While racing over the last few weeks, I realised watching those at the lower end of the fleet, a possible reason why they’re not matching the speed of those nearer the front. Have you ever heard the phrase “they really look the part?”, or “they’re starting to look the part?”. Well, there’s probably more in this than initially meets the eye.

I said to myself watching Brittany sail at the 24 hour race that she looks like she’s going well, and as the results later showed, she was. So as it turns out, what I’m seeing is a sailor developing the knowledge of not only where to sit in the boat, but how to sit in the boat.

The thing about the wind is that it’s rarely steady the thing about the water is that it is rarely steady, and so in addition to getting the balance (heel) and the trim (forward-backward), one needs to be in position of readiness in order to react to the ever changing wind and water conditions. One needs to adopt a position that one can move in and out of efficiently, but also adjust the controls. This applies from both light winds to strong winds. In the stronger stuff, failure to be able to react to a gust results in heel, causing you to pull on the rudder and slow down the boat. If one reacts in time, instead of slowing down, the gust will accelerate the boat forward. In lighter stuff, when a breath of wind hits the boat, again, the failure to accelerate the boat has an effect on performance, but just as importantly, as you react, from a poor starting position, the rig gets shaken about causing the flow over the sail to be disrupted, and it takes at least the time for the wind to move from the front of the rig to the back to reattach itself and create power. What inevitably happens then is that the breath of wind passes, leaving you in the wrong position, and the whole thing starts again.

I would recommend you watch videos – YouTube being a fantastic source – and pay particular attention to how the top sailors are sat in the boat. Take note of the positioning of their legs. You will notice that the knee is rarely bent past 90 degrees, and that they are sat up right in the boat rather than being hunched over. Each class has particular places where one would sit, but generally speaking, you need to give yourself space to move.

If for example you are sat hunched over on the outer side of a Laser side deck, try sitting with your bum closer to the centreline, but with your back straighter. Then your legs need to be ¾ straight, with your feet touching the opposite cockpit side wall. If a gust hits, you then can push with your feet and get further outboards, but if it dies away, you can lean your torso back in the boats. If the light winds are persisting – such as approaching a mark where the wind is light, then you will need to gently move yourself to sit next to the centreboard, further inward, again, positioning yourself sitting upright rather than hunched over.

The other thing you need to pay attention to is your tiller and sheeting. You need to be ready to sheet in and out. If you’re tied up with the sheet wrapped round your feet, or simply that you don’t have the room to sheet in and out effectively, you’re going to struggle to react.

Happy sailing!

Richard