

The Alternative Sailing Guide

Rigging the boat

Most important thing to remember when rigging your Laser 5000 is to allow no more than 25 minutes between arriving at the club and the firing of the starting gun. Bring absolutely no tools, as these are much more conveniently borrowed from other yachties just as they are heading for the water with the tools safely locked away inside the car. This shouldn't cause too many problems though, as the keys will be tucked away in the rear bumper, just under the left tail-light (isn't that where you leave yours?). Step the mast and raise the jib. Take a good crack just under the right eyebrow from the flailing jib clew while you thread both jib sheets around the same side of the mast. Ensure that at least one kite sheet runs underneath the pole, and that the spinnaker halyard and pole out-haul go out side of the flick flock.

Jump into your wet-suit, which should either be:

1. Unwashed, wet and clammy from last week, smelling like the cat's been in it, or
2. Neatly washed and dried so that you spend 10 minutes hopping about on one leg trying to get the other leg in - whoops, that was the arm hole, pull it all off, try again.

As you forgot your spray top, just wear the jumper your mother knitted for you for Christmas. One more day's sailing shouldn't hurt it. Pull on your harness and wind up the tension on the shoulder straps until you walk like E.T. (and speak like him too). Leave the centreboard securely locked inside the car (keys just inside the rear bumper etc.), forget to take off the antique watch you inherited from your grandfather and it's time to hit the water.

Launching a Laser 5000

The boat should be held by the crew in such a way that his Royal Highness can step cleanly in without getting wet above the ankles. The crew should then proceed out into deep water, just a little bit further than the point at which all traction with the slip is lost. The helm can take his time to slot on the rudder, a process that will require plenty of instructions to be issued to the crew on just how to hold the boat steady. Having achieved this, you can pop the centre-plate in the slot, grab the mainsheet and depart. The crew should preferably come along as well. He/she should leap nimbly out of the shoulder-deep water over the high side of the already-heeling Laser 5000, straight onto the wire and pull in the jib-sheet while ... NO, LET IT GO, f**! sh%@ f&^%, GET IT IN! ON THE WIRE ... Make for the start-line, ensuring you get there in time to come barrelling in, in everyone's way right on the pin.

Language

It's worth deviating for a moment to discuss language and its use on the Laser 5000. All violent activity - tacking, gybing, starting, bagging the kite, twin wiring with the kite, sailing a Laser 5000 in Garda etc. - should be punctuated by appropriate comment from both skipper and crew. It should go something like this: F#\$k F#\$k F#\$k F#\$k F#\$k Sh&& F#\$k Sh&& ... It must really help, because everyone seems to do it.

Starting

It would make sense to start like this: Approach the point at which you want to start with 40-50 seconds to go, dive round to leeward of some unsuspecting victim and round up underneath them both on the wire with 20 seconds left, hitting the line at full tilt 1-2 seconds after the gun with clear water underneath you. Do not attempt this as a beginner. It really shags other boats

off, especially when they are the unsuspecting victims, and a better way to shag them off is this: Hit the committee boat hard with about 20 seconds to go, and because you don't want to cross the line early, just bear away and accelerate along the line, hitting all others in front of you. You might hear some language like that described above but remember that's fast.

The first beat

After the start, you should be neatly placed in some really bad air. Move well away from your crew and things might smell better. If you don't have a faster boat driving clean over the top of you, take at least 30 seconds to get settled down and wiring properly - there's sure to be someone going over the top of you by then. Everyone knows you have to tack to find clear air, so do this immediately, then tack back in front of a good group of approaching boats so that they all have to go around your now-stationary boat.

Remember that if a Laser 5000 feels comfortable going to windward, you're not pointing high enough or sailing it sufficiently level. Round up until the jib backs, and the helm should ease off the main until the crew gets washed off the back of the boat. You're sailing it sufficiently level when you can't breathe because the water coming off the bow is taking you round the head.

Tacking

There is a fundamental rule of Laser 5000: No tack ever feels like it works 100%. If you've just done a tack that worked, don't worry, the next one will be total sh*t.

Uncleat the mainsheet and say "Tacking" sufficiently quietly that you can't be heard. Leap into the boat, put the helm down and get caught on the wrong side of the boom by your trapeze wire when you can't unhook it. Meanwhile, the crew should be caught about half way over the boat with feet tangled in the biggest knot of ropes since the last Hangmen's conference. The crew should also fail to get the jib released. When all this is sorted, the crew should yank the jib bar-tight on the next tack, forcing the boat to heel enormously so that the cockpit scoops up 200 litres of water, and go out on the wire, leaving the jib totally over-powering the rudder and the boat going sideways. Recommended communication during the tack goes like this: Helm - "F\$%k F\$%k F\$%k F\$%k F\$%k": Crew - (calmly from the wire as the helm struggles in the centre of the cockpit) - "What the hell are you doing?". Such comments help a lot.

Bearing away at the top mark

This is impossible. Don't bother trying.

Spinnaker work

Kite work is simple if you remember a few simple rules. The crew should, as ever, obey the quiet orders of the Transom-Ballast regardless of whether their arms are about to pull out of their sockets. The real magic of course is to be performed by the helm: When the boat starts to heel to starboard, steer right; To port, steer left; To the front, yell something incomprehensible and follow a parabolic trajectory over the cockpit and head-first into the forestay.

If you were twin wiring up-hill, you should be twin wiring downhill as well. This is not as difficult as it seems, as the better you get, the more cash you can justify spending on buying and repairing sails.

There is a common myth that foot-loops for twin wiring the kite somehow either slow boats down or prevent their yachtsmen from being Real Laser 5000 Yachtsmen. This myth is part of a clever plot devised to ensure maximum frequency of spectacular prangs. If you do have foot-loops, make sure that they hang in such a way that the crew can't get his/her foot in. If necessary, the skipper can sit on them at the critical moment.

At the gybe, the crew should balance the boat while not allowing the kite to collapse for more than half a second, regardless of the course steered by the helm. As ever, the helm will need to continually instruct the crew on what to do next. At the bottom mark, the crew should nimbly leap into the boat and bag the kite before leaping back out on the wire ready to take over the tactical decisions from the poor, exhausted helmsman.

After the race

One simple rule to remember - never be present when the glasses need filling.

So that's how it's done. Now it's time to leave your wet-suit in the cupboard and the spinnaker in the garage and head for the water.

Cheers

Laurence

This guide has been adapted, with permission, from an original article on the Kiwi R Class Skiff website, which can be found at www.rclass.org. This lot make 18 Foot Skiff and International Canoe sailors look like rational, well-balanced individuals.