

ACO sponsored Musto Skiff Training at CNA, Palma de Mallorca (26-27 May 17)

I have just had the pleasure of coaching over 30 sailors from countries from as far afield as Australia and Norway during the @ACOWater sponsored Musto Skiff class training. Based at the fabulous Club Nàutic S'Arenal in Palma de Mallorca the entire bay became the playground for two days. This training built on the success of last years format in Carnac which gives me the unique opportunity to be in amongst the sailors on the race course during the pre-worlds, watching, offering assistance with set up and sailing style around the racecourse and providing tactics and strategy advice between races.

This year the class opened the training up to all the sailors and the attendance included a wide range of abilities, from those at their first championship to sailors who have previously won events. This mix of abilities provides a really rich depth of experience to bounce ideas around and share pearls of wisdom. Morning sessions with the sailors in the shade of the Yacht Club (and by the pool) provided some building blocks to work on over the two days and take into the World Championships. A session on the beach with a rigged skiff demonstrated to the audience the way the sail controls can be utilised to change gears and how one single control is not the answer to your prayers!

On the water a medium sized windward/leeward course allowed me to interact with the sailors to discuss everything from steering in waves to getting start line transits. In the end, in perfect sea breeze conditions there were 24 Musto Skiffs whizzing around a two-lap course, refining their sailing, swimming and recovery techniques under clear skies and blazing sunshine.

Day 2 was pre-worlds race day, an opportunity to see the course management at first hand. The very professional race team soon had a long windward/leeward course set in difficult gusty and shifty conditions. The two races gave me a fantastic opportunity to interact with the sailors, watching the more experienced manage the conditions with apparent ease and coaching the less experienced from the RIB. The curse of the coach boat was ever present with one or two sailors succumbing to 'coach phobia' and taking an unscheduled dip for the camera! Videos of the starts can be found [Race 1 here](#) and [Race 2 here](#).



At the end of the two days we debriefed in the cool of the club bar to discuss the days racing and my observations. Questions about technique and strategy dominated as the race leaders were



grilled for their top tips on how to minimise the losses on a ‘snakes and ladders’ racecourse. For me one of the best things about the Musto Skiffs as a class is the friendly, helpful atmosphere that encourages the more experienced sailors to share their wisdom and thoughts with the fleet, growing the strength in depth.

Here are some of my observations from the training in Palma:

1. **Boat preparation** – Preparation is vital. Your boat needs to be in the best condition possible for the event. There were people doing jobs to their boats that could have been done at home before travelling thereby maximising time on the water at the venue and with the right tools and available spares. Giving the hull a wash is the least it deserves!
2. **New kit** – Several sailors were trying brand new untested kit from trapeze harnesses to sails in Palma. Although new kit is normally fine, finding out there are issues in the day or two before the event adds unnecessary stress, especially if you have nothing else to fall back on.
3. **Know your boat** – Keep it simple. A major change to your set up at the start of the event because the ‘bar chat’ highlighted your rake needed sorting and your spreader settings were miles out and your trapeze adjusters were rubbish is risky business. The class settings are available online so I recommend you use them as a start if in doubt. Only go radically different if you are at the extremes of the sailor weight range.

4. **Read the sailing instructions** – Knowing the course layout, lap format, buoy colours and other essential information are all available in the Sailing Instructions. Don't wait for the second race to figure it out, give yourself a fighting chance....
5. **Starting** - Have a plan, there is room for everyone on the start line. No need to get buried. Give yourself a fighting chance. Use facts (transits) to help you establish where you are in relation to the start line. Clean air is always a priority in a big one-design fleet, consider the options to find it and do something.
6. **Lookout** - Eyes looking everywhere; for boats, breeze, marks, basically anything that can help you make a good decision on the course. Don't stare at your feet or the bow!
7. **Technique Upwind** - Keep the boat upright (+/- 5°), too much heel either way is slow, upwind and down. The tendency to heel too far to windward sailing upwind makes the boat slide sideways in waves, especially if it is so far that the leeward chine is clear of the water. You also risk being washed off the wing. [This is Ben Schooling sailing upwind in 15kts with the boat perfectly upright.](#)
8. **Technique Downwind** – In simple terms, the kite pulls the boat forward, the mainsail pushes you sideways allowing you to power up and get on the trapeze. If the main is under sheeted (too far out) the boat has to be sailed closer to the wind to feel like there is enough pressure to maintain you on the wire. The helm is heavy and you have to push the tiller away from you. With the main fully in (on average over the hull edge) the boat is at full power, the leech profile is more closed (held by the mainsheet) and the boat will be able to be sailed deeper downwind at the same speed if not faster. Here are two clips of Andy Peake vs 2017 World Champion Frithjof Schwerdt down wind in 12-15kts. [In this one](#) After the hoist Frithjof (red kite) has his main in tighter, enabling him to maintain full power and actually sail lower and faster. Andy (black kite) has to head up searching for power. Both are searching for the next gust and watching the fleet behind. [After the gybe](#) Frithjof (red kite) has his main in tighter, enabling him to maintain full power. Andy (black kite) has to head up searching for power but travelling at the same speed.
9. **Changing gears** – The ideal situation is to be able to change gears (cunningham, vang and mainsheet plus trapeze height and body position) without unsettling the boat, staying upright and with no effect on the tiller. No single control will change gear for you – an ease of the Cunningham will also need an ease of the vang and/or mainsheet. Likewise when pulling the controls on, the 3 all have a relationship with each other. For example: Cunningham on = flatter sail and twisted open top section. A bit more vang will tighten the leech keeping your height to compensate. Finally the boom will be a bit lower so the mainsheet needs to be tightened to keep the boom as close to the centerline as possible. [Here 2017 World Champion Frithjof Schwerdt changes gears as the wind build from 6 to 15kts.](#)
10. **Rudder and Daggerboard** - Sailing with the rudder raised. I noticed that those people sailing with the rudder raised (10-25cm) used the tiller more in the light/medium conditions than others with the rudder fully down. This might be creating more drag than having the full rudder down. This could just be sailor specific. Sailing with the daggerboard raised – a good idea in strong winds, however in light/medium conditions why take away lift? None of the leaders at the pre-worlds had their boards raised on Saturday in 8-14 kts.

To help with some of the basics I have put together a single guide to get you set up from the road trailer to race ready in about 45 minutes.

Starting with the Rig

Mast step – bolt in the 4th hole back from the front of the mast base.

Spreaders – 4 holes showing (395mm long), deflection between 80mm (heavier)-160 mm (lighter)

Put the mast up!

Shroud Tension (28-30 loos gauge)

Rake datum check 6110mm to the top of the vang lever fitting on the mast.

Rake 7270mm (plus or minus 30mm) measured to the bottom of the transom.

Lowers between 10 and 15 loos. (Lighter sailors 10-13, heavier sailors 12-15+)

Batten tension – Lie the sail on the ground, tighten the battens so they rise off the ground and can ‘flick’ from one side to the other when pressed. Too much tension is when the batten starts to form an ‘S’ shape.

Outhaul – when all of the above correct hoist main, pull max vang and max cunningham. Take up slack out of the outhaul and sail should be tight. This is the correct setting; mark the rope where it exits the cleat for consistency.

Traveller – when outhaul set as above pull mainsheet block to block. Traveller needs to be tight at this point. Confidence check – pull traveller forward along the deck to the daggerboard case, there should be a gap of 3-4 fingers between the rope and front of the case.

Boom position for downwind – ease main to position above wing, mark mainsheet with tape at the rear side of the traveller block. Pull mainsheet in until the mark is at the top block on the boom, your main should now be on the edge of the hull.

Put the foils in and go.....