

# Preparing Your Boat for San Francisco Bay Racing

By Mike Holt / Photo by Peter Lyons

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The first time I sailed on the Bay back in 1993, I was too busy enjoying the view to take much notice of the sailing -- Alcatraz, the Golden Gate, San Francisco and those hills were spectacular. However I do remember that I spent plenty of time staring at the bottom of the boat -- but that was okay since it gave me more time for the view.

Since that time, my understanding of San Francisco as a sailing venue has become clearer. A typical summer day starts foggy and cool. The fog will then pull back towards the “Gate” and the breeze will fill in. By mid-morning it will be into the low teens, building by mid- afternoon to the low twenties. The cool moist air on the edge of the fog carries a wallop -- it is denser and packs more punch than a breeze of similar speeds at other venues. Now I know we have all been to events and heard the “It’s not normally like this,” speech from the locals -- and we nod knowingly while gazing at zephyrs on a lake. I will go out on a limb here and say we will have great breeze for the entire event.

Let me share a story from 2006 to illustrate the conditions. In the second race of the 2006 North American Championships, Carl Smit and I round the first leeward mark with a comfortable lead, feeling good and going fast. As we sheet in, there is a “bang” from the bow and bits of metal fittings fly back into the cockpit. The turning block for the forestay has opened up and folded in half. This was most annoying as we had looked at it in the morning and were advised by Doug Hagan to replace it. We ignored his advice, agreeing that that we didn’t like the way it looked but feeling sure it would be okay. We limped around the last lap and sailed in, spent the night rebuilding the boat and added a DNS to our score. This could have happened anywhere, but in San Francisco it is more likely to happen than anywhere else. The moral is, “If you think it may break, fix it or better yet replace it.”

So, before you ship your boat out to San Francisco don’t give it a once over, give it a second and third look. Replace anything that looks tired or old or under strength. Do all those little jobs you meant to do. Those old rudder gudgeons -- replace them. That loose goose-neck fitting -- rivet it on. The spinnaker sheets that are starting to fray -- get new ones, and while you are at it, go for the next size up!

Go around the whole boat and look at all your fittings -- are they screwed in? Can the screws be replaced with bolts? Do you have bolts? Are the washers big enough? If you look at a West Coast boat all the lines look thicker, the blocks a size bigger. This is not an optical illusion. We have learnt from sailing in San Francisco what it takes to have a boat that will bring you back safely after an exhilarating day on the bay.

For some of our best tips, I've spoken to some of the local sailors. Here's the best from the '99 World Champion crew and winner of every windy North American's that I can remember, as well as from the hot favorite for '09: Mike Martin.

### **Tip Number 1: Inspect your boat**

The Berkeley Circle is hard racing. If you inspect your boat before the event and every day after racing you can prevent a disaster on the water. (You also have to fix whatever you find that is on the hairy edge of breaking.)

### **Tip Number 2: Through bolts, not wood screws**

If at all possible use through bolts with backing plates or fender washers to attach fittings. I see boats with wood screws for sorts of high load applications. Eventually they all pull out.

### **Tip Number 3: Use the proper hardware**

If you use Ronstan hardware -- and you should -- the breaking strength and safe working load is printed right on the label. Make sure that the hardware is sufficient for the application. The gains made by the weight savings from undersize hardware are undetectable. The downside if they fail can be catastrophic.

### **Tip Number 4: Get into decent physical shape**

Your boat is not the only thing that can suffer from the harsh conditions on the San Francisco bay. Make sure that your body can handle a week of sailing all day in 20+ knots and four foot moguls.

### **Tip Number 5: Have the proper warm and waterproof clothing**

Even though it is the middle of summer, San Francisco is freezing cold. Make sure you have a good full wet suit (3mm minimum) and a decent spray top. Jeff Nelson and I carry wool caps to keep warm between races. It can be very cold at the launch site as well. If you just bring whatever you wear skiing you will be fine.

### **Bonus Tip: Stay away from Mike Holt (A completely biased view from Mike Martin, fellow 505 competitor)**

*On the water Mike Holt is a great competitor, but look out for him off the water. He will lead you down the path of beer swilling debauchery that will result in you waking up in the gutter with a budget deficit-sized hangover.*

*Whilst some of what Mike says is tongue in cheek the advice is not to be taken lightly. I will go over the boat with a fine toothcomb before the event starts, double-checking each fitting and line in turn. As another local sailor Aaron Ross states: "I have obsessive, compulsive, anal retentive neurosis. After every big day, I put my hand on every single fitting and give it a shake. That's probably my best tip, and I learned it working at Jiffy Lube." He promises me he is talking about the sailing.*

Dave Shelton, twice a visitor to the podium at 505 Worlds, as he will be sure to tell you, adds, "If you have any doubts fix it and fix it right." He also comments "Change your names to Nelson/Martin."

Ultimately San Francisco will be a great test of sailor and machine, we will be talking about the sailing and the races for many years to come and I am sure, as always, the stories will grow with time, but make sure one of them isn't, "If my (insert here) hadn't broken, I would have won that one!"