

South Sound Sailing Society's "Transition" from Amateur to Professional grade Race Committee.

South Sound Sailing Society "SSSS" in Olympia Washington has traditionally been like a lot of other sailing clubs in that the Race Committee boat duties and what went with it were rotated throughout the sailing fleet. Every race saw another boat and their normal racing crew taking on the job on either a voluntary or assigned basis. The philosophy was that if everyone took their turn the job would get done, and with a large fleet you would only have to serve normally once a year. That's fine, but it has some distinct problems. Not every skipper has experience running a race and a lot of times their crews had no experience at all. So from race to race the quality of the races would vary and almost without exception mistakes were made that either affected the results or confused, confounded or infuriated the participants. The leveling factor is that no one complained because everyone knew firsthand how demanding the job was, and how easy it was to make mistakes.

Instructions were written, updated and revised continually, but there is no better way to improve than actual experience. What was needed was a dedicated Race Committee boat and a person to run the races. SSSS had neither the money nor a dedicated person willing to take on the job.

As fortune or misfortune would have it, the fickle finger of fate interfered, and the problem was solved. One of the long time racers entered into a period where health dictated that he could no longer actively compete as a racer. So he decided that he would take the bull by the horns and do something about it. That person was Bill Sheldon. Bill and his wife Vicky had a long history of assembling a first rate crew to race their Humboldt Bay 30 *Opposition*. Bill finally came to the conclusion that his time to compete actively was over, but he still wanted to be involved. He decided to buy a suitable, "Race Committee Boat" and outfit it to do the best job possible. Fortunately for SSSS Bill approached the project with the same tenacity and dedication that he raced *Opposition*. He and Vicky looked around and decided that a 31 foot "Cruise-A-Home" motor boat might work best. They bought the boat and started to modify it into the best conceivable Race Committee platform they could within reason. (It was still a boat, and no one can afford that, it is all mad money) As they were making quite a change from racer to race committee they decided to name the new boat *Transition*. They also both have taken the course instruction offered by US Sailing in

Instrumental in developing the mechanical systems and installation of electronics were two SSSS members ; Jason Vannice of Aloft Marine, and Hans Seegers of Osprey Boat Works. As sailors they understood what Bill and Vicky wanted and had the talent to turn ideas into workable modifications and installations. There has been a continuing evolution of equipment and gear placement to come up with the best Race Committee platform possible, and a system developed to make sure all the gear is where it is needed and ready to use. The result is a reliable Race Committee conducting the SSSS races so the competitors can expect consistency and "by the book" on the water race management. Each boat in the fleet is expected to provide two helpers for one race during the season, so all the sailors get a chance to learn what it takes to do the job, and at the same time what all the flags and signals mean. Hopefully this will give you an idea of what can be done with dedication and a total disregard of budget. You know just like racing your own boat.

So here is the boat, the crew and how it works.



From the bow. Notice the upper deck, and of course the massive anchor roller and windlass on the bow. This makes it easy to set and adjust the start and finish lines without straining anyone's back. The anchor can be raised and lowered completely from inside the cabin without anyone having to go out on the deck. Horns mounted on the fly bridge are extremely loud and easy to hear over the flogging of sails and confusion as boats jockey for position prior to a race start.



Starboard side: note the red stripe that denotes the start/finish line (when the sliding window is closed) During wet cold conditions boats can be finished from within the cabin by sighting through the red lines to the finish line mark. Note also the boom with winch for retrieving anyone who is in the water and needs to be lifted out with the aid of the Life Sling.



From the stern. Two 135 HP Evinrude outboard motors provide plenty of power and speed plus easy maneuvering to set marks. Note also the sturdy swim step/ engine mount. This was all part of the inboard engine replacement project that was an expensive surprise, but needed to be done. The original engines just up and died after the boat was placed into service. A lot of people would have given up at this point, but not Bill and Vicky.

The hatches located in the aft deck for engine access, have now become access to a deep storage locker for inflatable marks, spare line and other bulky items.

On the cabin top is the Race Management Platform (RMP) where Personal Flotation Devices (PFD)'s are required at all times. The big box aft is for the permanent storage of all the flags that may be required during the conduct of a race.

There is a 360 degree unobstructed view so nothing hides the flags from the fleet, and any boats in the vicinity can be seen at all times.

The side rails port and starboard have clips for making ready at easy access the flags that are most likely to be used next.



RMP Starboard side. Flags on this side are for signaling boats during the start timing sequence and are on the side closest to and most visible to the fleet where they gather to begin their approach to the starting line.



RMP Port side. In this photo the flags clipped to the port side railing are all those most likely to be required to signal the fleet as to course, course changes and other information not related to the timing sequence of the start.



RMP aft. Permanent flag storage box. All the flags are kept aboard at all times ready to go. Every flag that may be needed to conduct a race is here. All the flag staffs are labeled indicating what they signify and when they should be hoisted/lowered while being used. Little is left to chance.



*Transitions* owners Bill and Vicky Sheldon ready to get underway to start today's race. Next to the instrument panel is a large screen B&G GPS Chart Plotter. Also fed into the Course plotter is wind speed and direction. So at all times even when underway the direction of the true wind and speed are constantly shown on the screen. Programmed into the memory are all the course mark positions so it is possible to set a starting line directly downwind from the first mark, and of course compute within a foot or so the exact distance from the boat's position to any mark of the course, At any time the starting position can be moved and the new position instantly recorded and all distances immediately updated. This allows for the Race Committee to set the fairest courses possible and know for a certainty the precise distance the boats sail.

Because they wanted to do the job by the book, Bill took the course offered by the United States Sailing Association in Race Management and is now a Certified Race Officer. Vicky is presently taking the same course and will soon be the second Certified Race Officer aboard.





Vicky says, "Bill is the boss, but I do the important stuff like this." Giving the boat a shove off the dock on the way out to the race course.



Starting sequence underway. Code flags 1 and 2 have been hoisted indicating that Classes S and A are within their 5 minute starting pre start period. Bob Johnson on the left crewed with the Sheldons during their racing years, and is now the full time Flag boss. He is giving instructions to Greg Rohner one of the stalwart racing crew from the Viper *Dragonfly*. Other than Bob the rest of the crew is comprised of crew members from the racing fleet that volunteer for Race Committee Duty at least once during the year. Many of the crew volunteers have little or no Race Committee experience so this is their chance to not only take their turn on duty but to learn what is involved, and gain some understanding of flag sequences and what it all means first hand. Bob makes sure they all know what to do and when. A very big job.



Greg Rohner under the "flag Boss's watchful eye hoisting code flag "P" indicating 4 minutes remaining prior to the start of Classes "A" and "S". Three minutes later that flag will be lowered indicating 1 minute to go before the start.



Displaying Code Flag "S" indicating the course has been shortened for the next class to finish.



Here come the finishers with the crew waiting to mark them off and record the exact finishing time. Rafe Beswick, the skipper of the race boat *Dragonfly* waits to sight down the finish line and call out the instant each boat finishes.



Two race boats the J-92 *He Lives*, and the C&C 35 *Liberty* closing in on the finish.



The Beneteau 37.7 "Spirit" crosses the finish line.



Thanks Race Committee for a job well done. They know from past experience what a big job it is, and how hard it is to do right.





After the last boat has finished, Bill photographs the finish time sheet and sends it to the Official Scorer who will crunch the numbers and post the final results on line. The results are often posted on line before the racing fleet arrives back at the dock. How's that for quick?

You can't help but be impressed on how professionally the whole operation works. SSSS if very lucky, and most appreciative to Bill and Vicky Sheldon for the gift they have given us all. We can't thank you enough.

Article and photos by Dan O'Brien