

Harbour Racing Tips

By Alan Gick

Alan has lived and sailed in Bosham for 50+ years, he has ocean raced and is a Thames Barge Master. Alan races at Bosham in Gannet, a Chichester Harbour restricted 12 footer built in 1934 for his mother's 21st birthday. Gannet is still in the family and won the Bosham Sailing Club classic dayboat series in both 2001 and 2002. - Bosham

This year John Davis has asked for Racing Tips on Bosham Creek. A photo of the Bosham Channel at low tide with the relevant racing marks and points of interest marked, is on the adjacent page. At this point it is sensible to consider the people who race in Bosham Creek. Most of them are members of Bosham Sailing Club and the races run by BSC are probably best described as un-pressurised. In the largest class, the Classic Dayboats, there has never been a protest. This attitude to racing and mood of the club probably came about through a number of things but the sailing environment is certainly one of the contributory factors. Looking at the air photo you will see that the creek runs just west of South, the prevailing wind is South Westerly. You will also see there are a large number of moored yachts, these have a major effect on racing. When racing a scow or an optimist, you have to be very wary of the significant wind shadow that lies to leeward of a large moored yacht. If you are pinching to get to windward of a moored yacht you will find that the wind is frequently deflected off the moored yacht forcing you to make a hurried tack. Basically the moored boats just make sailing difficult for everyone. The modern faster racing dinghies, RS's, Laser 5000's etc do not start from the Bosham Quay Line and it would probably be un-seamanlike if they did. The racing that has developed at BSC consists of General Handicap, Classic Dayboats, Scows, and for the cadets, Optimists. Possibly these boats have become established classes because they are all relatively slow and can manoeuvre satisfactorily amongst the moored yachts.



Looking at the racing facilities in the creek, BSC has 2 starting lines, one at Cobnor and the other at Bosham Quay; both are marked on the photograph. The Cobnor start and finish line is usually used during neap tide weekends when the tide is high in the early morning and evening. Courses starting at Cobnor will generally run south making use of marks outside the creek, finally returning to the creek to finish at the Cobnor line.

Whatever you are racing there are 4 points you need to consider:

- The upper reaches of both Cutmill Rythe to the north of Bosham quay and School Rythe to the east are only usable for 2 hours either side of high tide and on neap tides they are very shallow.
- The large number of craft on swinging moorings significantly affect the course you can sail.
- Both the direction and strength of the wind is greatly affected by shelter given from whichever is the windward shore.

- During the spring tides the movement of water in the creek to the south of the old dam can run to 2 knots. As the boats racing from BSC are relatively slow, taking advantage of the slacker tides inshore, especially in light airs, will frequently give you that winning break.

There are any number of factors that need to be taken into account when racing in Bosham creek. To make it easier, an imaginary course has been set and the marks of the course are both listed below and shown on the photo of the creek. The text follows thoughts that a helmsman might well have/consider as he goes round this imaginary course. He is sailing a 14 foot Yachting World Day boat with a Portsmouth Yardstick of 1220.

The course is: Quay start - heading south, Deep End - Port, Cobnor - Starboard, Rythe End - Starboard, Anchor - Starboard, Rythe End - Starboard, Cutmill - Starboard, Finish - Quay line crossing from North to South.

Look at the course marked on the photograph and then follow the dialogue. The start we will say is set for 1100 with the spring tide high at 1230, the wind as set above is South Westerly 8 knots Force 3. This direction is marked on the photograph. All the racing marks are indicated by name.

START – Southerly from the Quay Line. With the wind blowing from the South West – the prevailing wind - the BSC quay start line has a bias towards a start on the Chidham (Westerly) shore. With 1½ hours of spring flood still to run, short tacking very close to the Chidham shore is almost always the best plan. In very light airs it will probably be worth raising your plate to ¾ down to take full advantage of the slacker tide closer inshore.

TO DEEP END – SOUTHERLY. It's best to keep to the Chidham shore until the SW wind starts to be sheltered by the Cobnor trees, usually just past the Gestetner jetty that is on the eastern shore. You will now be 20 minutes nearer the top of tide which will be at 1330, it will have started to slacken. Cross the channel and you will be clear of the shelter given by the Cobnor trees and can continue down the Bosham side of the creek tacking out of the tide. When you approach the Deep End racing mark remember it is handed to Port. Before you start any race at Bosham take down the course given making sure you have noted which way each mark is to be rounded, many of the marks at BSC are not handed.

TO COBNOR – NORTHERLY. As a rule when you travel North in the reach up to Cobnor always stick to the Eastern side – the tide always runs fastest on the outside of a bend which means on the ebb it runs fastest on the Chidham side and on the flood it is running fastest on the Bosham or eastern shore. In this particular race this advice is not so relevant as the tide by now will be nearly its highest and be with you, flooding. As you pass Cobnor racing mark be careful of the training dinghies with yellow or white and red sails, they are learners and prone to unpredictable behaviour. The best racing tactic is just keep out of their way!

TO RYTHE END. This buoy is always difficult to find – it is usually obscured by moored yachts. Have a look on your way south to note a yacht that is nearest the buoy. By this point in the race the tide will still be flooding gently.

TO ANCHOR. This in a south westerly wind should be a broad reach on starboard but the wind is very fickle in School Rythe, always head well to windward of the mark as shifts 20-30 degrees during your trip to Anchor may well be encountered. Remember it is shallow and be careful about the weed during May-June. If you suddenly feel you are going slowly, fully raise and lower both your centreplate and rudder blade, if it is calm do it quietly otherwise everyone will copy!

TO RYTHE END AND CUTMILL. On the beat back to round Rythe End, the deeper boats will need to keep in the centre of the channel where the moorings are – this can be seen on the photograph. Having rounded Rythe End to starboard you will soon pass the end of the quay on the way north towards Cutmill. Look carefully at the race flags on the start box, in lighter airs the courses are sometimes shortened. The flags are small and in the prevailing wind lie towards the start building and directly away from your line of vision as you cross the start/finish line.

When you have passed the quay make certain you go between the port and starboard withies at the end of the old dam. These are marks of the course and you will be disqualified if you don't leave them both on the shoreward side of the course. They actually mark the outer end of a row of stakes from the old dam, hitting one of them would not enhance your boat!

On the northbound run to Cutmill, remember the weed problem and remember that the Cutmill racing mark is not handed. Make sure you are going the correct way round it. On the beat back to the finish there is no noticeable tide in the Cutmill Creek but the wind can vary by up to 30 degrees as you progress south. Again remember to keep off-shore of the port and starboard withies marking the old dam. At the quay line you should receive a claxon!

That is a typical short, light weather race at Bosham. There are all sorts of other points that should be taken into account. In an easterly it could be best to start from the Quay end of the line. When you race successfully south against the tide on the eastern shore (Club side) in an easterly wind you will find that by the Gestetner jetty the wind is blanked by the trees on the shore. If you decide to start out of the tide check the tide tables, but more important have a look at the nearest withy and see just exactly what the tide is doing, go out to the nearest moored boat look at the tide running past her, compare the relative water speeds. Work out where you want to start, do a trial run over the path you have selected. It will probably be sensible even with a close hauled start to raise the plate a little to ensure you do not touch the bottom during the pre-start manoeuvres.

A start against the tide usually involves the slower boats crowding the inshore positions, in these conditions a start watch is less relevant – at the one minute gun just get on the correct tack close to where you want to start, go as slowly as you can, when the gun is sounded just pull in the sheets and go, you will nearly always be amongst the first few over the line. Avoid timed starts at speed from a long way behind the line, the theory is great but starts at Bosham often vary from plan!

FINALLY – A previous racing tip suggested looking at the creek on dead low springs. For those who miss the chance the photograph attached can be used as a substitute. You probably will not remember it that well but after you have bumped a few offending banks and looked again at the photograph, you will find that you will be able to visualise this dead low photograph as an overlay as you sail.

A key part of any racing is dependent on the organisation, BSC's un-pressurised racing style offers a rather good 'Complete shallow water tidal racing experience', it seems to suit the boats and the people who participate, it probably reduces the damage to moored craft and of course most important, it is good fun.