

Top Start Tips



by *Brian Phipps*

Down 'that other end' of the start line!

The **start gun** is where everything falls into place for some sailors whilst for others it is regularly where everything can fall seriously out of place. Comfort sailing is our biggest enemy to achieving a high percentage of good starts. So questions like **"Why start there?"** can often lead eventually to **"Because I always start there"**. Comfort starting is no bad thing in some ways. You might not win a series but it is likely that at some time over a number of races it will prove to be the best place to start and you will get a good first leg position at the windward mark.

To be a truly good starter you need a range of starting tools in your tool box and not be frightened to get them out!

Port end starting (that other end) is not often the beginner's choice. It has a reputation as high risk with few "get out" clauses if things go wrong. We will ignore starting on port tack for this article and just talk through starting on starboard at the port end of the line given the situation where the port end of the start line is favoured.

Why do it? Well here are just a few reasons:-

- The port side of the course is favoured and you want to get there as soon as possible.
- The bias on the start line means the port end is significantly closer to the windward mark than the starboard end saving valuable boat lengths and giving you a jump start on the rest of the fleet.
- The wind is up, you are a heavier sailor and you want to power up and drive the boat out of the start without lighter sailors luffing you up.
- The wind direction is oscillating and the phase at the start means that it is backing and you plan to take advantage of that backing and then tack onto port and clear the majority of the fleet.

Things not to do when starting on starboard at the port end of the line? Consider these.

- Coming off the port end of the start line without good boat speed, you cannot afford to get rolled by a windward boat
- Tack too early and meet the fleet coming at you on starboard
- Arrive at the pin end too early without anywhere to go apart from around the end.
- Allow a windward boat before the start to get its bow in front of you.
- Drop below the holding line and allow others to stack up above you.
- Line up as second row.

Some suggestions on how to make that port end start gain.

- Port end starting on starboard tack is about timing and pace. Before the real start practise winding up off the start at that end of the line, get the feel and know when the boat is in the groove.
- Know the close hauled transit for the pin end, dropping below that transit will mean you will not make the pin.
- Remember that, as you get closer to the pin, the less margin there is for a safe line transit.
- The meek will never inherit the earth so protect your starting position. Manoeuvre within the rules but firmly.
- Once the gun has gone and you are on your way, focus on speed and keeping your bow ahead of the fleet even if it means sailing low and fast. Getting rolled is not an option. We say any boat to windward should never get past your rear beam when striking out from the port end.
- You make a true gain when you cross the fleet so be ready to put in the tack on to port. Duck the first couple of starboard boats if you have to so you capture the rest of the fleet.
- Looking back is never fast. At best, take a very, very quick glance just to draw a picture of the fleet in your head, but not at the cost of keeping the speed on.

And finally how do you do it? Well you practise. You practise outside of important races and you get to a point where port end starting on starboard is one of the tools you can get out of the box when you need it. If you need some outside motivation, attend the class teach-in or visit Windsport's Cat.Clinic Coaching Centre.

Happy sailing and see you on the water.

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