

## How to find a boat to race on for Wednesday Night Races

There's nearly always demand for crew on boats racing in the Wednesday Night Races. The first race of the season is on the first Wednesday in June, and the races are held every Wednesday right through the end of September.

Most boats sail faster with more "live ballast" (sometimes known as "rail meat") to help keep the boat from heeling over too far. That's why there's an entry-level crew position called "sandbag."

To get a crew spot on a boat for a Wednesday night race, show up at or before 6:00 PM. Most boats don't actually leave their docks until 6:10 or even 6:20.

It's appropriate to ask "need crew?" to anyone who walks by looking like they might be a skipper. The skippers are looking for sailing ability and experience, and sometimes muscles and body mass, if it's a windy evening.

If the skipper answers your "need crew?" with "maybe, but first I have to see if some people I invited are going to show up" that might be code for "yes, but I want to see if I can find someone better first."

You have no choice but to cooperate, if you're new. Skippers have every right to look for people they know before taking on a stranger. Be patient, the same skipper might be back in 10 minutes with much lower standards!

You can improve your chances dramatically by bringing a small consumable treat. Designer chocolates, up-scale cookies or muffins, or other snacks.

Another tip: Have all your gear with you and be ready to jump aboard. They're probably short for time and want to get going right away.

Sailing on an unfamiliar boat with an unknown skipper and crew, you should definitely wear a life jacket. If you are a non-swimmer or a weak swimmer, make absolutely certain that the skipper is aware of this. **Always** wear a life jacket if you're a non-swimmer.

Sailboat racing can be dangerous, and minor injuries are not unusual. You can be hit (very hard!) by the boom, you can (and probably will) be cut, scraped, banged, and bruised. You can have tendons pulled and bones broken if you don't understand the forces acting on various parts of the sails and rigging, or if you attempt to do things that are way beyond your experience and ability. So be careful, and always ask first if there are any safety concerns. Don't fall overboard, keep your head low, and assume that any piece of heavily-loaded gear could break at any instant.

Remember that even if you seem to be trading food for passage, or even if you seem to be getting food or drinks in return for your services as crew, it is usually understood that you are neither a paying passenger nor a payed crew. Any exchange of valuable consideration should be voluntary. Most skippers and crew consider themselves to be co-participants in a competitive sporting event, and crew voluntarily assume the risks that are associated with this participation. A few skippers (usually the more diligent and safer ones) will ask you to sign a "guest register" that includes a statement to that effect, or a liability waiver of some sort. These "waivers" of course will not remove

the normal obligations of the skipper to operate the vessel in a safe and non-negligent manner - so you should feel free to sign such agreements without fear of signing away any important rights.

After the race you will be expected to help put the boat away. Even if you have no idea how to help, it's poor form to run back to the parking lot or yacht club until the skipper says it's okay to leave.

The post-race postmortems and general-purpose schmoozing at the bar are often the best parts of Wednesday night racing. Even if you don't get a ride, or don't get to the club in time for the start, prospective crew should feel free to stop by and check it out.