

SWIFTSURE STARTING

(Some practical advice)

Swiftsure is a unique race in many ways, and that includes start line considerations. So, instead of talking about the usual boat speed & sail trim stuff, I'd like to take a slightly different tack, and address some of the basic DO's that might help you not just survive, but thrive on the Swiftsure start line!

DOCK START TIME: Work backwards from your start time to figure out a realistic dock departure. I'd recommend getting to the start area about an hour before your scheduled start. Leave a little buffer for the standard hold ups, like being boxed in by the last two teams to leave the barge. Plan on 35 to 40 minutes from the inner harbour, 45 minutes from Royal Vic. or CFSA.

SUSSING OUT THE STARTLINE: Getting out early has all sorts of benefits for you and your crew. Even though the line is in the same general vicinity from year to year, the configuration can vary quite a bit. Line length and skew, favoured end in terms of wind direction, pressure and current variations are all important. So "Find the Line" for a better start.

WATCH THE EARLIER STARTS: OK, so Swiftsure Lightship boats you're out of luck on this one, but for everyone else there's much to be gleaned. As the fleets progress up the course towards Race Passage, it's like having dozens of wind vanes to look at. Watch closely to identify variations across the course, persistent shifts, pressure and any other clues.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE FILL: More often than not, Swiftsure morning is about a filling breeze. There are some regular patterns to the fill, but paying attention to the texture on the water, heel and pointing angles of the other boats, will help paint a picture, and identify the progression of the fill. Devise your starting strategy around best pressure at and after the gun.

THE RIGHT STRATEGY, THE RIGHT SAIL: An important part of any Swiftsure starting strategy is choosing the right sail combination. It can be a long wait if you're one of the later starters and so a lot can change with the breeze in that time. I'm a big believer in doing some sailing before the start, getting everyone loosened up and in the groove, and that obviously means having a headsail of some sort up. Have the next obvious sail(s) on deck, discuss the possibilities and make

the final call based on what's to come. I'd recommend having a bowman on the bow at all times while manoeuvring in the prestart. Smaller boats exempted, but keep your eyes open. Prestart collisions or near collisions are no fun!

RADIO MONITORING FOR RECALLS: There have been quite a few recalls in recent memory, so be vigilant and make sure you've heard the all clear... or the individual or general recall. It can be a bit confusing, so make sure you've read the Race Instructions and procedures. Do you restart right away or go to the back of the pack?

CLEAR LANES AND CURRENT LINES: Getting away from the line in clear air, with a clear lane IS really what the Swiftsure start is all about. A clear lane preferably means bow out, room to foot if required or enough bow out to move up and forward on the boat(s) to weather. Staying on the correct side of a current line is also very important. Monitoring SOG is vital, be it instruments or relative speed to a single boat or the fleet. Work like mad on boat speed, preserve and build on that advantage you've worked for. If you find yourself in a less than perfect lane, think speed, speed, speed, Foot rather than point.

LOOK OUT FOR THE KELP...AND STICKS...AND LOGS,,,,, AND..: Yah, Clover point tends to be a bit of a backstop for debris and there's generally a kelp bed at the shore end. The debris usually collects along a tide or current line and the movement of the loose pieces can indicate current direction and strength. Pay attention and make sure you're not collecting anything along the way. Be prepared to do a back up before your sequence starts, it's worth the effort.

KNOW YOUR COMPETITION, AND DON'T GET LOST..: Review the boats in your fleet before the race, and identify the competition before the start. Pay attention to what they're doing in the prestart, it will give you some clue as to their strategy and very likely influence your own decisions. When I say don't get lost, I mean, taking a flyer and splitting with your identified competition early on is risky in a long race. There are a lot of other smart sailors out there!

Best of luck to all competitors and I'll see you on the Swiftsure start line!

Alex Fox, "The Sailing Shop at Trotac Marine"

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