

# Osprey Challenge Regatta: The Battle for Bragging Rights on The Albemarle Sound

By Steve Harris, Vice Commodore, OYC

Four times a year, every year for the past fifteen or more years, the Albemarle Sound has been the scene of collegial competition, conspicuous consumption, and collective craziness, the likes of which are not seen anywhere else. This event, known as the Albemarle Sound Sailing Association (ASSA) regatta series, determines the Bragging Rights for sailors from the Far East (Collington), to the West Endies (Albemarle Plantation), and from the industrial north (Elizabeth City) to the southernmost outpost of the civilized sailing world (Edenton).

This year, the regatta season gets underway on June 2nd at Albemarle Plantation when the [Osprey Yacht Club \(OYC\)](#) hosts the Osprey Challenge Regatta, the first of four 2017 regattas sanctioned by the ASSA. Races are conducted in accordance with the *Racing Rules of Sailing, 2017-2020*, published by World Sailing, the internationally recognized governing authority for sailboat racing.

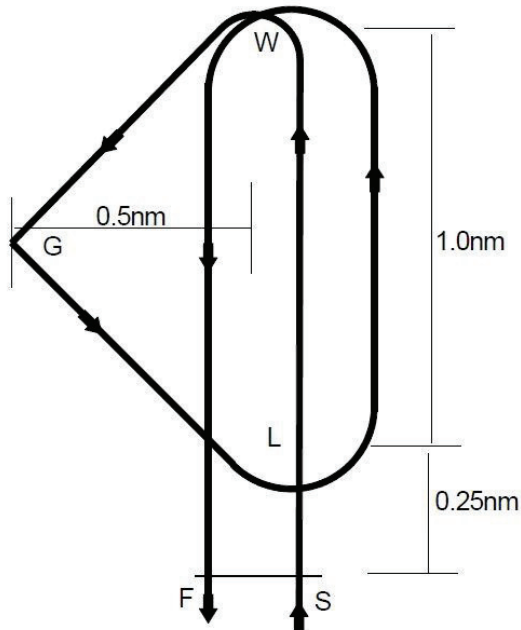
The weekend's activities begin with check-in of visiting boats and a reception [for racers](#) Friday evening, June 2, under the tent at Albemarle Plantation Marina Park, hosted by OYC. The always popular reception is the place for sailors to embrace old friends, compare notes, plan their strategies, drink toasts to



1. Courtesy Osprey Yacht Club.

their competitors, dance and generally carouse till the wee hours. The event rarely concludes before Plantation midnight. But the apparent conviviality belies a deeper and more sinister purpose, observed by your humble reporter – to fatigue the competition and to learn their plans and discern their technologies, so as to defeat them in the coming battle. For, as all sailors know, faster is better, and fastest is best.

The preparations for battle begin next morning promptly at oh-dark-thirty (0800 on Saturday) with a Skippers' meeting. The captains of the competing boats meet for breakfast (donuts and coffee) with the Race Committee to review the race course, safety procedures, weather, and myriad other details to ensure a safe and orderly race series.



2 Courtesy Osprey Yacht Club.

The race course is typically a three-legged (triangular) course with one or more "hotdog" legs thrown in – approximately 6 nautical miles (nm) in length. On a good day, with good wind, a sailboat might expect to average 5 knots (nm/hour) around the course, so the race is set up so that it might be concluded within a couple of hours. But, of course, rarely do ideal (or even typical) conditions prevail during a race. The Start (S) and Finish (F) lines are the same; the Windward (W) and Leeward (L) marks and the Gyb (G) mark form the corners, and the legs up the middle (from L to W) are sometimes called the "hotdog." Specific course layouts depend on wind and weather conditions the day of the race.

Once the skippers' meeting is concluded, skippers typically join their crews who are already making preparations to depart for the race course. Boats depart at their own discretion – some leave early to arrive at the marked course, and commence immediately to practice various maneuvers that they will likely use during the race. Others leave just in time to make it to the course to start the race.

Boats are organized into different classes, and compete against other boats in their class. Each class is designated by the color of a signal flag used to start the race. This is where it gets hard – skippers are expected to remember their color, and be ready to start racing when their color signal is raised. Honored reader may only imagine how difficult this task is – remembering the appropriate color – after the challenges of the reception the night before the race.

The most challenging phase of the race is often the start – this is the time when all competitors in a class are swarming close to the start line, preparing to turn and head across the line as soon as the start flag is dropped. The Committee Boat will raise certain flags to provide a five minute warning, a one-minute warning, etc. The skippers must maneuver their boats (under sail) in close quarters with other boats, while paying attention to the time, and to the signal flags from the Committee Boat. It can be quite harrowing for newcomers to sailing and to those who over-indulged the previous evening.

By tradition, when signaling with maritime flags, raising the flag signals intent; lowering the flag signals execution. This technique was developed by the British Royal Navy, and continues to be used today. So, when the start signal flag for a class is lowered, the race is on. Boats turn to make their way across the start line, around the marks that define the course, and back across the line. The Committee Boat determines the start time, and the time of finish for each boat as it crosses the line. They then score the racers (using the times and the rating rules) and prepare the list of winners.

Racing day ends with an Awards Dinner, during which the winners of the various classes are announced and highly valued prizes are handed out. At the end of the Racing Season, at the final Awards Dinner, the overall winning Club is announced and a grand trophy awarded. This is when Official Bragging Rights are claimed by victorious crews to take back to their respective Clubs and cherish forever, until next year....

Loopers are welcome spectators! The best way to watch the races is from your boat, but keep in mind that the course is complex, and boats may be found at any point on the course as the different classes all race at the same time. You can easily identify the Committee Boat and the course marks, so position yourself outside the course, and plan to move as the racers you are interested in make progress around the course. Give the racers a wide berth. Sailboats don't usually drive straight to their marks. Tickets for the Awards Dinner may be purchased from the host club for the race you choose to watch. Schedules for the races are posted on club websites, as well as on the Albemarle Loop website.

Stay tuned to the Loop website for other races – drag racing on the Roanoke River is a completely different experience!

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Additional Notes:

**Local knowledge for approach to Albemarle Plantation Marina can be found at <http://albemarleloop.com/videos.html> : and “[Albemarle Plantation Entrance Video - view the actual navigational courses and markers for entering the channel to Albemarle Plantation Marina](#)”**