

Sailboat Racing is Alive and Well on the Hudson River

Come Join in the Fun!

The Hudson River Yacht Racing Association (HRYRA) is the local arm of US Sailing (America's national sailing organization). Yacht racing might bring to mind blue blazers and exclusive private clubs but it's really an open arena where anyone, well you need a boat (or better know someone with a boat!) can participate.

Sailing often seems like an idyllic pastime to non-sailors; lounging on deck while the boat effortlessly moves through the water, the sounds of wind and waves help soothe the stresses of modern life. The reality is a bit different. Most notably there's the wind; usually either not enough or too much to contend with. The perfect moderate 12 to 15 knots of breeze is as rare as a highway devoid of traffic. Fortunately, there are many ways to cope with the vagaries of the wind involving; sail selection, trim and good old human ballast (aka "rail meat" in sailing parlance!). Many people would wonder why you'd go to all that trouble just to spend a day on the water. I had a dyed in the wool power boater look disdainfully at my wife and me as we wrestled with our oversized genoa while at the dock. "Looks like work to me," he sneered. I just shrugged, but I wish I'd responded; "I like to think of it as skill!" Which is getting at the point of why people sail; it's fun to pit your skills and knowledge against the unrelenting forces of nature.

If you've enjoyed using the wind rather than an engine to power a boat through the water, you are probably a person who enjoys a challenge. I won't get into the reality that in the modern world traveling by sailboat is a bit anachronistic and though it's eco-friendly it's not a "free ride." So if you've suspended a bit of the hard earned logic that all of your schooling tried to instill in your brain and you find the idea of sailing on a boat enticing, boy have I got a sport for you!

I heard a sailboat instructor once say to her students; "I can teach you the basics of sailing a boat in an afternoon on the water, but you'll spend the rest of your life

becoming a good sailor.” I heartily agree with her summation of the sport, but I would add; “If you want to speed up the process, go race your boat!” Someone once said that you can learn in one season racing your boat what would take you five seasons to learn from casual day sailing. Most sailors when planning a day on the water might balk when the weather is adverse. Other’s may love the heavy stuff but have no patience when there are only zephyrs to be had. When you’ve made a commitment to race your boat it helps get you out on the water no matter what. This has a tendency to put you into all kinds of situations you might not encounter if you get to pick and choose your sailing days. Now don’t get me wrong, sail boat races do get canceled or abandoned. Without the provision to end a race when the wind has died, sailing would look like an endlessly tied game of baseball that could theoretically go on forever!

In order to race a sailboat, you need to adhere to the racing rules. They can seem daunting; but knowing only a handful of them is enough to get you going and keep you out of trouble. The navigational rules of boating are designed to keep boats safely away from each other. The Racing Rules of Sailing, on the other hand, allow boats to maneuver safely when close to each other. This occurs especially when starting and rounding racing marks. Sailboat racing is exciting, and I won’t deny it, can also be stressful, but it’s the good kind of stress that makes you feel accomplished when you’ve gone through it.

OK if you’ve read this far maybe you’d like to give sailboat racing a try. We race mono-hull cruising boats. Though many of our member’s boats have one design classes, at the present all of our racing uses the PHRF system which allows different boats to race against each other using a formula to equate them based on past performance. The easiest way to start would be to crew on a boat with an experienced skipper. The next step would be to race your own boat in one of the weeknight races held at several clubs on the Hudson River. Weeknight races are generally shorter and tend to be a bit more laid back. The other alternative is the HRYRA series of weekend regattas that occur at six of the member clubs in the Spring and Fall of each year. All of the information you’d need can be found on the Hudson River Yacht Racing Associations website (hryra.org). There are links to the member clubs and email addresses for the HRYRA officers whom you can

contact for more information. There is an excellent tutorial on the sailboat rules and how to begin yacht racing that can be found on the website as well. A few members are willing to either have a new racer join them for a race or provide an experienced racer to sail on your boat to help out.

So what are you waiting for! Come join us for the most fun you could imagine while getting more out of your boat than you ever would on your own, and making some new friends along the journey!