

Water Fronts for Jan. 14

There has been a major change in local sailboat racing in recent times and it is presenting something of a moral dilemma to local yacht clubs.

There are two kinds of sailboat racing classes locally – spinnaker and non-spinnaker. Until recent times spinnaker boats dominated the racing scene but there has been a drastic reversal. In almost all weekend races these days, non-spinnaker boats outnumber those using spinnakers.

In 2009, a non-spinnaker boat – Tim Haapanen's Catalina 27, Sisu – won the county high point championship and the Association of Santa Barbara Channel Yacht Clubs high point championship. Two of the top five and five of the top 10 boats in the county high point series were non-spinnaker boats.

In the Ventura Cup, one of the three winning boats on the Ventura Yacht Club team – Brian Shaw's J-30 High Voltage – was a non-spinnaker boat. Channel Islands Yacht Club, which placed second in the Ventura Cup, field a full non-spinnaker boat team – Sisu, Brian Swanson's Islander 29 Velero and Larry Hansen's J-35 Scooter.

It is possible for a non-spinnaker boat to win the prestigious Milt Ingram Trophy Race, and that has happened several times in the past.

So why are more skippers and crews racing non-spinnaker these days? One of the reasons is that non-spinnaker boats tend to be more cruiser oriented and another is that it doesn't take as much crew to sail a boat without a spinnaker.

I personally challenge the latter because I have raced our J-24, Tortoise both spinnaker and non-spinnaker and it is way more difficult to aggressively sail a boat non-spinnaker than it is to fly a chute. A properly sailed non-spinnaker boat will fly a second headsail going down wind and that takes more crew effort than popping a chute.

But, for whatever reason that skippers are trending more toward non-spinnaker racing, the dilemma remains for local clubs. So, what is the dilemma?

Virtually all local clubs require a PHRF (Pacific Handicap Racing Fleet) certificate for spinnaker boats, but they do not require one for non-spinnaker boats, even in major events.

These clubs, however, use the PHRF handicapping system for their races, so the irony is that they are in effect, stealing from the PHRF organization. Bill Gates wouldn't tolerate people using his software without paying a licence fee. Maybe PHRF should take a similar stance. By the way, the boats mentioned previously in this column, all had PHRF certificates.

Ventura Yacht Club requires a PHRF certificate for non-spinnaker boats sailing in the Ventura Cup and is considering requiring a certificate for all events except for "beer can" type races on Wet Wednesdays and non hard-core events like the Commodore Classic and the Gal & Guy Series.

The first big event of the year will be the opening race of the Spring Series, hosted by PBYC. This series always attracts a big fleet, but once again PBYC will not be requiring a PHRF certificate for non-spinnaker boats. At the very least, certificate should be required by the end of a series in order for a boat to qualify for a major series trophy.

The Association of Santa Barbara Channel Yacht Clubs is wrestling with the issue. It doesn't have the power to dictate to local clubs, but it certainly should get them all together and take a serious look at the issue.

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County High Point Standings:

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Stay up-to-date with the latest notices of race, results and other timely information by joining the local Google Group for the Association of Santa Barbara Channel Yacht Clubs. Click over to: <http://groups.google.com/group/asbcyc> and then select "Join this group" on the right side of the page.

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Upcoming sailboat races:

* Sunday, Jan. 17, VYC Regatta Series 1. Hosted by Ventura Yacht Club, this is the first of three regattas for PHRF boats and J-24s. The other regattas will be sailed on April 18 and Sept. 12. The entry fee for the series is \$45. Entry for individual regattas is \$20. Three races are planned for each regatta, with skippers meetings at 8:30 and racing beginning at 11. Notice of race and entry form are available on the club's website at Venturayachtclub.org. For more information, contact Stan Whisenhunt at 659-1464 or e-mail him at Swhisenhun@aol.com.

* Saturday, Feb. 13, PBYC Spring Series 1. This popular three race series is hosted by Pierpont Bay Yacht Club. The other races are on Feb. 27 and March 20. The skippers meeting for each race is at 8:30 a.m. and racing starts at 11 in the vicinity of the Mandalay buoy. All finishes will be in the Ventura Harbor entrance channel. Entry fee is \$90 for the series (\$80 for USSA members) or \$30 for individual races (\$25 for USSA members). For more information, contact Richard Countess at (818) 889-2669 or at Rcountess@aol.com.

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2010 ocean sailboat racing schedule:

Jan. 17, VYC PHRF & J-24 Regatta Series 1.

Jan. 23, VYC, SCYA Race Management Seminar

Feb. 13, PBYC, Spring Series 1

Feb. 20-21, CIYC, SCYA Midwinters, PHRF & J-24.

Feb. 27, PBYC, Spring Series 2

Feb. 28, PCYC, Racing Rules Seminar