

An idiot's guide to race management - (or how to enjoy your OOD duty) (v3)

Your RO duty needn't be a hassle. With a few tips and some guidance it can be quite fun and something to look forward to. I very much enjoy my duty so here's what I find helps me to have fun.

Before race day

Your race officer duty starts long before race day. In fact it starts when you first receive your copy of the programme. At this point you should enter your duties into your diary and check dates don't clash with any other obligations; If they do then now is the time to arrange swaps.



Weather : Check forecasts regularly in the days leading up to race day and on race day. Have a wee think about wind direction and courses.

Be prepared: Identify your race officer assistant and safety crews and if possible remind them of their upcoming duty.

Race day

The key to enjoying your duty is **time**: More time means less stress and more fun, so give yourself plenty! Oh and don't forget the bickies and milk, it is an Annandale tradition to provide biscuits and milk for the post race fighting (I mean post race blether).



Shore prep

Get there early - no less than 1 hour before first gun. I always aim to be down at least one and a half hours beforehand. This gives half an hour quiet time before the hordes arrive and YOU time to relax. Stick kettle on and whilst on the boil open up the race officer room and lay out the race officer forms, money basket and pen. Have a slurp of tea and gather your thoughts. Open up the garage and if assistance is available launch the Orkney and fetch the comm. boat alongside the jetty.



Check her equipment: flags, burgee, course board and letters/numbers box, radio, anchor lines and angel, Dan Buoy, spare horn and main horn, stop- watch and spare. Pencils and rubbers, race sheets and paper. If a pursuit race you'll also need the countdown boards (large white on black boards with sequential numbers and aye, check the numbers are in sequence). Oh, and if you are male and beyond a certain age perhaps a bucket...

Brief your safety crews and identify the safety craft which has your additional buoys Y and W. it is a good idea to instruct this boat to standby alongside the comm. boat when on station and await instructions. Check that the safety boat officer has checked the boat's equipment and has a radio.

Before leaving the jetty decide whether you need to brief your race fleet. This can be a simple chat to inexperienced racers looking for encouragement or, if weather conditions are grim, advice on whether to race or not. You can run a race in anything from 4. Knots to 25 knots of wind. Remember, although ultimate decision to race lies with the participant, inexperienced sailors may not yet have the capacity to make an informed choice. If there are non racers wishing to cruise around then a friendly chat advising them of appropriate cruise areas does no harm and lifts their confidence levels. Maybe even try and encourage them to follow the fleet if they are nervous of entering a race. Don't force them though...slowly, slowly, catchy monkey.

Load up with chockies and a flask, soft drinks and water for proper hydration. Make sure you are dressed appropriately and take contingency clothing. A fleece, hat and shades never go amiss and sunscreen is a must even on cold sunny days.

The race

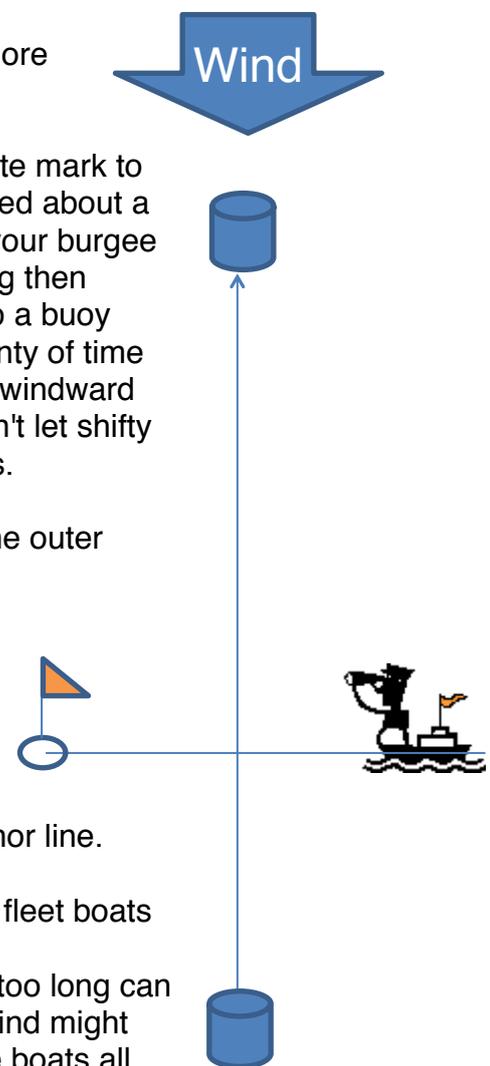
Leave the jetty a good 20 minutes before first gun (remember, more time means less stress) and motor up the loch.

Position the committee boat directly downwind from an appropriate mark to give a good lengthy beat. The committee boat should be positioned about a third of the way up the windward leg. Check your position using your burgee and adjust accordingly. If the wind is playing silly sods and shifting then simply take the mean position and instruct the safety boat to drop a buoy between the two extremes accordingly. Again, giving yourself plenty of time allows you to take regular burgee readings. This will give a good windward start and the race fleet will appreciate it immensely. However, don't let shifty winds prevent you from starting; racers quite like shifty conditions.

Once you are happy, call the support boat and have them drop the outer distant mark on the port side of the comm. boat at 90 degrees. The comm. boat should always be on the starboard end of the start line. It used to be recommended to have a bit of port bias on the line to help stop bunching at the starboard end but current thinking is for a straight 90 degrees.

The line can be adjusted by either giving instruction to the support boat or pulling forward or slipping back on your own anchor line.

The start line length should be the sum of the lengths of the race fleet boats plus 10% - 50%. In other words, not too long and not too short! A line too long can create problems of identification for ROs and in big events the wind might differ at either end. Too short and you are in real bother as the boats all bunch up and the protests will fly.



The leeward mark: If you are unlucky and don't have a permanent buoy behind you as the leeward mark then instruct your support boat to drop one of the additional buoys (w or y).

This should be placed so as an imaginary line drawn between it and the windward mark bisects the start line. If you are happy with all this and the wind hasn't shifted dramatically then now is the time to give a sound signal and run up the onstation flag (orange flag). The fleet now knows you mean business.

Now set the rest of your course: Ask your assistant for his/her thoughts but remember to set it according to the classes being raced and the wind strength; not an easy task as handicap racing inevitable means pleasing some and displeasing others but try and adopt the 'Box of Roses' approach; a little something for everyone. Oh, and watch out for wind shadows!

Course size:

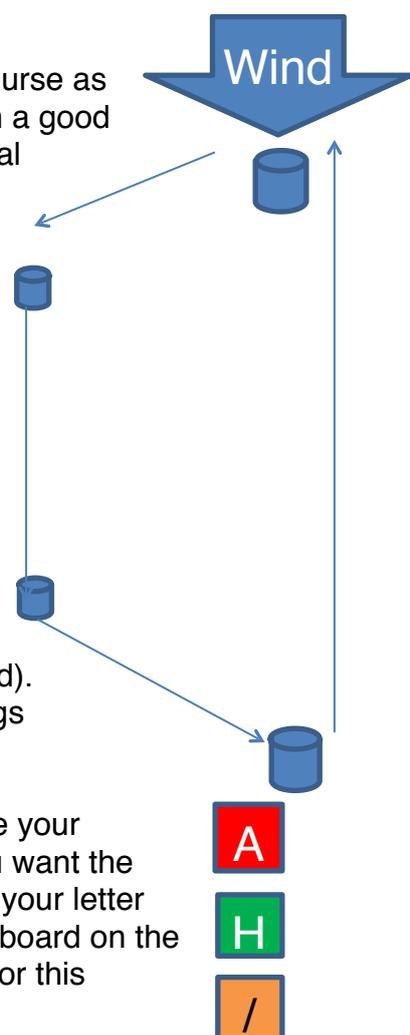
It is better to have several laps of a short course than one lap of a big course as it gives you more options to shorten or adjust. A good course will contain a good windward leg and a good leeward leg as these are reckoned to be tactical and gives greatest opportunity for racers to use their skills and judgement to best advantage. Throw in the odd broad reaching leg here and there for yahoo purposes and hike out grandstanding - great fun but not tactical and little overtaking opportunity. If in doubt or your brain is frazzled there is absolutely nothing wrong with a good old triangle. As your skills improve you will become confident in fitting in additional beats and you can try out trapezoids and such like, but at all times work within your own confidence levels and never be afraid to consult with the rest of your team. They appreciate being involved and it makes your job so much easier. You'll probably learn something as well.

Once you have agreed on your course you can test the roundings by running an imaginary thread round the buoys (draw it or use a chart card). If the 'thread' remains taught round the buoys, you have got the roundings correct, if not swap the rounding.

Now set up the course board using the red/green plastic letters and have your partner shout out and check it matches correctly for roundings etc. If you want the boats to cross the line at every lap then shove in the / card at the end of your letter sequence on the course board. Once you are happy, display the course board on the side of the committee boat. There's a handy bungee with carabiner clip for this purpose.

If you have your timings correct you will still have about 5 to 10 minutes before first gun and you can relax a bit and survey the fleet which hopefully will by now be milling around the committee boat checking your start line etc. Start to list the fleet on your race sheet etc. and, if you have time (and I like to do this always) ask one of the racers to sail through the start line close hauled so you can double check the line quality. Make minor adjustments as above.

Now radio your support craft to call for radio silence, stating you are about to commence a start sequence. This cuts down unnecessary distractions.



Agree with your assistant who is doing what (flags, horn, line etc) and don't be afraid to ask each other to check as you go.

The start

Once you are all happy that all is in place, Sound the horn and begin the start sequence. This is:- 5,4,1,0.

At 5 minutes (class or handicap flag up with 1 sound signal),



At 4 minutes (preparatory flag P up with 1 sound signal),



At 1 minute (preparatory flag P lowered with 1 sound signal),



At 0 minutes (class flag lowered with 1 sound signal and go)...



If any are over the line and you can identify them then 1 extra toot and raise flag X for an individual recall. Once the offenders have returned through the line you must lower Flag X . In any event the flag is lowered after 4 minutes and if any offending boats have not returned then they are automatically disqualified.



If too many are over the line to identify then its a general recall and you give 2 extra toots and raise the First Sub flag. You must then wait until all the boats return and recommence with a complete new start sequence. Keep the flag up til 1 minute before the new start sequence. By the way, if you do have a big general recall have a think what might have caused it: your line might be wrong or there may have been a significant wind shift.



During the start sequence try NOT to chat as concentration is paramount. However, If you are distracted and miss a flag then don't panic: two hoots and raise your good friend and saviour, flag AP (Answering Pennant) to postpone. Recalibrate your stress noddle, relax and start again.(AP is lowered 1 minute before new start so suggest you reset watches for six minutes or ask your partner to use theirs set for a minute).



Top tip. Remember, YOU are in charge; don't be bullied by nervous racers yattering away in the background - chances are they know less than you and they are usually only burning nervous energy in the form of noise (it's not personal). Anyway, what pleases one racer will equally displease another. Do however be prepared to listen if you are being informed of a duff line or a significant wind shift. Take your time but always remain in charge.

The race has now hopefully started and you can relax. Time to play armchair strategist as you criticise or complement the various goings on as the fleet progresses. Pour yourself a cup of char and break out the Crunchie bars and praise your team.

As the boats approach the end of the lap, prepare your clipboard and tick off the boats as they come through the line noting the time in minutes and seconds and the lap number completed (compulsory for handicap races). There are forms printed on waterproof paper for this purpose.

The Finish

Races at ASC generally last somewhere between 45 minutes and 1 hour. So judge which lap this is most likely to occur.

The max number of laps you may race is 6, so if you are going to finish within this then you shorten the race when the first boat approaches the last leeward mark by displaying Flag S and giving 2 good toots.

Note the elapsed time and number of laps completed for each boat as they cross the finishing line.

Give a clear sound signal when the first boat to finish crosses the line as this gives the other competitors a time reference. You must note this time. You may give the other racers a complementary toot as they cross the line (not compulsory by the way, but nice to give and gives the racer an indication he/she has finished and a hint to thank the OOD crew.)

Once all boats have crossed the finishing line the race is now finished so give yourselves a pat on the back and retrieve your buoys and return to the shore or begin prep. for the next race.

After the race

After racing it is your job to cash up and place the properly and neatly completed race and cash sheets in the appropriate doocot. Chase up any non payers as well.

Check and make sure all the safety boats and committee boat are returned to their proper homes and also make sure they are as you would expect to find them with everything in their proper places. It is not nice to arrive for duty and find stuff all over the place and the committee boat flags flapping around like some scruff's washing line. Take your time and tidy up properly. A place for everything and everything in its place, eh?

Ensure the clubhouse is thoroughly checked over with everything switched off and lock up.



Summary

So, to quickly summarise:-

- # Put the dates in your diary
- # Give yourself PLENTY of time
- # Prepare the paperwork
- # Check the committee boat
- # Brief your racers if necessary
- # Wear appropriate clothing
- # Take Nosh and drinks
- # Windward start, Broad Reaches, Dead Runs
- # Timings in minutes and secs and number of laps.
- # After the race, tidy up and leave as you expect to find.

There you go, not so bad now was it?

Willie Patterson (idiot)

Images courtesy of Richard Bryant (good guy)