

How to Sail Fast in a Rhodes 19

By Steve Uhl

Momentum – The objective is not just “going fast”, it is more “don’t stop the boat”. The Rhodes 19 is so underpowered, you’ve got to keep the momentum going at all times and at all costs—starting momentum again is a killer.

This means:

- Momentum at the starting line is more important than exact position on the line
- Bail out quickly if you are in bad air. If you don’t have a clear lane right away, tack! Take multiple sterns to get out of the crowd and in your own clear lane. Once clear, drive for several minutes— period. Then start thinking about your tactical situation.
- Most importantly, you must have *total focus* on driving the boat. If you take your attention away from driving, even for a few moments, you are slowing the boat down. Get the crew talking and looking for the helmsman, and resist the temptation to look around too much.

Light Air Upwind – It is critical to get body weight down low and forward in the boat. The driver should be forward of the traveler and all should remain very still. You have to be patient and focused.

Halyards – Many boats do not raise their main halyard as far as they should. Use a knot to attach the halyard and you will buy yourself an extra inch or two in height. Jib halyard tension is a critical gear shifter, so be sure it is easy to fine-tune.

Trimming Upwind – Adjust the jib as the conditions change: halyard and sheet tension should be adjusted to react to changes in wind velocity, wave action and your overall momentum. To avoid stalling the upper part of the main constantly check mainsheet tension as wind velocity changes. This requires a lot of observation.

Heavy Air, Choppy Water – De-power the boat as needed to keep it relatively flat: lower the traveler to leeward a bit, increase backstay tension. Keep the boat chugging through the water.

When Rounding Windward Mark – Know where you want to go on the next leg *before* you get to the mark. Once you have rounded, get pointed in the right direction *ASAP*. It is easy to end up heading too high while setting the chute and losing valuable downwind distance to boats sailing inside of you.

Smooth Mark Rounding – Sharp turns kill your boat’s momentum, so be sure to round each mark in a smooth arc rather than a tight turn.

Light Air Downwind – Resist the temptation to sail too deep downwind – especially near the end of sloppy, light air runs. Inevitably the boats all stop and other boats come screaming in from the sides.

Remember, if something is not working, then do something. Don’t wait for circumstances to change. Particularly downwind, if it feels like you are on the wrong jibe you probably are, so jibe. If people are blowing past you, head up or head down – do something to change the situation. Experiment.

Good luck!