

J/105 Crew Organization and Duties

J/105 News, October 2000

by Robert Taylor

I've been racing the J/105 for several years now and have recently been working with new and existing owners on getting their boats and crews up to speed. I've seen many of the top racing crews in action at the major regattas and have come to appreciate the duties each crewmember contributes to the boat's performance. While every boat's crew may have slightly different duties depending on their personal strengths and weaknesses, here's a guideline for organizing a five person crew to make it around the buoys.

BOWMAN:

Before the race: Anything and everything from the mast forward is your responsibility as far as boat and gear preparation, above and below the deck, including the jib and spinnaker inspection, halyards and shackle inspection, sprit and furling drum function. After running the tapes on the kite, rig the spinnaker sheets, tack line and halyard (tape it if there's a shackle) get the jib up and furled, tape bow cleats and any sharp edges in your area. Communicate with the helmsperson and tactician about their starting and race strategy. Dress accordingly, you'll get wet before anyone else!

At the start: Ask to run the starting line for your own reference, get a sense of the intensity of other boats, keep your helmsperson alert to other boats, know what the current is doing at the starting line, it's not always your fault if you're over early! Get off the bow and seated on the rail as soon as possible in the forwardmost spot.

Upwind leg: Constantly relay information about incoming puffs and wave sets to the helmsperson and trimmer, look up the course to assess the wind direction and strength, relay your impression to the tactician., skirt jib on tacks if needed, adjust outhaul, vang as requested, cunningham if rigged at the mast.

Final approach to weather mark: Free up spinnaker halyard if it is secured to anything, open forward hatch, doublecheck all spinnaker lines, help pre-feed tack through bow pulpit if necessary, stand at mast ready to hoist spinnaker halyard.

Weather mark and downwind leg: Hoist spinnaker halyard as fast as possible, check spinnaker head for right halyard hoist, be ready to troubleshoot spinnaker wrap, assist in tack line adjustment, close forward hatch, eyeball lazy spinnaker sheet for correct lead, assist in jib furling if needed, face backwards and call out puffs and waves as they come down the course, adjust outhaul and vang. During the jibes, pull in on new spinnaker sheet to get the clew around the furled jib, be fast, pull hard, stay in front of the shrouds.

Spinnaker takedown and back upwind: Make sure the jib unfurls completely, it's **CRITICAL** the lazy jib sheet gets put behind the open foredeck hatch prior to starting the douse, grab the lazy spinnaker sheet and hand down to the "squirrel". At the douse, pull aggressively on the lazy sheet, whether around the forestay or under the jib, until you can grab the spinnaker tape and make sure the "squirrel" has it coming down the hatch, call for the halyard to be in a controlled release, keep your feet on the deck, not on the kite,

gather and guide the kite into the hatch, grab some foot and stuff it in the hatch, leave the tack for last. With the typical port side douse, try to keep the port side spinnaker sheet from going down the hatch with the kite. Once the tack is released, get that in the hatch, gather the tack, sheets and halyard and center them forward in the hatch opening and "dog" down the hatch. Pull some slack in the spinnaker halyard and get back on the rail, let the back of the boat know they're clear to tack if needed, look for oncoming boats, puffs and waves coming down the course. Do any clean up later.

PITMAN:

Before the start: Everything from the mast, back to the primary winches, is your responsibility, above and below decks. All winches, cleats, sheetstoppers, blocks, shrouds, etc. are your responsibility as well as gear stowage and placement below decks. While sail tuning adjust halyard tensions, check onboard electronics for function, make sure the countdown timer is working if so equipped, otherwise make sure your watch can do the countdown. Help the trimmer with the jib sheets during the pre-start maneuvering, be ready to hike to either side after the start, whether to help heel the boat or hiking on the weather rail.

Upwind: Constantly monitor and relay your boat's speed and gauge with boats on your weather side to the tactician and helmsperson, this is especially critical in the first few minutes after the start. Be ready to make any halyard adjustments during any upwind tacks.

Final approach to weather mark: Stay hiking as long as possible, then get into position in the forward cockpit so that you can pre-feed the spinnaker tackline and be ready to extend the sprit once the bow is at the weather mark.

Weather mark and downwind: Bow's at the mark, extend the sprit fully, upon hoisting the spinnaker, tail the spinnaker halyard as fast as the bowman is hoisting it, do not allow any slack in the halyard above the deck turning block. Once hoisted, adjust halyard setting and tack line height. Be ready to let out a little halyard if the kite went up with a twist. Prepare the lazy spinnaker sheet for a jibe, clean up and flake spinnaker halyard. Fly the kite just prior to the jibe and release the sheet as the kite is jibed, make up lazy sheet to do it all over again. Be ready with a winch handle if the spinnaker trimmer needs grinder.

Spinnaker takedown and back upwind: Prior to the douse, doublecheck the spinnaker halyard to make sure it will run freely, get below to the forward hatch and be ready to take in the lazy spinnaker sheet from the bowman. During the douse pull in the spinnaker sheet and then the tape, be quick about it and try not to twist the kite as you grab it. Once the douse is near completion, keep your head away from the starboard side as the pole's on its way in! Hustle back to the weather rail and assess the competition on your weather hip, again giving speed and gauge to the tactician and helmsperson.

Mainsheet Trimmer/Tactician:

Before the race: Your responsibility is all things from the traveler to the stern, including mainsheet controls, spinnaker blocks and hydraulic backstay adjuster, etc.

Check the mainsail for rips and the battens for tension, check shroud tensions for the racing conditions expected and adjust if necessary. Develop a strategy for the upcoming race and constantly reassess the wind conditions, current direction and the competition. Have a crew meeting to discuss your plan and get input from the crew. Trim the main during the pre-start and set up a plan to pick an area on the starting line to implement your race strategy. Don't block the helmsperson's view of the boats ahead and keep the boat moving.

Upwind: Set the main up for speed right at the start and get to whichever rail is needed to properly balance the boat. During the tacks, take up the lazy jib sheet and hand over to the jib trimmer once fine tuning is needed. If on the weather rail, be ready to jump into the cockpit to release the mainsheet if a big dip is anticipated. Assess tactical and strategical plans as the race unfolds, listen to your crew.

Approaching the weather mark: On the final approach to the mark, take over the jib trimming duties to allow your trimmer to prepare for trimming the kite. As the bow rounds the mark, ease off the jib sheet and furl the jib, as soon as the kite is 50% hoisted. Call for adjustments on backstay, outhaul, vang, cunningham.

Downwind: Control the main on the jibes if it's blowing hard, otherwise balance out the boat, have a good view of the surrounding boats and implement tactics to gain positions.

Preparing to douse and back upwind: Call for upwind settings on outhaul, vang, backstay. When ready to douse, unfurl the jib and put the working jib sheet with one turn around its winch. Step on that jib sheet to control the jib tension so that the jib foot is not over the lifeline, but not too tight either. Put the spinnaker halyard around the starboard secondary winch with one turn, remove working spinnaker sheet if necessary. When the douse starts, control the halyard release with pressure on the secondary winch, stopping the douse if necessary with the halyard sheetstopper, keep an eye forward on your bowman to see how he's doing. Once the spinnaker trimmer releases the sheet, he'll take over the jib sheet you've been stepping on. As the douse is nearing completion, release the tack line and sprit, remember to forewarn your "squirrel" that the pole is coming, jump back to the mainsheet and trim to your pre-marked settings. Assess the tactical situation.

Trimmer:

Before the start: Make sure your gloves fit well and your kneepads are thick enough! When sailing upwind check the jib shape, car positions, etc. When trialing the kite, look for rips or tears in the cloth. Get a good feel for the breeze and be nice to the helmsperson, communication between the two of you is what makes it all work. Discuss speed through the jibes and get your timing down.

Upwind: Final trim on the jib and giving the helmsperson the groove he needs is the priority. Call for changes in jib halyard tension if needed. Hike on the rail once the jib is set and you're fast. You're first off the rail to release the jib sheet for any tack.

Final approach to the weather mark: Hand off jib trimming duties to mainsail trimmer and set up working spinnaker sheet on secondary winch. Be on the weather side with spinnaker sheet in hand as the bow rounds the mark.

Spinnaker set and downwind: As the spinnaker is hoisted, trim in on the sheet to spread the corners of the spinnaker, once the kite starts to fill, begin easing the sheet to get it flying properly. Constantly communicate with the helmsperson as to the amount of pressure on the sheet, it's the highest priority downwind. In preparing to jibe, hand off the working sheet to the pitman, grab the lazy sheet from him and cross over the coachroof, under the boom during the jibe itself. Trim in hard on the new working sheet and be ready to ease big time once the kite fills, balance the boat and concentrate on the nw trim.

Preparing to douse and upwind: Prior to the douse, continue to fly the kite as best you can while the jib is unfurled. Once the douse begins and the bowman has the lazy spinnaker sheet well in hand, release the sheet and jump to the new working jib sheet. Trim the jib to the necessary setting as you work back up to speed upwind. Check that the tack line, sprit, and spinnaker sheet are in okay. Once set with the jib trim, get to the weather rail.

Helmsperson:

Before the start: Get feel of the boat, the wind and the waves. Assess the mental and physical state of your crew. Discuss race strategy and tactics with your tactician, be very nice to your trimmer(s). Focus on whether the boat seems to be up to speed this day, if not, try and figure out what's different and adjust accordingly.

Around the course: Stay focused on boatspeed and communicate with your trimmers. Stop looking around, you'll only slow down.....don't forget to smile every once in a while and remember to compliment your crew!

Bob Taylor is a J/105 two-time North American Champion, having won in Newport in 1998 and San Francisco in 2000. He is a retired dentist who has started a dot-com one-design chartering business called OneDesignCharter.com. He served as Vice President of the J/105 Class Association for the 1999-2000 year.