

# MATCH RACING

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

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In most races a second place is nothing to sneeze at, but in a match race like the America's Cup it's just another way of saying "last" Special strategy and tactics are called for in a match race, with the aim not to get around the course in the fastest possible time (as in a fleet race) but rather to finish ahead of your single opponent.

Match race strategy is particularly apparent and especially important at the start. The aim is not to start with the gun but rather ahead of the other boat and if possible on her wind. That's why in the ten minutes\* before the start both boats invariably circle each other like a pair of wrestlers. The aim is to get positioned close behind the other boat, thus enhancing the chance of blocking her when she attempts to head back for the starting line. If in the process you can get on her wind then you've got it made. An excellent match race start is one in which you might be a full minute late but your opponent is two lengths behind and to leeward.

Once the race has started, the boat in the lead does everything possible to hinder the other's progress. The boat behind manoeuvres to get clear air. The frequent tacking duels are a favourite tactic of the trailing boat, designed to enable her to get her wind clear and, hopefully, to cause a fouled sheet or other breakdown in the boat ahead.

Although the basics of match racing call for the boat ahead never to give the one behind a chance to get clear, there are times when it pays to let her go a bit, provided you're confident she is heading the wrong way into unfavourable wind. Knowing when such a time has arrived is one of the many subtleties which give match racing an attraction all its own.

On downwind legs the boat astern tends to have an advantage. She can pick her own time to jibe and the leader must jibe immediately to keep clear wind.

If you've gotten the impression that match racing is a dog eat dog affair, you're absolutely right. But it's all done in accordance with a strict code of rules and while it's frustrating to be clobbered by a more wily opponent, good sportsmanship prevails.

\* NOTE: In Royal Lympington Cup this is five minutes!