



ADVANCED RACING TACTICS



Australian Yachting Federation
Recommended Edition

Stuart H. Walker



ADVANCED RACING TACTICS

This book is directed to those racing in large fleets at major championship events in open water — national regattas, Olympic trials, and the like. It is for the advanced racing skipper, or the skipper who is ready to become one.

Dr Stuart Walker, one of the foremost theoreticians of the art of yacht racing, is also one of the most skilled helmsmen racing today. He was the first American winner of the Prince of Wales trophy for the International 14 class, is a winner of the International One-of-a-Kind championship, has been a member of the United States Olympic sailing team, and has won many other championships in Europe, Canada and the United States. He has also been active in the Soling class since 1968.

Using his vast experience and case histories from others, he demonstrates how the tactical situation, the weather, the current and the overall strategic considerations can be put to use. Here too is what to expect from your boat and its crew — whether the crew be just one person or several.

Preparation, tactical principles as applied to starting, beating, reaching, running and finishing are all, with the help of copious illustrations, analysed in depth with an expertise that must make **Advanced Racing Tactics** a definitive work of its kind.

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Foreword

In the past decade far more sailors than ever before have reached a superior level of competitive ability, and racing is conducted far more often on properly established, large triangles in open water. The skills necessary to success continue to evolve. A level of ability that could provide a reasonable rate of success a year ago is insufficient today. The few individuals who remain at the head of competitive classes year after year must constantly improve their skills. Even a superior background must be enhanced by continuous competition. To pass up the big regattas for a year is to be left out.

My own experiences reflect this general trend. When I wrote *The Tactics of Small Boat Racing* ten years ago, my racing had been done chiefly in the International 14, usually in small fleets with but a few highly qualified competitors, and often in confined waters. In the past decade, I have raced largely in boats of the Soling class (as well as 5.5-meters and International 14's), in large fleets, in open waters, and against dozens of highly qualified competitors simultaneously. My experiences in the Olympics, in World, North American, European, and various national championship races, and in Olympic trials, CORK, and SPORT, are representative of racing at today's high standards; many of these experiences are described in this book.

The principles set forth herein are primarily applicable to racing in major regattas, in big fleets, against top competition. They embody understanding gained on Olympic and Gold Cup courses in open water. The same principles may be appropriate to racing in smaller fleets in confined waters, but in these circumstances other matters may be of greater significance. Race-committee behavior, shoreline effects, "local knowledge," aberrant starting lines were discussed in *The Tactics of Small Boat Racing*. The present volume presumes a thorough knowledge of the racing rules and of boat-handling skills. It deals neither with the determinants of boat speed (for a complete analysis see *Performance Advances in Small Boat Racing*) nor with the variations in surface air flow that determine strategy (see *Wind and Strategy*). What is considered is the most advantageous means of starting, beating, reaching, running, and finishing in the close proximity of large numbers of highly competent competitors.

I have kept a complete record of the factors that determined the outcome of every race in which I have competed for the past eight years. My recommendations are based upon the analysis of these races—the mistakes and the successes. I have tried to present what mattered, what consistently provided an advantage. I have ignored tactical flourishes that worked occasionally, but risked greater loss or disqualification. Consistency is what provides series success. It is better always to do the “right” thing—even though it turns out to be wrong 20 percent of the time—than to experiment and risk being wrong 50 percent of the time. And there are basic principles of starting, beating, reaching, mark rounding that are “right,” that should be practiced every time. Forget about boat speed (once you’ve got it), forget about the grand strategy (once you’ve understood its determinants)—and sail the boat.

My good friend Robert Bearer commented after observing a group of sailors racing in the Bahamas that what they seemed to want was not to learn to race better, but rather to be moved up five places by a beneficent god. This book will provide no such magic. It will, however, stimulate the reader to analyze for himself the determinants of tactical success. He must look around, examine his own mistakes and successes, record them, review them, remember them. When he recognizes from his own experience the validity of the principles presented here, they will become useful to him. When he has incorporated them into his regular racing patterns, he will have made a five- or ten-year leap forward. However, only continuous participation at the top level will maintain him at that level and permit him to keep pace with the competition.