

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: Getting ready to race

Now that you've decided to do the Pacific Cup, your safety, your enjoyment, and your competitive performance will depend more on your preparation than on your vessel or your crew. For you, the race has already started; you'll spend more time in preparation than you will sailing. A well prepared boat and crew is safe, fun and fast; good goals for any off-shore passage.

This guide is intended to help those who are considering a significant offshore passage where the vessel will be beyond easy return to port or shore based assistance. It is important that anyone sailing offshore be prepared to deal with any emergency situation, even when participating in a group crossing. Assistance from other boats, freighters, or Coast Guard aircraft is very limited. In most cases if your vessel is incapacitated the only alternative is to be taken off by another vessel. The loss of a rudder or a mast without an alternative frequently means the loss of the vessel, yet many have suffered one of these failures and made port safely with a jury rig. The difference is preparation.

Who's responsible?

This is a challenge common to all boats, regardless of size or type, and is best described by the ISAF Offshore Special Regulations and U.S. Sailing Prescriptions, Section 1.02 (<http://www.sailing.org/specialregulations.php>):

“The Safety of a yacht and her crew is the sole and inescapable responsibility of the owner, or owner's representative who must do his/her best to ensure that the yacht is fully found, thoroughly seaworthy and manned by an experienced crew who have undergone appropriate training and are physically fit to face bad weather.

He/She must be satisfied as to the soundness of hull, spars, rigging, sails and all gear. He/She must ensure that all safety equipment is properly maintained and stowed and that the crew knows where it is kept and how it is to be used.

Neither the establishment of these Special Regulations, their use by race organizers, nor the inspection of a yacht under these Special Regulations in any way limits or reduces the complete and unlimited responsibility of the owner or owner's representative.

The ISAF requirements represent sailing's best understanding of the equipment and training appropriate for offshore sailing. The appropriate Sections are an excellent guide for any off-shore passage and are part of the requirements for the Pacific Cup Race. Deal with it; no whining.

Understanding the objective

The very first task is to clearly describe the Objective, and from that it will be possible to organize and set priorities for the very large task of preparation. If the boat and owner are making their first ocean crossing it is a challenge that will involve a significant commitment of time and money.

There are as many different objectives as there are boats on the ocean; but there are some common elements that need to be considered and addressed. Balance and consistency across the program will go a long way towards safe, fun, fast.

What are you trying to accomplish? If the answer is a safe passage to Hawaii, you're a **Cruiser**. If you are focused on bringing home one of the lovely trophies, you're a **Racer**. And if you have your heart set on the Pacific Cup trophy, you're a **RACER**. Sure, these are arbitrary categories, but just three points on a continuous line to help you benchmark your Objective. It can always be somewhere in between. Once you decide this sets the strategy for addressing all the other stuff.

Time and Money

No one ever said recreational sailing was a cost efficient way of travel; round trip airfare to Hawaii is a lot cheaper, regardless of the size of your boat or crew. It's an expensive proposition, measured in Boat Units (\$1,000) and without an upper

limit. It is also a big time commitment, not the days you will spend on the ocean, but the days you will spend getting the boat ready to depart. There are a lot more of the latter than the former. If this is the first crossing for the owner or boat, you will likely spend a year prior to the start of the race getting ready, and wish you had started earlier. Your budget will likely be a wishful memory. Even experienced boats and owners will spend six months dedicated to the task. It is seriously foolish to assume some system will perform in the ocean; you need to be certain.

As most are aware, time and money can be substituted for one another; usually in larger quantities than you might expect in either direction. If you're in a hurry, it gets even more expensive. Your budget and prep time line should be consistent with your objective, ability and experience.

Crew:

Right after you 1) decide to do the race, 2)select your boat (I'm not going there), 3)determine your Objective, and sort the Time/Money riddle, you will want to focus on the team you will need to make it happen. It is very important that the members you recruit understand and agree with the Objective. A crew mix of Cruisers, Racers and RACERS will be an exercise in terror and frustration if all are not in agreement on the Objective. Make sure everyone is on the same page.

Although I am unsure of the physics involved, boats shrink significantly when they are out of sight of land, and as a result place the crew in much closer proximity to one another than is true near shore. This invariably leads to the observation that there are more sailors than there are people you would like to spend 8-14 days with in close company. This is usually well understood at the end of a passage. Choose carefully, fun is at risk.

Nearly everyone would love to do an ocean passage, even if they have no idea what it will be like. Having someone decide after the first night that they really don't want to be there will be a big problem. You will be much happier if you

know this before the race starts and can buy them a plane ticket. Make sure everyone has done an off-shore overnight before they become crew.

The subset of your Objective helps define the kind of crew you need. If you are a RACER you need **DRIVERS** who are people who can keep the boat at 90%+ of it's potential, catch waves that are unseen, allow the off watch to sleep like babies and can do all of this at 2am in a squall. If you are Racing, it's nice to have a few **DRIVERS** for the exciting parts and you can fill in the balance with **Drivers** who can hold a course, keep the kite full, and avoid rounding up or down. Cruisers can be happy with **Crew** who can hold a course for Kaneohe, show up for their watch, and do dishes. You will find that you can tell who is driving from your bunk when you are off watch.

PREPARATION:

A well prepared boat will be ready to start the race in the Spring, not July. This goal will leave our "well prepared boat" time do practice and do the early ocean races as a shake down to find the things that don't work. Few undertakings of this complexity and magnitude work well right out of the box.

The Really Big Stuff

Once you have a handle on the Objective and the crew it is time to start the heavy lifting. Putting together a strategy and schedule to deal with the endless list of tasks will give you the time to deal with the tasks you forgot to put on the list and the stuff that fails to function that you were sure would work.

Prioritize, you want to start with the Really Big Stuff:

- mast and rigging,
- rudder,
- hull and structure,
- life raft,

- alternative method of steering, and
- communication gear (SSB/Sat. Phone)

These challenges need to be wrestled to the ground as early as possible because they are 1)critical, 2)lengthy, and 3)durable. The last thing you want to be doing a month before the race is wrestling one of these. Having these items resolved 12 months before the gun goes off will give you the confidence and time to deal with the many smaller challenges on the list. If they are well sorted 12 months before the race they will be fine race day. If the rig and rudder have not been out of the boat in the last 3-4 years, do it now.

More Stuff:

Boat project lists are magical; no matter how diligently or quickly you cross things off the list, the list grows longer. Every system on the boat must be suspected, inspected and validated if you are to achieve your goal of keeping the tool box closed off shore and be safe, fun and fast. While some prefer the strategy of “It works now, and I have a rebuild kit on board” they tend to be people who have never attempted rebuilding a head in the ocean. It is very hard to focus on spinnaker trim while you are wrestling with the head.

Fortunately you have a crew to help and it is not too early to get them engaged in the process. A quick inventory of the skill sets should help in allocating the challenges amongst the crew; get everyone involved. We have found this process effective in building the teamwork and cooperation that will be important in the ocean.

Our “well prepared boat” will devote special attention to the challenges not typical of inshore or coastal sailing. These include:

- food/galley,
- charging,
- safety gear, and
- inspection

Theory doesn't work in the ocean; figure out how you will deal with each of these and try it, then change it so it really works.

Training:

That's right, even Cruisers. Driving at night, sail changes, reefing, and all of the emergency drills like MOB, fire, rig failure, water intrusion, and abandon ship should be well oiled exercises for this crew, for this race. This is why you want the boat ready to go in the Spring, this is how you reduce the adventure factor. If you are devoting all your time in the months before the race to working on the boat to fix things that don't work or to pass inspection, the crossing will be an adventure you won't want to share at the bar in Kaneohe. Remember the goals: safe, fun, fast.

Information management:

What works inshore for getting information to your crew, otherwise known as hollering, is pretty ineffective offshore for a week or two. One of the challenges of great crew work is to have everyone on the same page of the hymn book.

There are a number of ways to accomplish this; see samples at:

(<http://www.pacificcup.org/files/PacificCupNotebook.pdf>)

Daily task list: This simple time-based list documents the routine tasks that need daily attention. Tape it to the surface of the nav station or on the bulkhead so that on-watch crew can check off each task, and all will know what has been done or needs attention.

Hourly log sheet: This will capture current data hourly so that those coming on watch can review the prior period and gain an understanding of changes and trends.

Watch list: Whatever system you chose, create a printout that can be taped to a bulkhead so that everyone will know when their next watch starts. When fatigue sets in the information needs to be clear and available to all.

Race binder: A three ring binder with tabs is a good way to organize essential information. Weather fax printouts, storage plans, equipment and spares lists, medical supplies, menus, radio frequency and channel lists, log sheets, standings printouts and other information all go into the binder so that everyone can easily access the information.

Menus and assignments: No need for mystery here, a single sheet taped to the galley bulkhead will minimize surprises and make it clear who is doing the food prep and clean up. Assign it or someone will end up as an unhappy galley slave.

