

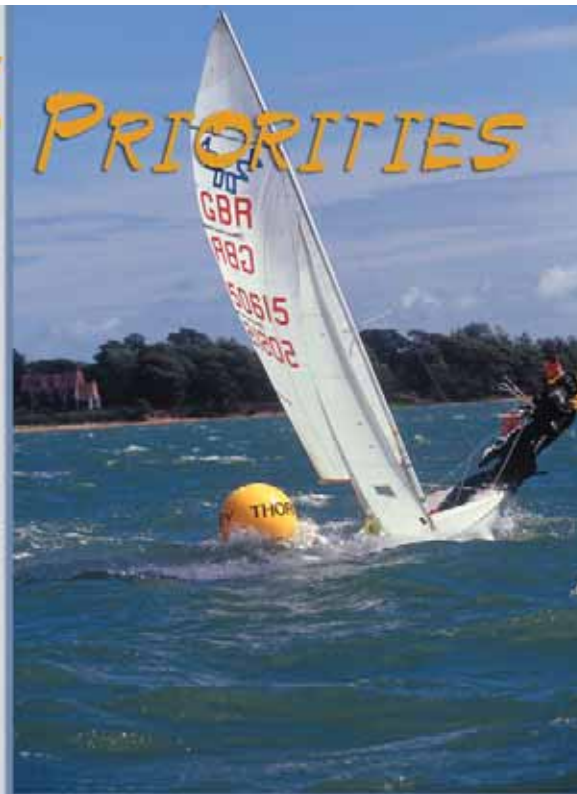
HARBOUR RACING TIPS

SORT THE PRIORITIES



Mark Rushall gives a word of advice to help you make the right choices in your gameplan

Ian Porter, Roger Palmer, Roger Wickens, Tim Weedon, Alan Gick, and Jim Saltenstall have all written entertaining and informative articles giving top tips for racing around and outside Chichester Harbour. They've all given us the advantage of their experience, providing clues on where the race winning tidal flows, wind bends, and calm areas are found in their favourite part of the harbour. If you missed them first time, most of these articles can be found on www.conservancy.co.uk.



However all of the experts' advice comes with some sort of caveat: 'There are generally other considerations'... 'Nothing is ever certain'... 'Be warned! All other things are not always equal!'... 'The difficulty comes with the choice and importance of each of these factors'.

One of the joys of sailing is that no one race condition is identical to another. While Ian Porter says '...one may regard the tide being the master and the wind the slave most of the time', Roger Wickens responds with 'As a rule of thumb if I have to choose between more wind or less adverse current, I elect for the wind'.

Faced with this sort of diversity, we somehow need a way to identify the priorities for the race (or each leg of the race!), and make sure that our strategy focuses on them. If we can get some other things right too, that's a bonus, but we should not get distracted from the real race winning factors. We'll discuss the variables which we've found most relevant to our racing and coaching around the harbour, and suggestions of conditions in which each one comes to the fore.

The tide

Tidal tactics are normally the major factor in the harbour. We'd expect tidal tactics to take the most precedence at spring tides, on legs sailed against the current and in steady, medium strength winds, when a few knots extra breeze makes a small difference to boatspeed, tacking and gybing lose little speed, and gains through windshifts are small.



The harbour is alive! Always take time at the start of the season to find where the sand has shifted

Strength: Beating against the tide up the Emsworth channel, it is simply a matter of taking advantage of the weaker stream over the shallower water on either side of the channel. On a short beat we'd normally look at the windward and leeward mark and pick the side which involves the shortest crossing of the main tide. On a longer beat we'd choose the side which gives the biggest expanse of shallow water, in this case the eastern shore. An eddy gives double the gain: we've found eddies near Hayling Island Sailing Club (HISC), south east of Pilsey Island, and behind East Head. Spot the current strength and direction from the wash around withies and moored boats. Notice when the current is dropping or turning from the direction the moored boats are lying.

Direction: Many of the channels of the harbour don't run in straight lines. But our racing legs are set in straight lines over these curves. We can plan our beat against the tide so that the tide is on our port bow when on starboard, or our starboard bow when on port, on one of the legs. Then our sailing wind will be lifted compared with those that don't. That means we will get there sooner! Some people call this 'lee-bowing the tide'.

In steady winds and adverse tide there are plenty of such opportunities on the sweeping curves between Itchenor and HISC. Sailing this 'classic harbour beat' will present an interesting combination of varying tidal direction, and strength through both depth variation, as well as slower current around the inside compared with the outside of the curves.

Tidal strength and direction also affect layline calls and course to steer to sail a rhumb line. It is tempting, when approaching the windward mark with the tide underneath, to judge the layline by tacking directly behind the boat ahead. But by the time we get to his spot, we have been carried way above the layline and end up overstanding and sailing extra distance. It is also difficult, once on the layline, or on a reach with cross tide, to judge a straight line course to the mark. Pick up an object on the bank which lines up with the mark. If the object moves left, turn right, and vice versa.

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The wind

Strength: Avoiding the tide may make a knot or more's difference to progress toward the next mark. But in light, patchy conditions the difference between sailing in breeze or calm will be even more significant. Upwind, we are looking for the areas of more pressure. Downwind, when there is a chance to stay in the individual puffs as they travel downwind, we line ourselves up and stay in them for as long as possible. Racing in the Snowflake in Chichester Lake, or at Emsworth or Bosham in overcast (non sea breeze) conditions are classic 'wind spotting' situations. Avoid the trees, other larger fleets, and congested areas of moored or anchored boats (East Head!) and look for the clues on the water. But take care that those extra ripples in the centre of the channel aren't simply the effect of a stronger current rather than more wind!

Sailing in Hayling Bay in an easterly, there will usually be more breeze on the left of the beat, a more important factor than a small tide variation over this large relatively shallow area.

Direction: Northerly winds are shifty in every part of the harbour, as well as in the Bay. If the tide is the major consideration, co-ordinating tidal strategy with sailing the lifts will give gains. If the tide is favourable, shifts take priority. Similarly on a classic sunny harbour day with clear and cloudy patches, there will be significant oscillations with (usually) stronger, veered wind in the clear patches.

As the wind strength and boat speed increases, especially in performance classes, gains through keeping in phase with the windshifts become more significant and may take over as the most important variable.

The wind also bends around many of the headlands in the harbour, and can be incorporated into the strategy in all sailing conditions. For example, in a north-easterly you'll be headed on port as you sail toward the inside of the bend around East Head, and make big gains as you lift away toward Bosham on starboard.

Type of boat

As we've hinted, the type of boat we are racing greatly affects strategic priorities in the harbour. Roger's Sunbeam takes a long time to build to maximum speed, so wind strength always takes a higher priority than for a lighter boat. A Firefly or an RS200 centreboard pops up on contact with the ground, and it loses no speed when it tacks,



Mark coaching in Chichester Harbour

but sails no faster upwind in 20 knots of breeze than at 5 knots. We'd expect tide to dominate strategy more in this type of boat than in an International 14, which breaks when it runs aground but has still not hit terminal velocity in 25 knots!

Walk the course

The Harbour is alive! Every year the channels and sandbanks move. The photograph on page 6 recently explained my most recent crash landing: where there was once water there is now sand! All of the top harbour sailors recommend taking the time at the beginning of the season to learn the latest position of sands and channels.

Keep a log!

We won our first national championship in Chichester Harbour in 1974! How I wish I had made just a few notes of lessons learned at that championship, and every harbour race sailed since. Unsuccessful races can be just as good learning experiences as successful ones. A log helps to drive those lessons home, and would certainly have helped me in writing this article!

Mark Rushall, based in Emsworth, is a national racing coach and journalist, who has been successfully racing around Chichester Harbour (and the rest of the world!) for 30 years. For coaching enquiries please e-mail coach@rushall.net



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