

The Philosophy and Policies of AMSS Handicapping

The principal goal of AMSS handicapping is to foster full participation and friendly competition in the Yesteryear Regatta. In recognition that each AMSS vessel is unique and generally not a production vessel amenable to a PHRF (Performance Handicap Racing Fleet) type handicap, we attempt to generate handicaps that reflect the individual performance of each yacht. The actual performance of each vessel is evaluated as it is currently sailed with existing crew and equipment, not its potential performance predicted by some arbitrary formula. A change of crew or skipper with greatly different skills or a change in equipment that results in changes in performance requires a change in handicap. Obvious changes to the original design to improve performance such as the turbo rig in "Maid of Kent" or the speed modifications to the rudder of "Brushfire" are monitored with great skepticism by the handicap committee. Flag vessels that are new to AMSS or have changed ownership are assigned a provisional (P) handicap which will change each time the yacht is raced, leading to a handicap in keeping with the rest of the fleet for the Yesteryear Regatta. The handicap is no longer provisional when the handicap committee is confident that a consistent rating is found.

The exception to this individual performance handicapping system are groups of yachts that have requested to race "head to head" with the same handicap such as the Kettenburg PC's and the Luders 16's. These vessels have adopted more of the PHRF philosophy that similar vessels have similar handicaps. In contrast to this we have Kettenburg 50's and Calkins 50's with substantially different ratings, as required to keep the individual yachts competitive.

The Yesteryear Regatta is a reverse handicap start where each vessel receives its handicap correction in the start time. In a year with average conditions all participants should arrive at the finish line simultaneously. We consider average conditions to be a SW wind of 8-14 knots with little tidal differences between the first and last starting vessels. Under these conditions the Yesteryear Regatta is roughly half reaching and half beating and running. Thus, the handicaps which apply for this mixed course will not always apply to a random course with all reaching or all upwind type of sailing that may occur in a given Guinea Cup or Half Pint of Rum race. The variations in performance with course type are particularly obvious in the heavier gaff rigged and split rig yachts which tend to reach well but do not go to weather well. Evidence that the handicapping system is working is found in the results of our 2008 Yesteryear Regatta (see 2008 overall results sort online) where 25 of 32 yachts finished within a 15 minute window. In that race our smallest yacht "Genevieve" (25 ft gaff catboat) finished within 4 minutes of our largest yacht "America" (105' gaff schooner). The committee's first priority in handicap review is the group of yachts finishing outside of this tightly clustered group in the Yesteryear Regatta.

Historically the Handicapping Committee has met just prior to the Yesteryear Regatta to review the performance of those vessels entered in the Regatta. With our Guinea Cup series spanning the entire year we are changing the timing and scope of our handicap review. We would like to have a set of handicaps for the calendar year which would not change in May prior to the Yesteryear Regatta. Handicaps for all vessels actively racing in any AMSS event will be reviewed in December and set for the forthcoming year, with the exception of provisional handicaps which will be continuously adjusted. Attached below and published online are the current handicaps for 2009 which will be used commencing with the 2008 Half Pint of Rum Race. If you have any questions about handicaps please contact the handicap committee in writing.

2008 AMSS Handicap Committee

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