchange and Mart scheme for second hand Comets. Nothing very dramatic happened at first, until one evening when I received details of two Comets for sale, promptly followed by a call from someone looking for a Comet. A deal was quickly struck with one owner and we can now welcome Mr. Pyke to the Association. Please encourage anyone in your club looking for a Comet to contact me, as I may have something suitable. Incidentally, I am sure we will all be pleased to know that while house prices have been falling, second-hand Comets are fetching a very good price.

Finally, on behalf of the Association Committee, may I wish all members a happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.

Stuart Lines

## PERIHELION

The Spring edition of Perihelion will be published in March. All contributions to me by the end of February, please.

Stuart Lines.

## MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Crikey, there's the gun. Is it that time already (as I pound through the dinghy park to my boat)? It is always the same. I never seem to be able to get to that line in time. Is it really worth trying to organise the Optimists and race my own boat as well? If only they could get themselves ready, sort out the course, pull the sprit tight, etc, etc; but no, it is always "Daddy this", "Daddy that" and Mummy cannot help; she is too busy sorting out the problems of the other children and the interminable questions of their parents. Maybe we really have allowed the Oppie fleet to get too big; maybe we should try and cut it down; maybe ... ah! here we are at the Comet. At least I got down early today to rig it, so it is more ready than usual. Now let's just swing it out of this slot down towards the slipway. Let me think; it's the usual three B's isn't it - bailer, burgee and ... um ... what's the other one? Can't remember! Anyway haven't got time; just let's launch the boat and get on with it. Into the water - that's it. Rudder in - yes. Dead flat calm today so should stay dry ... oh shhhhugarr! Now I remember the third B; it's the bung! Pull the boat out again. Come on, you wretched thing. (Why does the trolley always get stuck on the end of the slipway at the critical moment?) Ah! that's it. Round to the back and screw in the bung. There's the next gun; 3 minutes to go; now I really am short of time. Back in the water, get the trolley and throw it on to the bank (somehow).

Now, the starting line. Will I make it on time? Two or three hundred yards away and no wind; I really shouldn't paddle and I will not make it otherwise! It doesn't matter, it is a pretty low key race. What is it again today - something slightly different. Ah yes, there are just three races. The Oppies are starting last in a class of their own; otherwise it is two handicap fleets - I am the only Comet. There is the Coln Cup for those who have not won cups this season (that's me) and there is the Commodore's Cup which is really the competition for the cup winners.

Just about on the line now - I'm sure there is a port bias but there are very few other boats down this end - and the starting gun is about to go. There it is - helm over. Crikey! Dead flat it certainly is; the water is like a mirror. Anyway, I can just about keep it moving and I was right about the port bias; only an Enterprise in front and now a Laser. At this rate I could get to the first mark in third or fourth place on the water; what about that? That Enterprise is really going quite well. Funny though, I thought that chap was a cup winner, I wonder why he is not in the other fleet ... oh no!! He is in the other fleet and so is everybody else - except me! I've started too soon with the Commodore's Cup fleet; I should have started with the rest. They are all back at the line waiting for their gun. I was doing so well too. I'll never repeat that. Oh well, there's nothing for it except to head back there.

There they go - that's the start for my fleet and I'm still heading back towards the line. With a dead flat calm and no wind it will take ages to get there. Only the Oppy fleet to go now; I wonder if I will get back to the line before their start. Nearly at the line now and there go the Oppies. I think I am back behind the line now. 180 degree turn and off we go again. The wind (if that's what you call it) has not changed. The port end of the line still has it and if I'm lucky, virtually no tacking to the windward mark.

Well, this will be interesting. My own start (all on my own!) 10 seconds after the Oppies and my fleet three minutes ahead of that. Well, the Oppies certainly are not moving and at least I seem to be getting back on even terms with them (but they do have a PYS of 174!) - now there are only one or two ahead of me. That's something and the first mark hasn't yet been reached by any of my fleet. Maybe I will catch that tail-end Laser after all. Now, let's see. Plenty of time here to experiment with the best place to sit. Must keep the transom out of the water. What does Perihelion say? Sit on the seat beside the centre board and put your feet on the opposite side of the boat - must sit down to leeward. Gently does it. Hmmm! We seem to be making some progress like that and I'm certainly gaining on the tail end of my fleet. That Laser is now getting quite close. Is it just me or have I got a breath that they don't have down there? Stay still. No sudden movements. I wonder what the boat looks like from the shore. That very fine bow with almost vertical stem ... I wonder if there is any mileage in sitting on the foredeck and lifting the stern much further out of the water. It might look odd but would end up with much less of the hull in the water. Gently does it. Up beside the mast and now let's see if we make any better progress. This is looking good; catching the Laser fast now (well, relatively!). I do believe this is making a difference and now as I round the windward mark I have actually passed one or two boats but the water round here is just like glass. Keep the momentum going - no roll-tacking of course - not allowed any more - never was, really.

Now over there - about 50 or 100 yards - there is a little creasing on the water. It is in the wrong direction but at least it looks like a draught. Everybody else is sitting on the mirror. I'm getting some strange looks from Toppers, Lasers, Enterprises and a 420. Still sitting on the foredeck; the boat must look ridiculous, but at least it is moving, and moving faster than anybody else in this fleet. Nearly into that creased patch of water. This is better; my target must now be that Streaker - the same Yardstick as me - and driven by a chap who has been sailing it for years - very canny. Blast! He's got a little breeze and has pulled away again. I must be 100 yards behind him now. Anyway, I have got a little breath over here. Is that water lapping at the bows? Most of the rest of the fleet is well behind now and there is the Streaker. I seem to be gaining on him again; I can get off the foredeck now. There is the shorten course flag as the leading boats, Lasers and Enterprises, round the final mark - only one lap today and hardly surprising. Even that is too long really. The Streaker is ahead at the final mark and the wind is dying again. If I stay on this tack a touch longer, I just might get up-wind of him. Let's see t..a..c..k..i..n..g..... now! - and the line is at an angle; I hope I have judged this correctly. Well, well, I do believe the Streaker is in a hole! I think I may just make it to the line before him. Got him - and there's my finishing gun. That was close.

Post script: I didn't have time to do the next race - more Oppies to see to - so I lent the boat to Frank Collier who had always wanted a go. The next edition of the Bowmoor Newsletter duly came out and, would you believe it, the author noted that the morning race (my race!) was "won by a Comet, a new boat to the club, sailed by - fame at last - Frank Collier..." It wasn't him! It was me! Is there no justice? And nobody will notice the mistake, except Frank and me.

Mervyn Cully  
Comet owner and Bowmoor S.C. optimist Flotilla Leader (but only just)

[Remember - you read about it first in Perihelion - Ed.]

Having rushed into print after receiving my shiny new Comet, I thought that it might be interesting to consider what has happened since then, from my point of view. This is of one at the greyer end of the age scale, sailing regularly from a small family-based club on the North Kent coast. The situation is important because it means waves and tide. The first, especially a short chop, does produce problems for the Comet when beating, probably due to its lack of weight (such a boon going up the beach after a race!) and length. This is not important in class racing, but in General Handicap, or racing with narrow bands of Portsmouth Numbers, as in my club, the rest of the fleet does tend to forge ahead on the beat. On the plus side, the Comet has proved to be very stable under these conditions.

There seem to be some "Golden Rules":

1. Tie a knot in the mainsheet. In my case the mainsheet just fits around the length of the boom. This makes running more predictable.
2. Also when running, move your weight well back. I find it easier, more comfortable and probably more stable owing to the lower centre of gravity, to lie on the bottom of the boat.
3. When gybing, keep the boat level and move to the other side before initiating the gybe. In a blow, leave the mainsheet slack.
4. When beating in a chop and wind, get the weight a bit further back and tighten everything within sight! A flat sail in a blow makes an enormous difference both to the effort needed to sit out and pointing ability.
5. On a reach, loosening the outhaul to give the sail more "belly" is equivalent to hoisting a spinnaker.

The Portsmouth Yardstick Number has proved a problem for all boats in a tidal situation. After all, a boat making 3 knots against a 3 knot tide is not going anywhere, however big its P.Y. Number. Calculations over the season tend to give silly results, in my case ranging from 112 in very light conditions to 141 when it was really blowing. Our main opposition is the Pacer fleet (PY 126) which beats us out of sight when the conditions become tough, but drops back with a calm sea and light wind (an unusual phenomenon lately). I suspect that a P.Y. Number of 126 would be more appropriate under sea conditions.

I was very pleased to see the introduction of grab rails for use in capsizes. I know that you should neatly and nimbly step onto the centre plate as the dinghy goes over, but I usually find myself swimming, especially when my daughter has anointed the mainsheet with suntan lotion! The Hawk wind indicators near deck level are fine on a beat or close reach but tend to tell lies when the wind is abaft the beam, due to the wind reflected from the sail. I did obtain a fitting for a burgee, which I believe is now legal but did not fit it, as it looked as though it could produce wear on the sail sleeve, so I have reverted to the streamer of Topper days. Tell-tails have also taken some of the guesswork out of sail setting.

In conclusion, I must say it is the most comfortable dinghy that I have ever sailed and that its performance off the wind is exhilarating. I recently planed for over a mile during a long distance race in a very lumpy sea, expending scarcely any physical effort except in keeping straight to avoid disaster. It was said of aircraft in the Spitfire and Mosquito era that if they looked good then they were good and I am sure that this applies to the Comet; the designer deserves every credit. A length of 11ft 4ins must produce some disadvantages compared to longer boats, but within these limitations it is a real pleasure to sail.

John Finch

## BUILDER'S REPORT

It has been quite a while since you last heard from me, so there is a lot to report. Interest in the Comet has stayed high but in the present economic climate, the orders have not been quite so easily forthcoming.

The sales figure listed in the Class review of Yachts and Yachting is 93 for 1990 year ending September, whereas last year's figure was 104. There has been quite a healthy market for 2-3 year old Comets this year, so obviously some people have bought these rather than new.

A good second-hand market is healthy for the class but it seems the boats that are in short supply are the 4 years and older boats, as not that many were produced anyway. Southampton Boat Show was blessed with excellent weather and resulted in some end-of-season interest and orders.

The Comet name is going to be a bit more widely heard next year as there is an addition to our range of one! The new dinghy is to be called Comet Duo and will be unveiled at the London Boat Show. I don't want to turn this into a sales talk so I won't go on about the new boat, but I think the original Comet should benefit from the extra publicity the new dinghy will generate.

London Boat Show this year really looks promising and well worth a visit. An "extension" called Earls Court 2 has been added, which has enabled a better layout with all boats downstairs and all dinghies grouped together. If you have not been for a few years, I would strongly recommend it.

After London, Margaret Hylton and I are heading North with the Comets to Glasgow for the Scottish Boat Show, closely followed by Birmingham and Sailboat '91 at Crystal Palace, where I shall be torn between the warmth of the Comet Class stand inside, and a Comet Duo outside in the cold!

I hope you all have a Merry Christmas and, dare I say, a prosperous New Year.

Andrew Simmons.

## WILSONIAN OPEN MEETING

It is quite an impressive spot; you approach the club across a field that opens out into a marvellous view of the river Medway as the ground slopes away from you. The track is very narrow and twists down to the river and the large dinghy park and very modern club house, with good facilities and a bar and all and the members think it's great!

The club is so nice that the members seemed reluctant to share the spot and made it extremely hard to find this year, not a sign post anywhere. I am told that Comet owners were heard to mutter darkly about the bad planetary aspects as they wandered the streets of Hoo, looking for a sign or a thunderbolt, or just the entrance.

Eight visitors eventually arrived to be told that Dave Hudson was in hospital with a broken leg, hence the lack of directions.

Light winds and a mild sunny morning greeted the 10 starters and the race officer got the fleet away, after a general recall, on a course which took the fleet on a tour of 9 of the Medway navigation buoys. Local helm B. Matthews led round the first mark, with J. Withall of Aylesbury, J. Windibank (Gravesend) and K. Bullock (Kingsmead) hard on his rudder. Withall bore off to clear his wind and to get inshore out of the tide, while Matthews and Windibank continued a straight course for the next mark which paid off. Windibank came off the third mark on a puff and sailed over Matthews to take the lead. The fleet then split into two groups, one each side of the river, but with neither group gaining an advantage, Windibank went on to win, with Withall second and A. Pearce from Kingsmead coming through the fleet after a bad start for third.

The second race started with Withall, Pearce and Bullock pulling away and, with the wind dropping, the race became a procession. Nature was determined, however, that no-one would forget the day and proceeded to try and empty the whole of the year's quota of rain on the competitors in 10 minutes. Feeling rather generous and heeding earlier calls for a sign, the rain was accompanied by wondrous forked lightning which flashed and exploded around the competitors with Wagnerian ferocity. The race ended with Withall first, follows by Pearce, Bullock and Preston.

With the weather running out of stair rods, the race officer broke all records in starting the last race, and a very soggy, depleted fleet started with the wind stubbornly refusing to fill in. Withall led at the first mark, with Pearce, Windibank and Thompson close. Pearce went low, which put him ahead at the next mark, only to sail into a hole of what remained of the wind, letting Windibank through, who struggled to finish against a strong tide.

### Overall Result

1st J. Windibank	Gravesend S.C.	2nd J. Withall	Aylesbury S.C.
3rd A. Pearce	Kingsmead S.C.	4th K. Bullock	Kingsmead S.C.
5th M. Preston	Kingsmead S.C.	6th R. Ballam	Crawley Mariners
7th B. Matthews	Wilsonian S.C.	8th S. Thompson	Crawley Mariners
9th F. Cauter	Chipstead S.C.	10th K. Drury	Wilsonian S.C.

John Windibank

## THE PRODIGAL RETURNS

Circa 1986, I purchased Comet "Number Six" and sailed it with considerable success on my local water, JCB Sailing Club. Encouraged by this we joined the Comet travellers in 1988. The racing was very enjoyable and I was struck by how friendly everyone was.....

As a last fling before the "fat and forty syndrome" struck, I purchase a Laser. Scintilla was a beautiful, fast and very powerful boat. I must admit that I never fully mastered the techniques of sailing with centre sheeting, an enormous tiller extension and a very low boom (ouch!). The Northern circuit was much more convenient for me and the savings on petrol allowed the purchase of a new sail!

The series introduced me to a number of good Northern clubs; the High Peak reservoirs can hold some brave winds which brought the abilities of Scintilla and my puny efforts into sharp relief. However, I must say I found some rather quaint uses of the racing rules not to my tastes. (I thought these were framed to avoid collisions, not to use collisions to exclude one's rivals) I also observed that the classroom atmosphere was distinctly cooler than I remember in the Comet circle.

Please, please note that Laser sailing is intensely competitive and might be regarded as state of the art, but the effect on me as a gregarious under-achiever was one big turn-off!

Upon returning to the Comet class like the prodigal son in 1990, I was delighted to hear that your numbers have increased. As a percentage growth rate, this must be one of the fastest growing classes in the country.

A trip to Redditch revealed one of two old faces and the standard of racing had improved considerably. A longer journey to Chipstead, courtesy of Chris and Audrey Robertson, did not provide as many reunions as I thought, and the "intricate" wind reminded me of JCB lake. However it was good to see so many Comets, particularly at the mass start of the last race; it made a photo that I shall treasure.

So to summarise, yes, I am glad to be back in a boat that demands enough but not too much from me. Yes, I am glad to be back in a small class where emphasis on being friendly to one's competitor is important. I believe that small groups fight for their collective identity much more than large ones.

But Comets are increasing, and as they nucleate into groups of five or ten at a club, the need to go afield to race against one's kin get less. As this "travelling" reduces, so the open faced smiles of strangers linked by the bond of Comet ownership becomes scarcer.

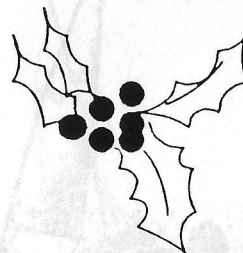
Please do not let it die out; maintain that "small class magic" by attending open meetings or holding your own. It is not as difficult as you might think.

Above all, do not let the Comet become just a second division Laser, the boat and the founders of your class association deserve better than that!

Will Turner  
Comet 85 "Hyperbola"

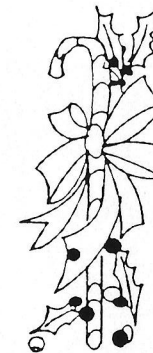
*Dinghy  
Leisure*

 **Comet**



Seasons Greetings  
to the  
Comet Class Association

*Margaret Hylton*



**Margaret Hylton**  
**The Comet Dealer**

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Comet Open at Gunfleet S.C.

Comets going up the first beat

(Photograph by David Hudson)

## RACING YOUR COMET - PART 4

So far in this series I have considered racing from the viewpoint of tuning and sailing the boat for boatspeed, using the natural wind effects of shifts and bends and the basic tactics of preserving and enhancing your position whilst racing on a leg of the course.

In effect, the race has been one long leg and, if you sail fast, get the wind right and keep out of trouble tactically, then you will finish in a fairly good position.

Unfortunately, (or fortunately, if you're behind!) real races are not quite so simple. They involve arbitrary start and finish points and a number of course legs bounded by turning marks and all of these features provide significant opportunities for making real gains (or losses) in your race order position. Even then, the position is not as clear cut as it seems because these interrupting features have a lesser effect on large water courses when compared to inland waters. The relatively few long legs on open water should be compared to the many laps involving many legs and marks on a compact inland water for a duration often less than the average sea race.

Inland, boat speed, wind effect and tactics will rarely compensate for a really poor start at the back of the fleet or a misjudged mark rounding which allows a bunch of boats to sail through and leave you in dirty water. Such mistakes leave you with little opportunity to get really clear and concentrate on your own race. Instead, you end up forever fighting in the melee of mid-fleet boats, forgetting the basics of racing and allowing the leaders to sail progressively clear of the field to a point that can never be retrieved, except through luck or divine intervention.

So, at these key points of the race, it is essential to switch your mindset momentarily away from race speed and concentrate wholly on taking advantage of the opportunities offered by each fresh situation and, equally important, minimising the disadvantages that may befall you if others, more prepared and flexible, turn the situation in their favour. Having overcome the situation at the start or rounding marks then it is equally important to switch back to race mode as soon as possible and concentrate once again on boatspeed, wind and tactics.

I will deal with the requirements of starting, mark rounding and finishing in the order they are encountered in a race.

**STARTING:** Firstly, I will consider the most common case of a windward start and then cover leeward starts separately.

It is important to remember that the purpose of a good start is to obtain clear wind and water as soon as possible in order to meet the needs of your first leg strategy and ensure a position among the fleet leaders at the first mark. Being first over the start line is not an absolute guarantee of a good position in the race, although the two often follow, due mainly to the overwhelming advantages of clear wind and water. In planning your start, you need to decide whereabouts in the line you wish to start having considered the possible options provided by the Race Officer.

If the line is set unbiased to the first leg and there are no major strategy considerations, then consider a start at the starboard end of the line to take advantage of right of way but be prepared to mix it with a large number of the fleet.

If the line is biased then start at either starboard or port end of the line to take advantage of the reduction in distance given by the bias, but be prepared to mix it even more with the fleet who will also want to use the bias.

If there are strategic considerations of tide, wind shifts or bends, calms or rough water, then start at the end of the line enabling you to follow the strategy even to the extent of being slightly late over the line rather than be forced away by the fleet to the side of the course which is unfavourable.

If there is no line bias, no strategic considerations and you do not wish to mix it with the fleet then try a start in the middle of the line. By concentrating on a good clean start you can often quickly obtain clear wind whilst waiting to decide any specific strategic options once the major fleet positions are known, (fig 1).

Note that even if you are starting in the middle or at the port end, you are advised to still start on starboard tack, as the chances of a successful port tack start off a fair line in any size of competitive fleet are very slim. At a time when boatspeed is inevitably low, the loss of momentum by being caught on port by a row of starboard tack boats is disastrous for your chances. Even with a very heavily biased line favouring a port end start, the smart option is a starboard tack start at the port end with an early tack on to port as soon as clear water develops.

I vividly remember a Graduate start at Grafham where the whole fleet sailed along the line on starboard, unable to point across the line and, at the gun, tacked simultaneously on to port for the first leg - no-one tried the port tack approach and, indeed, there would have been no way through.

One of the problems of deciding which is the best positional option is in determining if the line is biased and, if so, by how much. The easiest way is by sailing along the line in the period before the start and watching the set of the mainsail as you go in either direction. If the line is unbiased then the same sails setting will be basically correct in either direction.

If, in sailing towards the port end, the sail needs to be sheeted closer than when sailing away from the port end, then the line is port-end biased; obviously the reverse occurs for a starboard bias, (fig 2). This method relies on the wind remaining from a constant direction and therefore care must be taken if the wind is shifty but several attempts over a short time just before the start will usually determine any significant bias. An alternative method is to start close-hauled at either end of the line and view the relative angle of the other starting mark compared to your course. If you are at the upwind end of the line then the other mark will appear relatively behind you whilst if you are at the downwind end of the line, the other mark will appear relatively ahead of you, (fig 3).

One final point about pre-start positioning is that you should not get to windward of the starboard end of the line as you will have no rights in coming to the line to start over boats approaching the line to leeward of yourself and you may find that you are progressively shut out from the line.



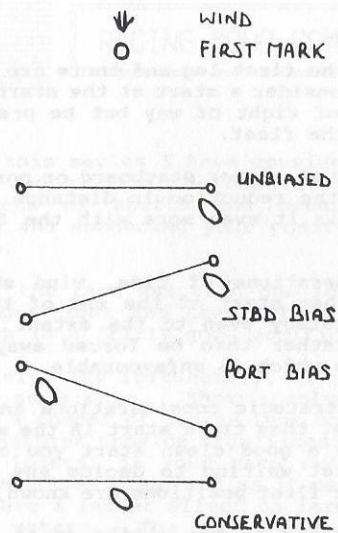


FIGURE 1

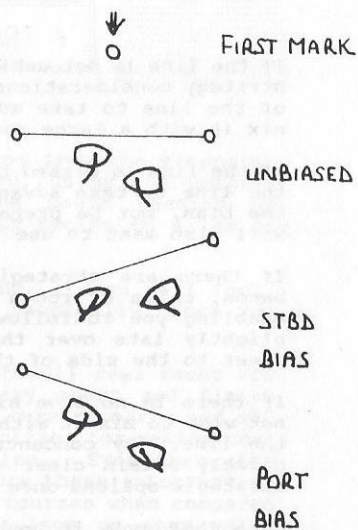


FIGURE 2

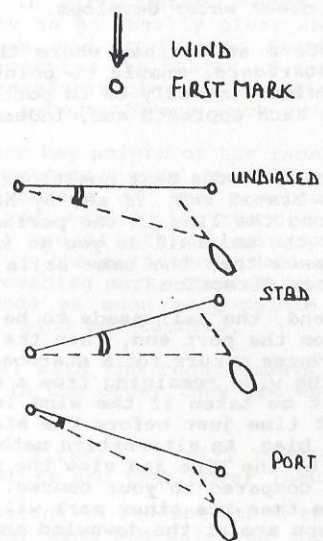


FIGURE 3

"STAKING"

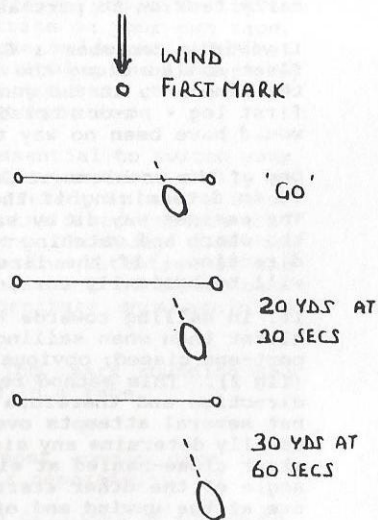


FIGURE 4

Having decided where to start along the line, the next problem is to decide how to get there on time by which is meant crossing the line with the maximum possible speed as soon as possible after the start gun. It is absolutely useless to be in the right place but with no speed at the start and then allow the rest of the fleet to sail straight over you. Equally, it is essential not to get to the line too soon or you find yourself being shunted forward by the boats behind and having no place to go other than over the line and back to the rear of the fleet. Timing is all!

There are two basic methods of timing your run to the start and a third which is a combination of the others - I call them:

- staking (a place);
- timing (a run); and
- milling (about a point)

Staking a place requires positioning the boat as close as possible to the desired starting point between a minute and 30 seconds before the start of the race. Then you idle with the sail flapping near head to wind and virtually stationary. This takes some considerable practice in boat control and is very likely to some interference from other boats but, by virtue of the short distance to cross the line, it is easy to judge the acceleration required to make a timely and fast start, (fig 4).

Timing a run may be done by sailing away from the desired starting point for a period of time and then returning along the same track in such a way as to arrive back at the line with good speed at the gun. If you are a good judge of time, distance and boat speed then just start from a point behind the line and sail such as to arrive at the line in time through continuous changes to your course, sail settings and boat speed. Again, this method is open to interference from other boats but, with practice, it can be effective particularly in relatively small fleet or rather long lines where space is not at a premium, (fig 5).

Both the above methods are rather predetermined and inflexible with a risk of disruption due to events outside your control and with very little in the way of a fall-back position.

Milling about a point is a technique which employs all of the above ideas and aims to drop into a space near the required point of the line at the last possible moment, already with good boat speed, and prior to the final acceleration towards the line for the gun. The advantage of this method is flexibility of approach which allows all of your options to be kept open until the very last moment in the starting period and enables you to avoid undue interference from other boats. Clearly, there can be a problem when no space appears, but then you cut your losses, sailing behind the majority of the fleet if necessary until you find clear wind and can reassess the position. Generally, there will be a space and it often appears in the very last seconds as people panic and drive off down the line or hesitate and hold back behind the line - keep your nerve and be patient. Whichever system you employ, there is one final point which is essential to convert a good start into a good first 100 yards up the beat. In the last few boat lengths to the line, edge as close as possible to the boats to windward and keep as far as possible away from the boats to leeward. This gives you the vital yards of space to allow you to drive the boat off the line by sailing just a touch free instead of having to pinch and starve your boat speed in order to keep clear of the leeward boats. Once your good boat speed has been converted into a small lead over the adjacent boats then concentrate on pointing as close as possible to the wind.

It is also very important that, irrespective of how good a start you make, you get into the normal race mode as quickly as possible. This is easy after a good start and is a matter of getting on the right shift for the correct side of the course as soon as possible. Even after a poor start, the principle still applies and you must attempt, even at the cost of short term loss, to get clear wind and get on track regarding your race strategy.

Although unusual, you may occasionally have to start on a downwind leg and here the priorities are different. Because of the major impact of the wind shadow created by the whole fleet closely bunched during the first leg, position on the line is much less important than the ability to obtain clear wind. It is a case of clear wind at all costs and if this can be achieved on the preferred side of the course, then so much the better.

If the start is a reach then either be at extreme windward or leeward ends of the line. If you start to windward then be absolutely sure of getting there exactly on time or you will be rolled over successively by boats behind coming up with greater speed. If you start as far as possible to leeward then immediately bear away from under the fleet in order to get even further clear before trying to head for the next mark. Whatever, do not start in the middle of the line with part of the fleet to windward trying to blanket you and the remainder of the boats to leeward stopping you from bearing away and looking for clear wind.

If the start is a dead run then much the same principles apply in starting at either end of the line and then having even greater freedom to spread out and get clear of the fleet which will have a tendency to bunch together in the middle of the leg to the first mark. It may even pay to start a little late with clear wind and good boat speed from behind the fleet, avoiding any chance of poor wind by blanketing until you see where the spaces begin to appear.

**ROUNDING THE MARKS:** The general principle is always to try and round a mark from one leg of the course to another leg, with or without tacking or gybing, in such a way as to:

- maintain boat speed at the maximum possible;
- avoid sailing any undue extra distance; and
- start the next leg in the tactically correct position.

This latter point is essential to either be able to protect your weather side from boats behind or ease away to leeward to a preferred course, if required. In rounding the windward mark without a need for tacking, the situation is quite straightforward. Come into the mark from slightly above the lay-line, with good boat speed and the boat held well upright. At the mark, bear off quite sharply and use the boatspeed to obtain momentum on the new course. As you bear off, the boat will heel slightly to windward, making it easier to free the boom to the required sail setting without hitting the mark with the boom end and also keeping it out of the water where it can act as the pivot into a broach. Then, as you trim the boat back to an upright position, you are in an ideal position to raise the board to the downwind position.

Life is much nor difficult if you have to tack round the mark and, if you are clear of other boats, it is always better to tack a short distance away from the mark and have a short leg up to the mark. Always ensure that, with all the worst case conditions of waves, wind shifts or interference from other boats, you can tack and have the time to regain momentum to bear away around the mark with speed or you will stop and find other boats rolling over you either at the mark or in the first few lengths down the next leg, (fig 6).

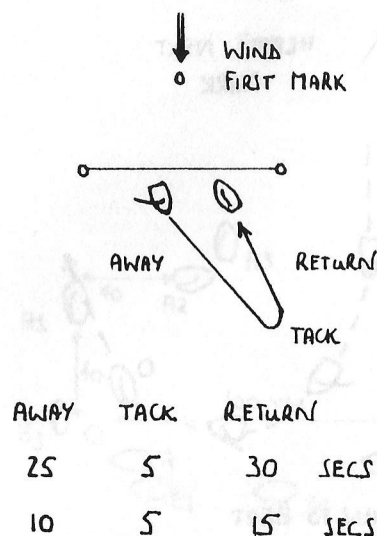


FIGURE 5

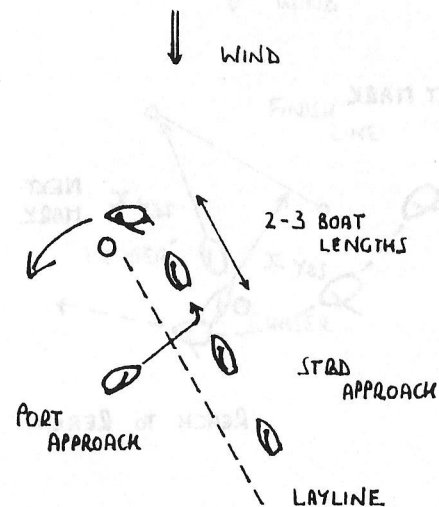


FIGURE 6

## "TIMING"

Whatever, never tack short of the mark or layline and then pinch up to the mark or attempt to shoot the mark by luffing towards wind. This technique, which works quite well in larger, heavier boats, is extremely difficult to control in the Comet which, because of its light weight, loses momentum quickly once the sails are not filling fully.

In rounding the mark at the end of the leeward legs, it again depends on whether you need to gybe or not and whether you are heading onto another reach or back up the beat. The principles remain that you are attempting to retain momentum, save distance and retain positional control for the new leg.

If there is no gybe involved, then approach the mark on as wide a sweep as possible and, as you head gently up to round the mark, slowly pull in the mainsheet to the required setting for the new leg and adjust the board. The objective is to pass very close to leeward of the mark whilst already being set for maximum speed on the new leg, whether it be a reach or a beat, (fig 7a & 7b).

It is, again, more difficult if the rounding manoeuvre includes a gybe as there is a lot of boat handling required to complete the gybe successfully, let alone worry about the mark. For this reason and, assuming you have the room to do so, I would go wide of the mark and gybe early, getting this manoeuvre out of the way before going straight into the rounding with the object of achieving the best possible results. Splitting the requirement into two parts like this means that you are not overloaded by trying to do everything at once and usually provides a better result. Of course, sometimes the proximity of other boats precludes the wide, two step approach and the rounding has to be achieved in one action - then you find out how good your boat handling really is, particularly on a dead run to windward rounding.

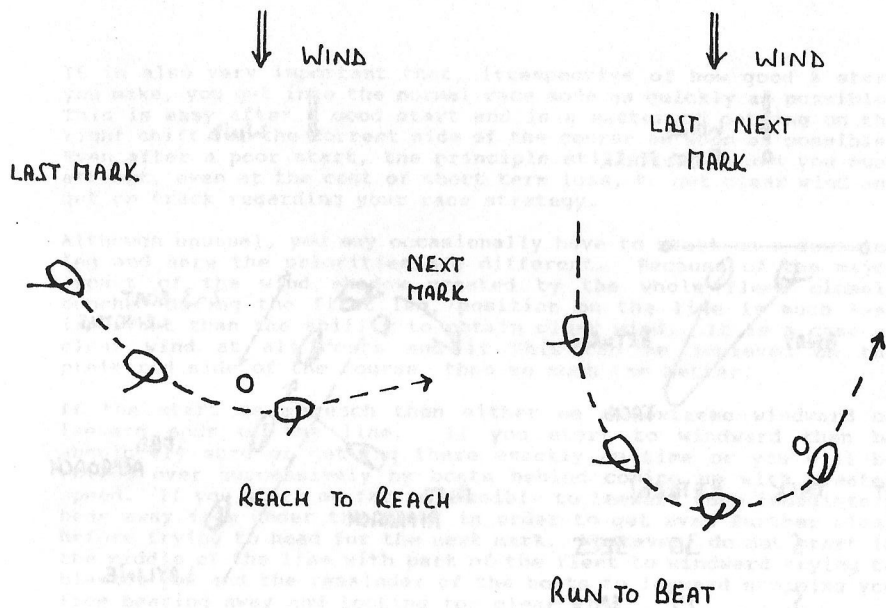
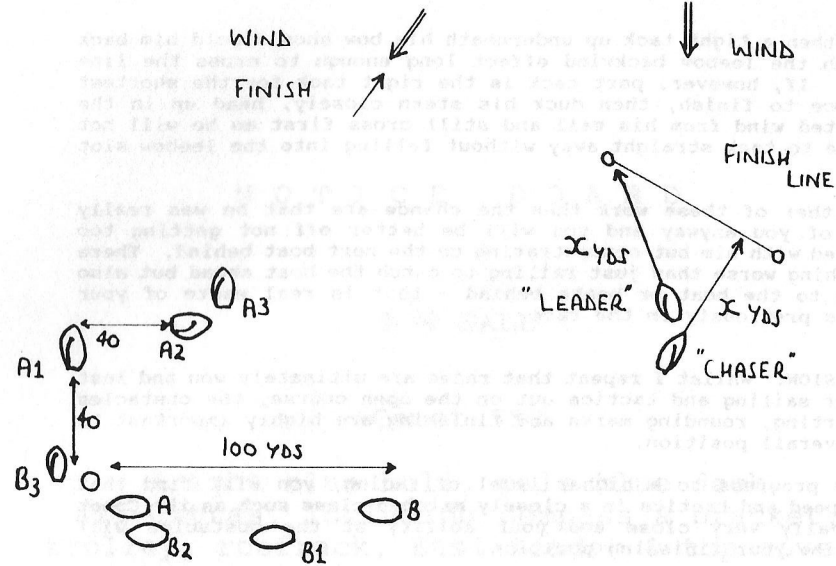


FIGURE 7a

FIGURE 7b

Mark rounding is a matter of practice and having a fairly structured approach to the sequence of events required. The most logical sequence is to set the board for the new leg first, (a small loss of speed due to putting the board down early is acceptable if you get a better rounding as a result), then to start pulling the sheet in ready for the new leg and to start sitting out ready for the new wind direction. If I am coming onto the beat in any wind, I get out on the straps before I take much more than the slack out of the sheet. In this way the boat comes really upright, or even slightly over to windward, and it makes it easier to balance the heeling forces as you sheet in for the beat. The trick in practice is to be able to follow the sequence quickly and smoothly, every time, without having something snarl up and stop you sailing quickly away from the mark. If you cannot perform a smooth accurate rounding of the mark without other boats around you then, in the pressure and pace of a race you will really struggle. So, like the practice required for boat control when stationary, do just practice going round marks when you are able to have a session sailing quietly around your water.

**FINISHING:** Finishing is ultimately the most important part of the race in that, having obtained a position within the race order, if you lose that position shortly before the finish then there is very little opportunity to recover the place. Therefore I like to consider the finish as being from the last mark to the finish line and, during this part of the race, careful cover is required to preserve your position. Of course, this is most important during class racing or with boats of equal handicap - if you have got a Mirror on your tail around the last mark, then it is all over anyway and covering is irrelevant.



"HALF LEAD" COVER

FIGURE 8

FINISH LINE BIAS

FIGURE 9

Usually the last leg to the finish will be a beat and this does give a tactical opportunity to establish a cover position through the "half lead" system. Watch your nearest opponents as you round the last mark to establish an estimation of the lead you hold and continue on the rounding tack for about half of that distance. then tack back towards your opponent and tack again just before they reach the mark and begin the beat behind you. You will now be pretty well upwind when they start the beat and you can easily cover every move they make up the beat, (fig 8).

It is essential that you have tacked back to the rounding tack before they are on the wind, otherwise they can quickly put in a tack which will leave you tacking twice to their once at a point when you are sailing slowly and they still have momentum from the rounding of the mark. Obviously, as the beat progresses, a group of boats behind you will split tacks and you cannot cover them all. However, there will usually be an option for covering the nearest one or a small group and, if one boat takes a flyer and comes out on top, then at least you will have preserved the majority of your lead.

In covering boats up the final beat, it is still important to keep an eye on the boats ahead and the finish line itself. If there is any bias to the line across the course direction from the last mark or any strategic considerations, such as tide of shifts, then you may still gain a place from the unwary, particularly if you can sail a shorter distance to one end of the line, (fig 9).

Unlike the start, it is not so critical to approach the line on starboard because there are fewer boats about and sharing the available water. It is distance and boat speed that counts and, if on approaching the line to finish, you get caught by a starboard

boat, then a tight tack up underneath his bow should hold him back through the leebow backwind effect long enough to cross the line ahead. If, however, port tack is the right tack for the shortest distance to finish, then duck his stern closely, head up in the deflected wind from his sail and still cross first as he will not be able to tack straight away without falling into the leebow slot again.

If neither of these work then the chance are that he was really ahead of you anyway and you will be better off not getting too involved with him but concentrating on the next boat behind. There is nothing worse than just failing to catch the boat ahead but also losing to the boat or boats behind - that is real waste of your efforts previously in the race.

CONCLUSION: Whilst I repeat that races are ultimately won and lost by your sailing and tactics out on the open course, the obstacles of starting, rounding marks and finishing are highly important to your overall position.

As you progress to a higher level of racing, you will find that boat speed and tactics in a closely matched class such as the Comet are really very close and your ability at the obstacles will determine your finishing position.

Good starting ability reaps enormous dividends as the leaders sail in good clear wind and water, whilst the ability to round marks efficiently offers opportunities to gain places quite painlessly and, sometimes, without your opponents even really noticing! Finally, sensible racing to the finish line should at least ensure you hold on to your hard fought position and may just sometimes enable you to snatch a place at a point where there is no comeback for your opponents.

SUMMARY: I hope that this series will have encouraged you to start racing or attempt to improve your racing. Ultimately, racing is a logical extension to your sailing and, in most cases, races are won and lost by pure sailing ability. All the racing techniques in the world will not enable you to win unless you can sail competently and understand the requirements of sailing in shifts, tides and waves.

But, assuming you can sail as well as the next man, then being a little street-wise on the race course can help your place enormously and, conversely, being in a competitive race fleet can help your pure sailing by continuously giving you a target to reach.

I said at the beginning of the series that you should set an objective for the season as a means of quantifying your progress as you became more experienced at racing.

The question is - did you, and did you reach it?

In my first season of serious racing for three years after injury, I set myself the modest target of sailing enough Open's to qualify for the Travellers Trophy and to finish in the top six. I was pleased to achieve this, just, and the win in a Championship race was an unexpected bonus.

Do go racing and do work to sensible objectives - it gives real satisfaction for your efforts.

Keith Lamdin

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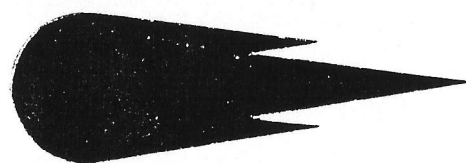
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