

RYA RACING INITIATIVE: PROMOTING RACING AT CLUBS

Making sailboat racing more fun is an RYA priority. At Club level this means well-managed racing that satisfies the back of the fleet as much as the front. Increased numbers taking part is one measure of success.

Class racing and handicap racing both have their place in this process and the important thing is that clubs are sensitive to their members needs in terms of making sure the type of racing they offer is kept under regular review.

The advantage of handicap racing is that it provides an opportunity to sail a design of boat that you chose, see how your boat performs against other designs, enables you to compete in your boat against friends who sail different boats and potentially allows for larger fleets to race together. When a particular design gains popularity, class racing may develop from this.

Class racing can sometimes be more competitive as the racing can be closer. The gaining and losing of places, and the final positions, are immediately apparent on the water. However, there needs to be enough boats on the start line to provide competitive racing. In club racing, where the range of ability may be wide, there needs to be enough boats to provide each crew with close racing, whether they are in the front, middle or back of the fleet. Classes come and go and clubs need to exploit these trends. Classes of small numbers can still be part of a handicap fleet and their one design results extracted to meet the best of both worlds.

There is a wide choice of styles of boat to suit different ages and weight ranges, some of which are more suitable to specific waters, but all classes whether old or new offer the potential for excellent racing. Older classes tend to have more established class associations which can do much to support racing and promote the class with newer designs generally relying on the manufacturer to promote the boat.

The challenge is: how do we take advantage of the increased choice of classes to attract more people and at the same time increase the quality of racing in our clubs? If we can do this, then the sport and the clubs will continue to grow.

Clubs will have different approaches to managing their racing which may include limiting the number of classes because of restrictions on water or ground area. Alternatively they may adopt an open policy with handicap racing from which sailors may choose to expand a class at the club based on its popularity with the members. Both options can work well depending on the club and its location.

Racing formats including class fleet racing, handicap fleet racing and pursuit races will provide a variety of options to give interest across the all sailors. Handicapping can exist within level class racing. To reward the best sailors yet encourage the less experienced or less able, races can be dual-scored. As well as the normal results for boats sailing level, personal handicapping can be used, relecting past performace, This will continuously motivate newer sailors while giving a consistent set of results for the experienced sailors.

It is important to value all the sailors racing in the club whatever their type of boat. Those loyal to their particular choice of boat will benefit the club as ambassadors for their class and it is often the way that strong class fleets are formed. This method generally works much better than classes selected by committee where on paper it might appear a good choice but the potential for upset and acrimony over the decision remains high. This is something a club must, of course, try to avoid

We must remember that there is a high degree of social side to racing and often who you sail with or the boat of your choice is a higher priority than being constrained to sail a specific class of boat. Handicap racing is a vital part of choice. It allows sailors to sail a boat they enjoy, with a crew of their choice which might not be possible with chosen "Club" classes.

The work done by the RYA Portsmouth Yardstick (PY) system and the National Handicap for Cruisers (NHC) now provides very high quality handicap racing numbers. The PY system allows for clubs to adapt the PY numbers for boats to specific local conditions which makes handicap racing much fairer between the different classes at all clubs. , Handicap racing can be very competitive right through the racing spectrum as proved by offshore racing under the RORC IRC system. The NHC is a personal handicap system allowing for the different configurations of cruisers where each boat has its own personal handicap. The RYA is developing a similar personal handicap programme to offer to clubs for small boat racing.

The ultimate goal for clubs is retain and grow membership. That needs great racing supported by a good social activity for all its members.

APPENDIX

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Clubs should actively manage the racing they promote to ensure that all sailors can race in the fleets they choose. Class and handicap racing can both provide the members with the necessary choices within the racing calendar.
2. Members should ideally have a choice of different boats to sail locally. . Fleet captains and enthusiastic owners will be able to provide information about their boats to prospective sailors. Depending on the waters sailed and the variety of sailing styles and ages of sailors it is possible that there will be several types of boat needed to cover all the possibilities of: junior and adult; easy and challenging; single handers and two or more crew; traditional and modern.
3. Be aware of other clubs in the area and what racing and events are on offer. Try not to clash with major events as it is good for your sailors to visit other clubs and for others to visit you in return. Make sure that date and duration of the races are sensitive to the requirements of each clubs members but as well as those clubs in the near vicinity.

4. Possible means of encouraging existing and new members into club racing include:

- **A variety of course and sailing events throughout the year.**
Fleet, handicap and pursuit should be part of the racing calendar but other events such as navigation racing, against the clock and treasure hunts could be considered to add variety during the year. Consider having some single trophy races between the series events.
- **Well managed Racing.**
The club race officer has a responsible job on that day. There are many ideas to help make the job easier and to ensure that people are happy to volunteer for the post. Requirements will depend on the clubs location, river, lake, sea tidal etc but there are many ideas to help in these situations. Set course cards related to the wind direction, computer controlled start sequences, automatic lights are just some of the ideas available. Contact the Regional Race Officials advisors for further advice and RYA courses which can be run at the club.
- **Dual scoring with a personal handicap scheme allowing a personal handicap score and an overall score.**
This can give new comers to racing an incentive to keep trying and keep the experienced racer on their toes.
- **Good results programmes.**
There are several good results programmes which will make life easier for the race officer. Individual or fleet results can be extracted from a single race and they will submit handicap results directly to the RYA PY system website.
- **Good use of the RYA PY, NHC Schemes and Club returns.**
Contact the RYA Technical Department for further information and explanations of the PY and NHC schemes and the RORC Rating office for further information on IHC.
- **A good number of single trophy races and some short series.**
Some club members may find the time to compete in a series difficult to allocate so regular single trophy races and some short series over just one weekend offer alternatives to long series.
- **Don't sail just on one day per week!**
Summer weekday evenings offer a good opportunity for racing. Why not also use them for racing aimed at newcomers to racing, for instance 'white sail' (no spinnaker) races? (see below). Look at using weekday evenings and Saturdays for racing for juniors and for 'ladies who launch'.

The RYA can help in many ways with advice and various courses. Contact your local Sports Development Officer.

- **Longer series racing that meet the needs of the local fleets. It is suggested that series are**
 - About 4-8 weeks long*
 - About 8-12 races in a series*
 - Allow up to 30%-50% discards to allow people to miss some races but still qualify for a series*
 - As a transition between series, you can consider having "Single trophy races / sailing days" between one series and the next*

- **Introducing people to Racing**

The majority of people in many clubs do not race. Sometimes that is because they are afraid of "getting in the way" of the "hot shots" at the start and during the races. To get around this concern, you need a separate "introduction to racing" programme to encourage these people to transition into the full club racing

- *Education – onshore and on-water short races*
- *A separate club racing programme designed specifically for these. (Talk to your Regional Development Officer for ideas that have been successful at other clubs)*
- *Encouragement for them to join into the mainstream racing and help the transition – using methods mentioned in this document – such as buddy schemes*

- **Shore based talks and courses.**

There are many talks that can be organised on racing tactics and boat tuning and boat handling which can appeal to new and experienced racers. There might be sailors within the club who would be able to deliver talks and the RYA can help with a suggested names.

RYA courses for Race Officer, Mark Laying and Rules will all help the club run well managed racing that is fun.

The RYA offers course on the Racing Rules of Sailing and for Rules advisors and judges. The club should organise and encourage attendance at one of these courses. It is very important to remember that racing is only fun when the rules are adhered to. There is very little fun in being beaten by someone who does not obey the rules. There is no place for experienced sailors "intimidating" new sailors and clubs should be watchful that situations do not arise.

- **Coaching and buddy schemes.**

Coaching can be useful whatever the experience level of the sailor so consider organising different sessions for the different ability levels. There may be experienced sailors within the club who would be happy to offer coaching to less experienced ones.

The RYA has several excellent books on coaching and will assist with courses and training.

Buddy systems work well by pairing an experienced sailor with a newcomer to racing. It is usually best if they sail the same or very similar type of boat.

- **Schemes to encourage young sailors to move up into adult classes both as helms and especially as crews.**

It is important that there is a pathway from junior classes to allow young sailors to sail “adult” boats. A club could hold crewing evenings where experienced helms take new crews afloat to race. It is important that crews are developed as well as helms. The RYA Sports Development Officer can help here.

- **Cater for the whole family**

Experience is that attendance and participation increases when there's activity for all the family at the same time - typically racing or training for juniors at the same time as parents are racing.

- **Back to Sailing and Racing**

Most clubs suffer from a significant drop out of people from sailing and racing coinciding with

- *Junior to Youth transition*
- *Youth going to university*
- *Young families arriving reducing / stopping people sailing altogether*
- *New people moving into the area or existing people wanting to start sailing*

You should consider programmes to increase participation by different “dormant groups” in the club (eg “ladies that launch”) as well continually trying to attract lapsed and new potential sailors into sailing and eventually into racing

- **Good social programmes.**

Post-race social is very important. Sailors usually like to discuss their race! Regular social events be they talks or “get togethers” are vital to help experienced and new sailors mix and share their sailing.

Visit the class stands at the RYA Dinghy Show and discuss how it would support the development of your club's racing, whether it runs buddying schemes, and what other initiatives it runs to encourage people to go racing.

Ensure that local One Design classes are supported as these often provide excellent racing in their locality.

In addition to the list on the RYA website, a very comprehensive listing is published by Yachts and Yachting in their annual racing classes guide. This covers dinghy, multihull and keelboat classes. It has a paragraph on each class giving its statistics

and secretary contact details. More up to date information is on their website, www.yachtsandyachting.com.