

# Breaking into Racing

## Advice for New CC21 Racers

By Rick Marshall

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One dark, Cleveland, February morning a few years ago, I was commuting downtown with Rob McCreary and somehow we got to talking about summer and vacation and how great it was to be out on the water. And how it was especially great to be out sailing. Too bad neither of us had a sailboat.

Rob's sailing experience consisted mainly of the occasions he and his wife Merry had taken out Gus McDaniel's Goose for day sails and his racing experiences were generally as crew. But early on he gained appreciation for the special pleasure of sailing and he was ready to try racing his own boat.

My racing experience was similarly limited. Usually about three outings per summer, crewing for Neal on the Dancer. There was that brief interval when my brother Bill and I owned the Flying Clam, a 1958 Lightning we restored, that saw some action one summer in the late 70's fighting the savage chop on Lake Erie.

It was clear to Rob and me that the time was at hand to make our move! By the time we got downtown we had agreed to go in on a CC21 as 50/50 partners. That was it. By August we owned Austin Drukker's Kiki and before the season ended, she had raced twice (as Sparkler).

Ever since the beginning, one thing was abundantly clear, newcomers are not only welcome, but celebrated! One new boat at the starting line can add geometrically to the fun quotient. The advantage of a less experienced skipper like myself is that the others are never quite sure what the heck I might try! I'm especially pleased to be able to add that element of suspense to the ambiance at the start!

Apart from the thrills I impart to the other racers, a big benefit to me is the fact that there is no way anyone with the slightest competitive urge will not become a better sailor. There is nothing like racing to point out the things one is doing wrong or right. It focuses one's attention on all the aspects of sailing and provides instant feedback. Others in the

Fleet have been more than willing to answer questions, help "tune" the rigging and share their theories on what makes a 21 go fast. Racing also gets you out in a much wider mix of weather than one might otherwise choose, from cloudy and calm to sunny and brisk. As we faced the differing conditions we learned to use the various rigging controls and got to know (a little better) how the boat works. Recent changes in our rules limit the use of spinnakers and genoas in stronger breezes. That tends to level-the playing field for lighter, younger, or less experienced crews. I have three kids who are either in or graduates of the CCIA sailing program. So far, I have had the benefit of at least one of them on board in every race. In some ways I'm looking forward to the day when our roles as skipper and crew become interchangeable.

Like all the other great sports, sailboat racing takes time to master. Skills improve with experience and practice but the level of fun to be had remains constant throughout the journey. During the first season I spent a lot of time watching the tactics of the boats ahead of me, as best I could discern them from such great distances. Later on I found myself dueling it out with another boat from time to time, which incidentally is nearly as much fun in the back of the pack as it is in the front. The next season I found that I was not always finishing last. Some may say something about blind squirrels finding acorns, but I prefer to regard this progress as proof of increasing technical skill, sound tactical judgements, clean living and high moral character!

No matter what the outcome of the race, at the end of the day there is always the Gam, the post race gathering where the highlights are recounted and the victors receive their moment of glory in the form of a

pennant. Those who participated share in a great common experience. Many of the stories will be shared over and over again. Listen carefully at the next Clam Bake or Family Picnic, and you'll know what I mean!

Not everyone who owns a CC21 can turn out for the races every week. Sometimes one must clean out the sock drawer and catalog last year's magazine collection. But that's ok. Even if one can only participate in one or two races each season, that's still ok. Fun times are to be had on a week to week basis. Those of US who decided to start, no matter if it was one race, or every race; and even if it had to be at the back of the pack, heartily recommend it to all!