

Top Tip #8

This month's top tip is courtesy of Jonathan Jowett.

Where to Look

Knowing what to look at and when to look at it can definitely add speed to your boat, more so than almost anything else in my opinion. When sailing upwind in flat water conditions I spend a lot of my time looking around me for where the wind is. At Littleton you can get big lifts (and dumps) if you sail into the wrong part of the lake. Look for the darkness of the water, where you will be able to see the gusts as they move down the lake, and try to work out where the stronger winds are, or where the biggest wind shadows are. Polarised sunglasses really help to do this, even in low light conditions. Use the tell tales, to make sure you stay on the wind. They should be flying level.

As you come around a leeward mark and round up on to the wind, take a compass bearing, or make a mental note what the boat is 'pointing' at on the shoreline. On the next lap, compare it again, and you will know immediately if you are being lifted, or headed, and if you should tack off or not.

When sailing on a run, make sure you are looking at the burgee ensuring that you are actually going downwind. Look at the burgee straight away after bearing away round the windward mark, and then check it occasionally on the downwind leg. Use the rest of the downwind time looking behind you, to see where the gusts are coming from.

When sailing in waves the wave pattern is really important. Look at the waves more than the tell tales. Going upwind, try to steer the best course you can through the chop, this is usually the flattest water. If you do hit a "stopper wave" then bear away a little bit in order to pick up speed again. When sailing downwind through waves, again look at the wave pattern, and pick the spots where you can "break through" the wave pattern of one set, and move through into the next set of waves. This stops you burying the nose of your Solo into the wave in front, and in big waves stops the water breaking over the front of the bow, and filling the cockpit.

Finally, you also need to look at the other boats around you, and try to work out tactically what the best thing to do is (as well as working out what the rules are now, and which rules look like they will come into play soon). Coming in on port tack, to a windward mark when all the other boats in the fleet are coming in on starboard at the same time as you, may not make for the best mark rounding experience.