



Racing for Cruisers

or

"How to race your house without spilling your drink"

Vallarta Yacht Club Race Committee

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What's all this racing stuff anyway?



Yeah, right. I'm going to race my house?

Racers are racers and cruisers are cruisers, right? Well, perhaps. Certainly if you look around the bar of a big yacht club after a Wednesday night beer can race, you'd be hard pressed to find anyone who is living on the boat they were just racing, and anyone at the bar who would be that interested in the latest refrigeration repairs you just completed.

Here in Banderas Bay it's different. We are blessed with a lot of new and old friends who are cruising their boats, often in transit to some other locations. At Vallarta Yacht Club, we like to put together races that give our cruising friends a chance to shake out their sails, and have a little fun doing it, before the next adventure.

The intention of this document is to give cruising folks a little background on how racing works, and specifically how we might do it a little differently in Banderas Bay.

The most important message here is that **WE WANT YOU TO HAVE FUN!**

You call this fun?

Heck yeah! What could be more fun than charging your home at another cruiser's home at crazy speeds within inches of having to call your insurance company?

Seriously, there's nothing like the feeling of charging across a start line with a dozen or so of your cruising buddies' boats around you, rushing up to a turning mark so you can set your spinnaker and run down to another mark so you can take the spinnaker down and put up another sail so you can rush up to another turning mark so you can set your spinnaker again. No, wait.

Admit it, any two boats going in generally the same direction are racing

When was the last time you were going generally in the same direction of another nearby boat? I'll bet you started trimming sails and comparing your speed with them, didn't you?

Darn it, let's be honest, racing big yachts is about as much fun as you can have with your clothes on. There's nothing like a large sailboat sailing fast. I'll put a grin on your face that'll take days to remove, and provide endless stories for the bar.

What's in it for me?

You get bragging rights, maybe a trophy, and stories and memories you'll take with you for a lifetime. How cool is that?

Registering your boat for a race



“Okay, I'm convinced. What do I need to do?”

Generally, you need to register your yacht for whatever race you intend to participate in. At VYC, we have an online process for registering your boat at the beginning of the racing season that will cover you for everything except the Banderas Bay Regatta, which requires separate online registration.

When you register, you'll be asked normal stuff about yourself, contact numbers, address, etc. You'll also be asked not-so-normal stuff like the size of your boat, the length of headsail foot compared to your J ('scuse me?) and a lot of other measurement details about your boat. Most of this is information for the folks providing your handicap, which we'll talk about next. The registration form has diagrams available to show you what measurements we are interested in. Please take the time to get the information right if you can possibly manage, it'll benefit you in the long run by helping us to give you as accurate handicap as we possibly can. In spite of what they may tell you, handicappers are only normal people and are not psychics. More information equals better handicaps.

You can find registration for Banderas Bay Regatta at <http://www.banderasbayregatta.com>.

What do you mean I'm handicapped?



Okay, let's be honest, there's a good chance you aren't going to get one of those cool blue handicap tags for your rear view mirror, or your boat. But your boat is handicapped. They all are.

Performance Handicap Racing Fleet (PHRF) is a very common system for rating boats in North America. Each fleet creates its own rules to suit the local area. Banderas Bay is not part of an established PHRF area however, we try to use base ratings from areas that have similar conditions to us. Southern California PHRF area tends to be close enough that we prefer to use ratings developed in that area if we can find your boat or a boat like yours. If not, we'll use the tables provided by US Sailing, which gives ratings for all boats in all areas. If all else fails, we carefully open the cage of our math wizards, throw them the dimensions you gave us, and they calculate a rating for your boat.

To provide fairness the VYC Handicap Committee will meet when necessary and establish or adjust a boat's rating based on actual race results or other facts.

Handicapping is a process for estimating the speed potential of one boat compared to others. Handicaps are relative to other boats, US Sailing suggests that all areas handicap a J-35 at 72 seconds per mile, and other handicaps are relative to that. Lower PHRF rating = faster boat, Higher PHRF = slower boat.

Handicaps are based on the performance of a very well prepared and very well sailed boat over a great number of races. It is expected that on any given day these handicaps will be less than perfect. Basing a new handicap on the results of just a few races makes the system worse, not better.

The biggest challenge for cruisers racing their yachts is that PHRF ratings are usually established for boats in racing trim. That means the cappuccino maker is left on the dock, and there's a good chance that the dog will be, too, unless

he is an amazing helmsman (take it from us, dogs are lousy on the foredeck). A cruising boat is going to have the cappuccino maker, the dog, a couple of spare anchors, a washing machine, engine spares, your kid's rock collection... well, you get the picture.

Also, you don't see a lot of cruising boats with those fancy one-season sails that the racers use.

For most of the racing in Banderas Bay, we apply a "cruisers offset" based on a number of factors about the boats. We expect a cruising boat to be at least 6% over their original weight, so anything up to that we just see as normal cruising weight, which you get an offset for. Over that, we try to give a little credit if you can prove that you really are overweight more 6%. We also apply offsets for older, cruising oriented sails, and props that don't fold. Sail plans that have been modified will get an offset one way or the other, depending on whether we think they'll make your boat faster or slower than the majority of similar boats with the same PHRF rating. *Last, but certainly not least, is an estimate, based on the past performance of your boat, of whether we think it'll be faster or slower than it was the last time we rated your boat.*

We review our system of offsets regularly and post the rules we use so we won't go into detail here.

Low Tech Recap:

For Monohull's we use a PHRF based system of rules to calculate local offsets.

For Multihulls we use a Texel based system that was developed in Europe for rating Cabin Multihulls.

Both systems use Owner Supplied Information, the single best thing you can do to get the fairest rating we can provide is to give us current and accurate data on **your** boat to work with! If you need help with all those weird numbers, just ask. One of our handicappers will be happy to help. This service is not free, expect to pay a minimum of two beer ... we are here to help you have fun!

Contact sss@vallartayachtclub.org

Documents



For most races, there are three main documents that tell you about the race and how it will be conducted, the Notice of Race (NOR), the Sailing Instructions (SI), sometimes also referred to as Racing Instructions, and the Racing Rules of Sailing.

Notice of Race

Notice of Race is nothing more than an advertisement for the race. It can take the form of a one-page informational sheet describing the race or something a little longer, generally describing the type of boats that will be racing, the venue, dates, etc. You should see the NOR well in advance of the race, it is sent out early to give competitors a chance to decide if they want to participate and make the appropriate plans.

Sailing Instructions

Sailing Instructions are the legal documents of the sailboat racing world. Everything about the race should be there: the course, what general time to expect the race to start, what flags will be used, how scoring will be done, who's buying drinks afterwards ... well, maybe not that, but you get the idea. What is said in the Sailing Instructions should be taken together with the Notice of Race, but don't get excited if there is a detail noted in the NOR that is different in the SI's, the SI's are more current than the NOR. The SI's are laid out to give you the information you need in the approximate order that you will need it. That's why they are called instructions!

Most of the time, the Sailing Instructions are given out at the last minute, often at the skippers meeting the morning of the first race in a series. This gives the Race Committee time to assess the conditions and make any last minute adjustments to the races to ensure they are safe and fair.

Some of us never read instructions. We wait until we get stuck or lost before we either dig the instructions out of the trash or call the help desk. That might not be the best idea for a regatta. There is no one to ask when you are on the race course. The Race Committee is not going to answer your questions about the courses or marks during a race. That happened at the Skipper's meeting.

It's usually a good idea to carry the sailing instructions with you when you are racing, as there should be information there that will help you understand what you need to be doing during the race. You will definitely need course information, as well as information about what flags will be used to signal your starts.

Racing Rules of Sailing

Wait, there are RULES? Yep, the International Sailing Federation (ISAF) publishes a document called Racing Rules of Sailing that is often referenced in both NORs and SIs. It is available for purchase, but you can also download the rules from this link:

<http://www.sailing.org/racingrules.php>

If you misplaced your law degree, there's a section later called "Rules of the Road" that summarizes what you need to know.

The Skipper's Meeting



Wait, there's MEETINGS?!

Yep, almost every race, or racing series, begins with a skippers meeting. The main objective of the meeting is to make sure that everyone that is racing is registered, they get their Sailing Instructions, and they hear any last minute changes or other information pertinent to the race. Here you might actually hear who will be buying drinks after the race! Fundamentally, it's a chance for everybody to come together to ensure that racing is safe, fair, and most importantly, fun.

You'll also get a chance to meet your Race Committee. They are the guys who are going to be officiating your start and finish, so it's usually a good idea to be nice to them. It's okay, they don't bite. Usually.

For you, the skipper's meeting is important because you get a chance to ask that all-important question that has been bugging you all week. You also get to see and size-up the competition, and if you are feeling feisty, talk a little trash to those guys who will be watching your stern through the entire race.

There are a few important take-aways that you should be sure you clearly understand before the end of the skippers meeting. If you didn't see them in the Sailing Instructions or hear them at the meeting, you need to ask:

1. Are there any hazards on the course? Any other safety concerns?
2. Where is the Official Notice Board?
3. What fleet am I sailing in?
4. What time do I need to be on the course and ready to race?
5. How will I know when it's time to start racing?

6. What course am I going to be sailing? Where are the marks? Which way do I go around them (port or starboard)?
7. How will I know if there are any changes in the race while I'm out there?
8. If the wind dies or I go for ceviche on the beach, what's the latest time I can finish?

Another important source of information is the Official Notice Board (ONB). Like the Sailing Instructions, what's on the ONB is the last word in instructions for the race – they even trump the Sailing Instructions. If there are changes to the Sailing Instructions, anytime during the series, the changes will be posted there. It is your responsibility to check the board every day of racing. It's a good idea to have a look at the ONB after the skippers meeting and before every race in a series.

At some VYC races we hold a "Luca Libre" competition as part of the overall race. Basically, Luca Libre is a race within a race – you pick your greatest nemesis, and challenge that boat individually. Money goes down, and the loser has to pay up – to a charity. You can agree the terms of the race, and the bet, with your competition. Since the bet is going to charity, everybody wins.

The Dreaded Race Committee



Who are those guys, Sundance?

The race committee is the team that makes sure your race is safe, fair and fun. During a race, most of them hang out on a boat at the start line, creatively called the "Committee Boat". While race committees vary in size and membership, they usually include:

Principal Race Officer (PRO)

The PRO is the Grand Poo-Bah of the race course. He or she is responsible for all decisions made on the water, and for directing the the actions of the other race committee members on the course. The PRO makes the final decisions on the orientation of the race course with the wind, the length of the course and when racing will start and finish. Everyone who is working on the race course takes direction from the PRO.

The PRO's office is the Committee Boat. (That would be the big-ish boat on the end of the start line.)

The rumor that some PROs walk across the water to the Committee Boat is unsubstantiated.

Assistant Race Officer(s)

The Assistant Race Officer is the guy or guys who do all the work while the PRO sits in a recliner watching Gilligan's Island reruns and sipping ice tea. They are at the PRO's bidding to do things like raise and lower flags, toot horns, start and stop timers, watch starting lines to make sure starts are safe and fair, record finishes, and bring more tea to the PRO.

On larger races, there can be several Assistant Race Officers on the Committee Boat, usually plotting how to get free beer after the race. They can have names like Secretary, Timer, etc. Be nice to them, as they are also the guys who notice if you were over the start line early, and record exactly what time you finished. You don't want them to make a mistake, do you?

Mark Set

There are guys running around in fast boats during the race that are collectively known as "Mark Set". These are people who enjoy playing with large inflatable toys and leaping their boats off of waves at crazy speeds. In spite of their grizzled look, they are vital to the safe and fair running of a race. Their primary responsibility is to place racing marks exactly where the PRO wishes them to be placed, and then move them 45 seconds later when the PRO changes his mind.

Mark Set personnel are also there as a safety backup in case a fast boat is needed for assistance on the race course. They are the PRO's eyes and ears on the course, providing information about when boats reach marks and when weather conditions are changing out on the course.

No matter how much you plead, Mark Set boats cannot be bribed into bringing you pizza and beer while you are racing.

Judges, Photo Boats, Safety Boats, et. al.

"Holy cow," you must be saying, "Are there more support boats than competitors?"

Sometimes it seems like it. Big regattas can have lots and lots of other official boats running around doing, um, official things. We try to make sure that all official boats fly a white flag so you know that they have something to do with the regatta. They have specific instructions on their conduct during a race, and are smart enough to know that sailboats have the right of way.

If they don't get out of your way, you have our permission to run them down. Be advised, however, that they may not have insurance, and you would definitely be slowed down.

Wait, you didn't think we were serious about the running down bit, did you?

Who are they waving all those flags at?



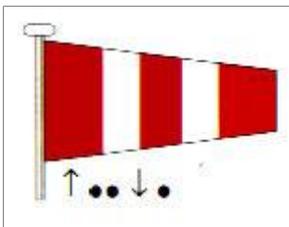
That would be you, dude!

For some bizarre reason, race committees like to wave flags around. Flags are used for signaling pretty much everything on a race course, such as starts, course changes, penalties, you name it. Flags are so important that even the timing of a race is dependent on when a flag touches the top of its travel on the flag pole.

Starts

One of the most important times that flags are used in yacht racing is at the start. Remember how we asked you to make sure you knew what class you are racing in? Flags are used to indicate what class is racing at that moment (called the Class Flag). You can find out what flag indicates your class by looking in the racing instructions or asking the question at the skippers meeting.

During a start you are most likely to see the following flags, roughly in order:



Answering Pennant or "AP"

Races not started are postponed. When you get to the starting area, there's a good chance this will be flying from the Committee Boat. This means that we haven't started yet, don't have a cow, man. You will hear one sound when this flag goes down, indicating that it is one minute until the starting sequence begins.

This flag goes DOWN 6 minutes before start with a single short horn.

You will probably not see this flag between starts if there are many classes and races are planned to start every 5 minutes.

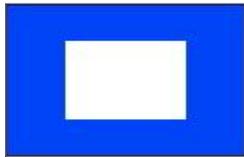
CLASS FLAG
(depends on the
race instructions)

Class Flag UP

Do we have to tell you again about knowing what flag indicates your class? This flag will go up, with a horn, exactly 5 minutes before the starting gun. Remember, it's the flag, not the horn, that determines the time.

This flag goes UP 5 minutes before start with a single short horn. Set your watch!

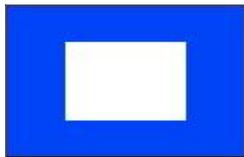
Preparatory Flag or "Papa" UP



In case the class flag wasn't enough, the "Prep" flag goes up 4 minutes before the start. In some races, this flag might also be India, Zebra, or Black. We'll talk about those later, but it's unlikely you will see them.

This flag goes UP 4 minutes before the start with a single short horn

Preparatory Flag or "Papa" DOWN



Three minutes later, the "Prep" flag goes down.

This flag goes DOWN 1 minute before the start with a single LONG horn. You might want to consider heading on over to the start line, where all the other boats are. They will be leaving shortly.

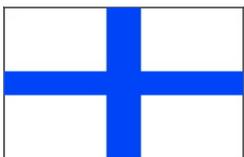
Class Flag

CLASS FLAG
(depends on the
race instructions)

The Class Flag goes down at the start. The exact time is when the flag leaves the top of the flagpole. Time to cross the start line and head toward the next mark.

This flag goes DOWN AT THE START with a single short horn.

Okay, in theory, you should be started and on your way. HOWEVER, stuff happens. Here's some other flags you might see at or after a start:



X-Ray or "Individual Recall"

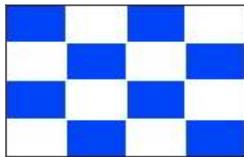
The race committee will raise this flag, with a single horn, if you have crossed the start line before the starting gun, and are still there after the start. You need to go back and cross the start line again, you naughty boy.

This is the time when you point at yourself, give your best innocent look to the Race Committee, and say, "Who, me?"



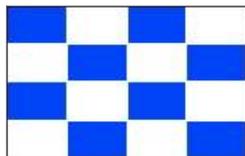
First Substitute or "General Recall"

Pretty much everyone has done something wrong at the start, such as all crowding over start line. The PRO is now officially angry, out of his recliner, and he's going to make you all do it again. Return to the starting area and prepare yourself for a whole new starting sequence. You'll get two horns and a scornful look from everyone on the Committee Boat. This flag will go down, with a single horn, one minute before the new sequence starts - similar to the way the AP is used.



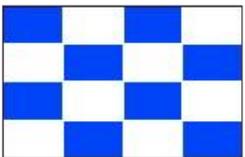
November or "Abandonment"

Sometimes stuff happens on the course after the race has started, like a huge wind shift, or the appearance of Dinoshark. The Race Committee uses the Abandonment signal to tell everyone to stop the race and come back to the starting area and wait for further instructions. You'll hear three horns when this flag is raised.



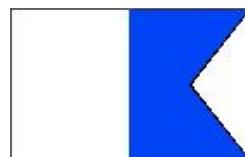
November over Hotel

This is fairly rare for us, but it means that all races have been abandoned and there will be more information ashore. It's used sometimes when the wind dies after the start, but the Race Committee believes that with sufficient offerings to Neptune, there will be more wind later. Three horns with this one also.



November over Alpha

Many people love to see this signal, it means RACE ABANDONED, NO MORE RACING TODAY. Head for the bar! Again, three horns.

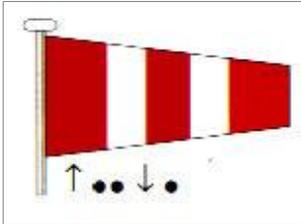


But wait, there's more!

Okay, just for completeness, we're going to give you most of the rest. Some of these may be used during a race, others before and after. Also, the letter or

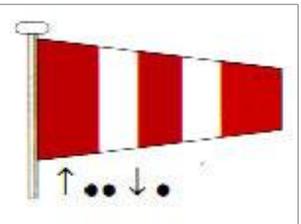
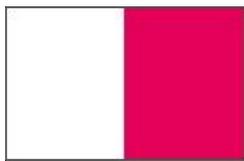
number flags are sometimes used to communicate things specific to the race, as outlined in the Sailing Instructions.

You can use this as a reference, so when they announce something like, "The class flag for the Slow Cruisers Class is Sierra" during the skipper's meeting, you can nod knowingly. Here we go:



Answering Pennant over Hotel or "AP over H"

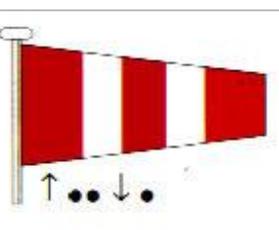
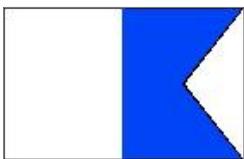
All races *not yet started* are postponed. Further information ashore. The started race can continue, but everyone else is instructed to head for the docks and await instructions. As with N over H, you don't see this much here. You'll get two horns when this one goes up.



Answering Pennant over Alpha or "AP over A"

All races *not yet started* are postponed. No more racing today. Party time!

You'll get two horns and a cheer from the Race Committee when this goes up.



Answering Pennant over a number flag

All races *not yet started* are postponed for X hours. So, if you see AP over the flag number 3, racing has been postponed for 3 hours. Again, two horns (and a collective groan from the Race Committee).

(A number flag)

The number flags are below.



India

When used in place of the Preparatory flag "P" it means that if you are over the start line in the last minute before the start, you have to go around one of the ends of the line before you can start. Race Committees will use this when they have a really aggressive racing fleet, like cruisers who found out there are free drinks after the

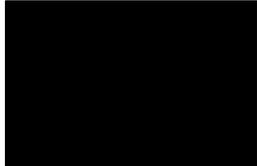
race.

Zulu



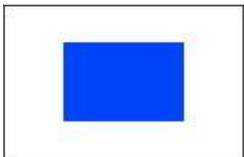
When used in place of the Preparatory flag "P", it means that if you are over the line one minute before the start of the race, you have to take a 20% penalty. The PRO has about had it with you guys!

Black Flag



When used in place of the Preparatory flag "P", it means that anyone caught over the start line in the minute before the start is disqualified, and might be drawn and quartered later. Yep, the PRO isn't going to take it anymore!

Sierra



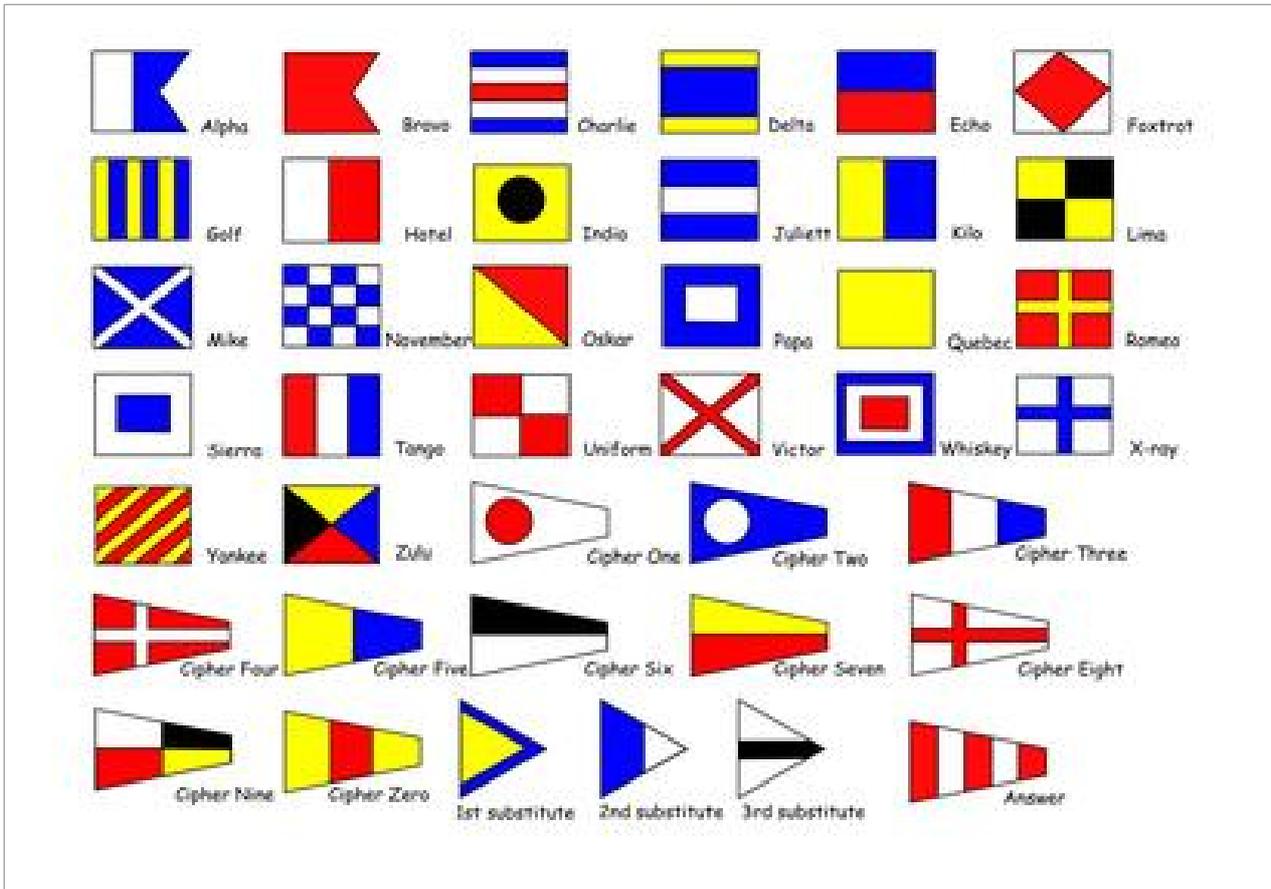
The course has been shortened. This usually means that the finish line has been moved to one of the marks and one of the Mark Set boats is sent out with the "S" flag to establish a finish line between himself and the mark. You get this when the wind starts to die and the Race Committee is worried that the race won't finish within the time limit (or they didn't want to miss the close of the buffet.)

Mike



This flag represents a mark replacement. If one of the marks mysteriously disappears, the Race Committee can send out one of the Mark Set boats with this flag to be the mark. Mark Set boats hate this, because they have to sit still and can't race around the course.

There are one or two others, but this should be good enough! As promised, here's all the flags:



Rules of the Road



Okay, I'm not too interested in reading the Racing Rules. What's the bottom line?

One of our race officers provided us with a great summary of the rules. Here it is:

1. Port keeps clear of starboard.
2. Windward keeps clear of leeward
3. The boat astern keeps clear of the boat ahead.
4. A boat tacking keeps clear of one that is not.
5. Avoid collisions.
6. If you gain right of way or change course, give the other boat time to keep clear.
7. The inside boat(s) at three boat lengths from the mark are entitled to mark room to round the mark.
8. A boat that is backing up (say *what?*) or not racing keeps clear.
9. If you have violated one of the above, take a *penalty.

* Penalties are usually something like turning your boat around once or twice – the SI will tell you for sure.

Simple, huh?

If you are into online movies, check out <http://bcove.me/942yjpxo>, a great video explaining how the racing rules apply when boats meet.

The Start



“Three, Two, One, STARRRTTTTT”

Anyone who has participated in the Banderas Bay Regatta in the past few years knows the voice of Lew Jennings on the radio, counting down to the start of each race. While counting down to the start is not normally done in big-boat racing, Lew has added a lot of fun to a race that we often refer to as “We had a party and a yacht race broke out!”

Regardless of whether it's Banderas Bay Regatta or any other yacht race, the start can be, for many, the most exciting and intimidating part of the race.

The Line

It's almost a universal law of nature: 99% of the time yacht race start lines are set up to be perpendicular to the wind. One of the jobs of the PRO is to ensure this is the case, and often times he will make the Mark Set guys' lives a living hell until they get the start line just right. Never-the-less, start lines typically have a “favored” end – usually the end of the line that is just a little bit closer to the next mark. Often before a start, you'll see yachts sailing back and forth along the line, even crossing the line upwind, trying to figure this out. Then, they'll try to time their start so that they are at that favored end the moment of the starting horn.

Rules of the Road At The Start Line

At the start, the rules summarized in the previous section apply, with one important exception: At the starting line, an inside boat is not entitled to room at the marks. If two starboard tack boats are approaching the starting line to start the race, and the windward boat can not fit between the leeward boat and the race committee boat, the windward boat must tack away. Remember that a leeward boat has the right of way and at the start line does not have to bear away to give you room even if you are going to hit the race committee boat as a result. Trying to sail in to the start to windward of the other boats, trying to squeeze in under the Committee Boat, is called “barging”. It's dangerous. Don't do it. Do this at a start and you won't have anyone buying you drinks at the bar after the race.

Fundamentally, if you and another boat are going the same direction and you

are between him and the start line, he is within his rights to force you upwind over the line. If that happens and the starting horn is sounded, you have to let everyone go until it is clear for you to head back down to the line and re-cross. That pretty much puts you in a position to admire the beautiful sterns of all your competitors.

Our Easy and Effective Way of Safely Getting Over the Start Line

Easy and conservative. This is called the "Vanderbilt Start", named for Harold Stirling Vanderbilt, a three-time defender of the America's Cup:

1. Don't wander too far from the start area.
2. Don't sweat the favored end – that's for the racers. You just want to get over the line safely and without embarrassment.
3. When your class flag goes up, set a 5 minute countdown timer as close as you can to the second. You'll need this later. Head up near the start line.
4. With 3 or 4 minutes to go, get up reasonably close to the middle of the line, heading right (port tack) on a beam reach. Try to run down the line, saying on a straight extension of the line as you move away. Heads up for people on starboard tack, they have rights on you. Try to stay out of their way while not drifting too far downwind.
5. When you pass the right end of the line, usually the committee boat, look at your watch.
6. How much time do you have left? Let's say you have 3 minutes. Stay on a beam reach, heading right, for a little less than half of the time you have left. Allow yourself a little time to get the boat turned around.
7. At a little less than half the time you have left, gybe and go back exactly the way you came. Starboard tack, beam reach, in line with the start line or maybe just a little downwind.
8. If you feel like you are going too fast and you are going to overrun the start line, de-power by letting your jib or main out until they flutter a little, but still keep you moving. That will slow you down but keep you in the flow.
9. By this time, you are going to have a crowd around you. Remember the windward rule! If there is somebody under you, they can force you over the line. Often times the best approach is just to depower so much they pass you underneath, you can follow their stern once they are past you.
10. At 10-20 seconds from the start gun, power up the rig (stop fluttering the sails) and think about where you are going to be crossing the line. If you are way downwind from the line, go hard on the wind. If you timed it well, you'll be near the right end, or toward the middle.

11. STARRRRTTTT! Head upwind to your best upwind angle and cross the line. You should have a good deal of momentum from your fast beam reach. Relax and enjoy the praise of your crew for an excellent start!

With so many boats, so close, starts can be pretty scary. If you are the sort of person that just can't stand that much stress, don't sweat it. Just get over the line when you are comfortable to do so (after the starting gun, of course).

Banderas Bay Regatta has a "Start Your Heart Out" practice the day prior to racing, so you can practice starting.

Getting Around the Course



Hey, this isn't so bad!

Just a walk in the park, isn't it? The first leg of most races is upwind, so it's up to you to decide what gets your boat to weather the fastest. The most common mistake cruisers make is trying to get their boats to point upwind like the racing boats that may be around them. They pinch, their boats slow down, and everyone blows by them. Think about keeping your boat moving fast, telltales streaming, even if you aren't pointing upwind particularly well. Keep in mind that upwind boats make leeway, so your tacking angle to make the turning mark might need to be a little more than you would think would be necessary. It'll save you the embarrassment of having to throw in a last minute tack at the mark. The best thing is to head perfectly upwind and just make the mark on a long tack, but the next best thing is to be able to turn downwind a little to make the mark. A good strategy for keeping your boat speed after a tack is to head off the wind for a few seconds while your boat speed builds, *then* head upwind at your optimum upwind angle. If you try to head to that optimum upwind angle right after your tack, chances are that it'll take considerably longer to get your upwind speed back.

The rules of the road are in full force here – starboard tacks and leeward boats on the same tack have rights on you. If a boat tries to “roll” you (drive over you on your weather side) you are within your rights to slowly point higher upwind until he gives up and goes under you. It's also a good time to talk some trash to that boat. This is when the boat comes from behind you. Alternatively, and this sort of thing is pretty complicated in the rules, you are not allowed to come up from behind, go to leeward of another boat and force him upwind.

Rounding Marks

One of the important things in you Sailing Instructions is which side of the

mark to go on. In a "Port Rounding", for example, you are passing the mark so that it is on your port side. As you approach the mark, keep an eye out for boats that are on the same tack as you, who might potentially be between you and the mark when you are three boat lengths away. They might even call "Room at the mark!" just to remind you that you have to give them space to make a nice clean rounding of the mark.

Touching a mark with any part of your crew or your boat, including sails, is a penalty. Unless otherwise noted in the Sailing Instructions, if you touch a mark you are required to immediately do a 360 that includes one tack and one gybe. Once you have done your turn, you're cool, keep on racing. This is the honor system, no one is going to tell you to do it, but if someone sees you touch a mark and not do a penalty turn, you are likely to meet them in the penalty room after the race. As that cuts in to time at the bar, it is not recommended. Other penalties, such as a little love tap on another boat, require you to do a 720. If you do significant damage to another boat, you are required to retire.

Downwind Legs

Another common mistake is in the downwind legs. Some folks believe that all they have to do is point the boat at the next mark directly downwind, throw up everything including their grandmother's underwear, and make a martini.

Where are all those other guys going?

They are tacking downwind. Going dead downwind is SLOW. You are going to get to the downwind mark much, much faster if you head upwind a little, get the air moving through your sails and plan on one or more gybes. Yeah, we know that it's a pain to get that big cruising drifter on the other side, but you'll be glad you did.

Finishing

Congratulations! You are finishing with most of your pride, and hair, intact! Blow through the finish line like a pro, but take a quick note of the time you finished, just in case there is a question later.

Oh, and one last thing. Give a nod of thanks to the good folks on the Committee Boat. They are usually people who love to race, but gave up their day of racing so that YOU could have a day of racing. It's good form to acknowledge their hard work.

Now it's time for the bar!

The Only Dumb Question is a Question That Isn't Ask

The FAQ List

Can I take off my washing machine?

No, but it's a good idea to move your anchor! We will all thank you if you don't sail close to us with that 40 pound can opener on your bow. Moving your anchor does ***not mean taking it off the boat***, that's just poor seamanship, and besides, it's against the rules. Racing cruising boats mean you "sail what you have", so that means the solar cells, washing machine, and the dog stay on the boat. We don't mind if you remove your tender.

Can I declare that I'm not going to use a spinnaker during a race, even if I said earlier that I would?

Sorry Charlie, but if you said you were going to use a spinnaker, we assume you are going to use it for an entire series. You can't get up in the morning, see the weather and decide that you won't be flying your spinnaker today. That just wouldn't be sporting, old boy!

I'm supposed to be in a Jack and Jill class (double handed) but my friend wants to ride along. Can he come if he promises not to touch anything?

We'd rather he didn't. It's hard to prove what he did or didn't do, and it would be pretty tough for your friend to sit idly by while your wife is struggling trying to get the spinnaker down by herself. Hey, there's plenty of other cruising classes, why not just race in one of those?

"My boat is so heavy"

"Oh, how heavy is it?"

"My boat's so heavy that last time it was hauled, we had a third low tide!"

Yep, we hear that a lot. All cruising boats are heavy, and believe it or not, they all still seem to be able to sail. Our handicapping process provides generous offsets for cruising related equipment and sails. If you really believe that you have something especially heavy on your boat that would require us to handicap your boat specially, let us know with a detailed inventory. Things like first aid kits and water tanks don't count – everybody has them.

Just Have Fun, Okay?

Now, for a bit of serious talk.

Terry O'Rourke, the founder of Banderas Bay Regatta, loves to tell the story of the year when the first place competitor in BBR dropped out of the race because he caught a fish. It is the sort of spirit that we have always tried to engender at every BBR – fun is more important than the race.

After years of watching and participating in Banderas Bay Regattas, probably the one thing that continues to surprise us is how seriously some people take our little cruisers' race. They fly in pros, scream at each other, protest, and all manner of things.

Is it serious to sail as fast as you can in your floating home, just inches away from another person's floating home? Sure! One of the reasons that some sailors love racing so much is because of the amazing adrenaline rush that comes from sailing a big boat fast. VYC's intention for BBR is to put on races that are safe and fun – winning is a very distant third on that list.

Protesting other boats just so you can have an argument with the skipper later won't make your racing experience better, and it certainly takes away from time at the bar after the race. Often, we see disagreements between cruisers who have little knowledge of racing rules, and other folks who are experienced racers, and who use the rules as part of their strategy on the course. We've even heard the experienced racers proclaim, "Well, if they don't know the rules, they shouldn't be racing!" Of course rules are important, that's why there are stop lights, and speed limits, and other things for driving. *For safety.* That's why you see an abbreviated version of the rules of the road (and not all the racing rules) in this document.

Trust us, nobody likes an on-the-water lawyer, and to be honest, the race is for the inexperienced guy, okay?

At BBR, we often suggest informal "standing protest meetings", where a few people get together at the bar and have a chat about what may or may not have happened on the race course. By far, the best outcome is for one skipper to say, "Hey, I screwed up. Sorry. Let me buy you a beer!", or for both just to agree that it's more important to have fun than to try to win a race in a protest room.

Your safety, and your fun, is important to us. Please don't make a cruisers race more than it is – just a bunch of folks sailing their cruising boats in company around some inflatable marks, with every intention of enjoying happy hour after they finish.

There are plenty of races out there for the hardened racers – BBR isn't one of them.

Now that's said, we have one last thing to say:

HAVE FUN!