

12/07/08 week 6

Laser 413 frostbiting WOW (words of wisdom) - Steve K.

Sunday was cold and windy with 35ish degree temps and a 14-22 knot westerly. The shifts were big and often fanned out in a way that accentuated any change in direction. Lifts and headers with the vang on too hard could result in either a round up or an auto tack pinned under the boom. The trick for speed and safety was thus to crank the vang super hard only when you weren't confronting a big velocity and / or direction change.

Since the puffs were really big I tended to start with a port approach coming at the line from pretty far downwind and my vang relatively slack. This enabled a straightforward tack into what I thought was a good position. A few times the hole I thought I had was shut out by a boat reaching or just plain blowing down into the zone in a big puff. When this occurred I tacked and went further up the line or cranked off further to leeward depending on which side I wanted to favor.

Off the line the key was straight line speed. Hiking super hard in the first minute of the race was essential. This was particularly true Sunday because in at least two races I had Andy P. to windward and Chad A. to leeward. Since both are total grinders the best thing to do was to hike like mad and hope for one of them to hit a wave or for me to get a bit bow out in a shift. This worked out well in race three, but in race five Chad pinned me until we were deep on the left side of the beat. Thankfully in the first three races I was able to get breathing room and hike like mad to get into the top pack. A few lucky shifts got me into the top three at the weather mark.

Downwind the waves were fantastic. A couple of years ago we hosted Steve Cockerill at Roger Williams University for a "Boat Whisperer" lecture. Those who attended will recall his comment about keeping the bow pointed downhill and to turn as aggressively as needed in order to make this happen. Sunday was the perfect day for this as the breeze was on and you could get acceleration going up or down if your timing was good. Once on the wave it was relatively easy to make big gains by staying focused on keeping the bow going downhill.

One thing that has helped my downwind approach significantly is kiteboarding. Although I don't get to go that often it is so much more extreme than running in a Laser that you lose all fear of wiping out. Believe me when I say that if you lose it on a kiteboard the outcome can be a hell of a lot worse than a high speed death roll. So when I'm going downwind and am debating whether to press by the lee or do a bottom turn I really have no fear. Any bad outcome is so tame in comparison to getting launched out of control on a kite in 30 knots of breeze. Before adopting this training mode I wholeheartedly recommend taking professional lessons and practicing with a small trainer kite. One option is Real

Kiteboarding on Cape Hatteras, NC - co-owned by former Laser sailor and Tufts Jumbo Trip Forman.

Lastly on the final beat knowing where the layline to the closer mark is helps cut down excess distance. If you have a sense of what the breeze will do on the final beat you should plan your mark rounding accordingly and choose which ball you will round. That said it was often so windy that I simply chose right hand ball looking downwind since it didn't require a gybe. Since the breeze was shifted a bit south at this point I tried to tack shortly after the rounding to avoid sailing beyond the layline to the pin end of the finish.

As always it was great fun. There is one more word but Theresa Colantuono told me it would be inappropriate to share the real secret to keeping your feet warm in a mass e-mail. If you want to know come ask me on Sunday....my secret only works with wetsuit socks and boots.