

regattaguru.com SPECTATOR GUIDE TO REGATTAS

This article is intended for those who know little or nothing about yacht racing but wish to understand what is happening out on the water during a regatta. At the end you find details specific to this event.

Who runs a regatta?

Regattas are organised by a yacht club. They appoint a Race Committee who are responsible for the actual running of the races.

How are the boats divided into different Classes?

Most regattas have boats divided into classes so that boats of a similar type can race together. Classes may be divided so that boats designed just for racing compete against each other, while boats that are mostly used for cruising compete against other like boats. Sometimes a number of boats that are very nearly identical enter a regatta. Those boats will be in what is called a 'one-design' class where they race against each other: first boat to finish wins. For boats that are not identical, a 'rating' system is used meaning that boats that are faster have time added to their finish time while slower boats have time deducted from their finish time to make up for the difference in speed of the boats. The Caribbean has the longest continuously used yacht rating system in the World, designed and administered by the Caribbean Sailing Association. All boats are measured and issued with a CSA rating certificate. When allocating boats to the different classes, the Race Committee will look not only at the ratings of the boats but also the size and types to ensure the tightest, most competitive racing in each class. You can see the various different classes by going to regattaguru.com, clicking on "Classes" on the Entries page.

How do the racers know what time their race starts?

Prior to the start of the first race, all competitors will have come to Registration where their entry details are checked and information given about the number of races, the order of starts, where the race area is to be and other details in a document called 'Sailing Instructions'. In addition, all this information is available on regattaguru.com under the tab "Documents". Rather than be told the exact time each class will start their race, normally the Sailing Instructions will state "the 1st warning signal will not be before" some time on each day. This is because there are sometimes delays to the start of racing for one class which then delays subsequent starts. Postponements can be due to race marks/buoys drifting or the wind shifting and so necessitating the start line having to be repositioned. Generally, Race Committees try to stick to these schedules as closely as possible.

Where is the Start Line?

The Start Line is the invisible line usually between a flag on the Committee Boat (often identified by the letters

"RC" in white on a blue background) and a small orange buoy usually positioned a hundred or more yards from the Committee Boat. The line is set at right angles to the wind direction so no end of the line should be more favourable as a starting position than the other.

How is a race started?

Racers are notified by the raising and dropping of flags accompanied by sound signals to advise them of the countdown to their start. The starting sequence is as follows:-

5 minutes before the start a 'Warning signal' (a Class Flag) for the class to start is raised with a sound: usually a horn
4 minutes before the start a 'P' flag (a blue flag with a white rectangle in the middle) is raised with a sound
1 minute before the start the 'P' flag is lowered with a sound

At the start the Class Flag is lowered with a sound. This is often simultaneous with the Warning signal for the next class to start

In addition to the flags and sound signals the Race Officer will often be using a pre-designated VHF radio channel to communicate with the racers.

What course are they racing & how do the racers know?

This varies from regatta to regatta. Some will have pre-set courses that are shown on the Course Maps. Others will prefer to have a greater degree of flexibility so courses can be designed according to the wind conditions on the actual day. There will be Course Maps available showing the racing marks - sometimes buoys, sometimes islands, all identified by letters. The Race Officer will then tell the competitors over the VHF radio the course for each class which the racers have to write down before the start of the race. For example the Course might be "B to starboard, F to Port, Line" which translates as the 1st mark to head to is letter B on the course map. Go round this mark leaving it to your right. Then head to mark F. Go round that to leaving it on your left. Then go to the finish line.

How are the boats identified & how do I find out more information about a boat?

Boats are required to have sail numbers displayed on their sails and this is how they are identified by the Race Committee, including when they cross the finish line.

regattaguru.com has a search facility so you can enter the sail number or name of a boat to find out more details about it. The exception to having sail numbers are the bareboats - ie: boats chartered from local companies such as Sunsail & Moorings - they will have bow numbers issued to them at Registration which will be displayed on the front & back of the boat.