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# Rounding buoys quickly and cleanly

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## Rounding buoys quickly and cleanly

Shirley Reekie describes the most common rounding situations and tells how to round a mark neatly and efficiently

**O**ne of the most important maneuvers in sailing, whether you are a novice or an advanced racer, is rounding marks. Even if you don't race around buoys, rounding skills come in handy any time you pass a navigation mark. While many of the principles of rounding marks are constant, the specifics are determined by the conditions, the course on which you approach the mark, and the course on which you leave it.

### ■ Rounding from a beat to a reach

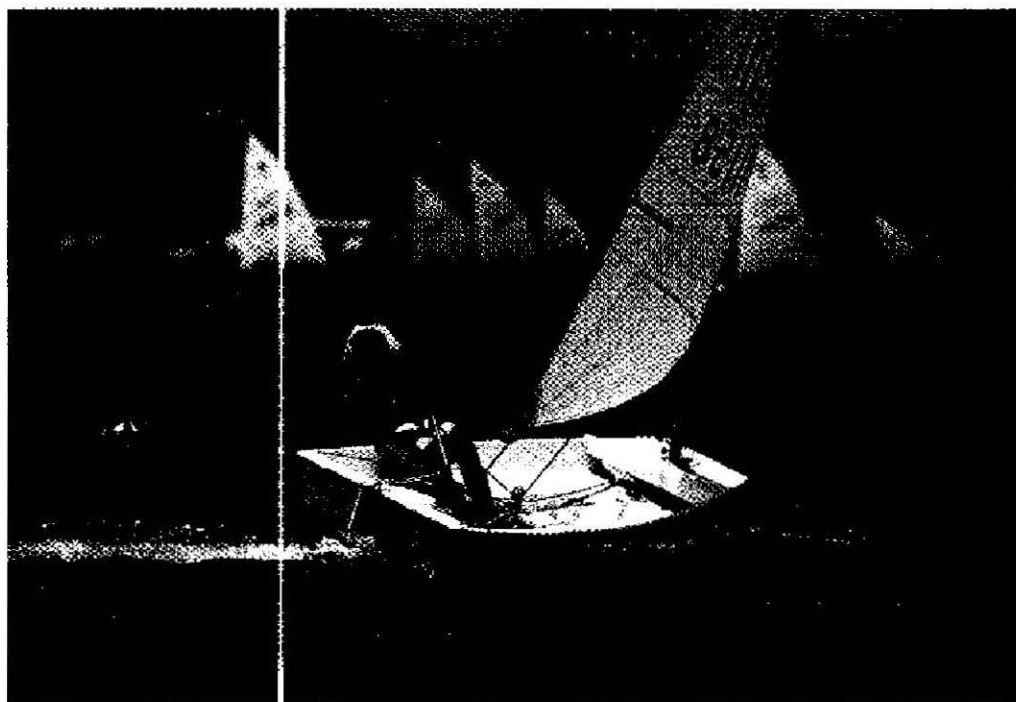
At the windward mark of an around-the-buoys race, you usually approach the mark on a beat and leave it on a reach or a run. If you need to leave the buoy on the port side of your boat, as you will when racing on most triangular courses, you will most likely approach the mark on starboard tack. As the stern passes the buoy, ease sheets and bear away from the wind onto a reaching or running course.

If you turn before your stern is clear and a gust of wind hits you, you may not be able to ease the mainsheet without hitting the buoy with the boom or the sail. On most boats you can use your own and the crew's weight to keep the boat as flat as possible or even heel it a bit to weather to help turn the boat around the mark. Hike to windward as you ease the mainsheet for the fastest beat-to-reach rounding.

You may have to tack from port to starboard just before rounding the buoy (Fig. 1). Watch for boats approaching you on starboard, the right-of-way tack, and sail on port until the buoy is either directly abeam or even

with the pivot point of your boat. Then tack, sail to the mark, and bear away from the wind to head down onto the new course as your stern passes the buoy. Although this maneuver is more challenging than simply bearing away to round the buoy,

the buoy a lot of room as you approach it, but once you are inside the 2-boatlength circle (for rules purposes), head up slowly and trim in the sails to your close-hauled course so that you sail away within inches of the buoy (Fig. 2).



Kelly O'Neil

**When rounding a buoy from a reach or a run to a beat, keep the boat flat and your steering smooth for best results**

it can be an effective racing tactic and may be the only alternative when you are daysailing or cruising.

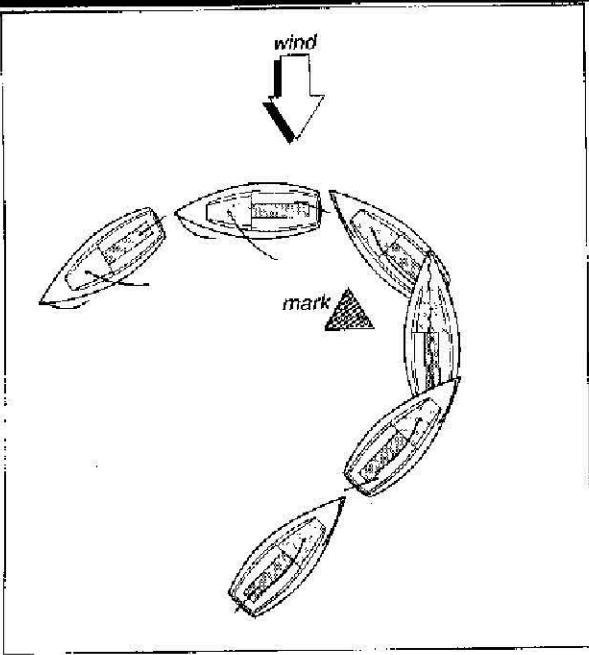
### ■ Rounding from a reach or a run to a beat

At the leeward mark of a round-the-buoys race, you approach the mark on a reach or a run and leave it on a beat. This rounding is often done poorly.

If you have eased the outhaul, cunningham, boomvang, or halyard while sailing downwind, return them to their upwind settings before you start the rounding. You should give

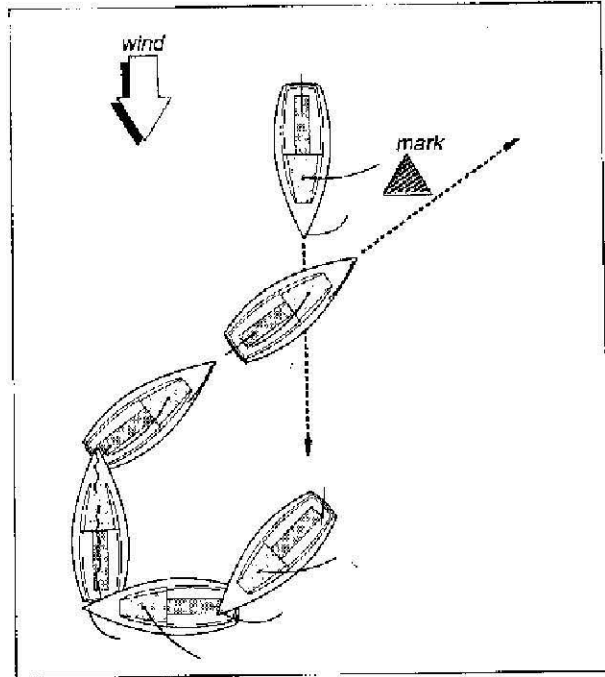
In a racing situation, keeping as close as possible to the buoy at the end of the rounding will prevent a boat behind you from sneaking between you and the mark. Never jam the helm to leeward to make the rounding close, because the boat will slow dramatically. A smooth and consistent turn will allow you and the crew to trim in the sails, hike out, and get up to speed quickly while leaving very little space to windward. If you are not racing, there's no need to try to get red or green paint on your topsides.

Depending on the wind direction, you may have to gybe before rounding a leeward mark. You can gybe before you reach the mark, or you can sail beyond the mark, harden up, and then



**Figure 1:** Sail on port tack until the buoy is abeam of your boat or even tuck for the buoy. Once your stern passes the buoy, keep the boat flat and ease the mainsheet to help you bear away to your new course

tack and go around it. This is a very effective maneuver in high winds. If you do decide to "take the long way around" the buoy, sail up to 3 boat-lengths past the buoy so you can complete the maneuver without touching it. Head up to a close reach first and then come up to a close-hauled course. Trim your sails as you change course, then tack as soon as possible onto the course that will take you around the buoy (Fig. 3). If you just



push the tiller to leeward, don't trim the sails, and try to spin around from the run, the boat will probably not have enough momentum to get around onto the new tack and may be stuck in irons. Remember that any time you feel gybing will be unsafe, you can tack instead.

In a race or in conditions in which you have to gybe, always complete the gybe well before you reach the mark so that the rounding requires you only to trim in the sheets and head up around the buoy. Gybe when there is as lit-

tle pressure as possible on the sail. If you can, gybe as a wave passes under you and the boat surges ahead, decreasing pressure on the sail, or in a lull. If you have to gybe as you are rounding the buoy, think ahead. If you are racing and leaving the buoy to port, make sure that your boom won't hit boats on your starboard side after it comes across onto the new gybe. Steer around the buoy as if you were not gybing.

Pull the sails across when the wind is directly behind you.

**Practice**

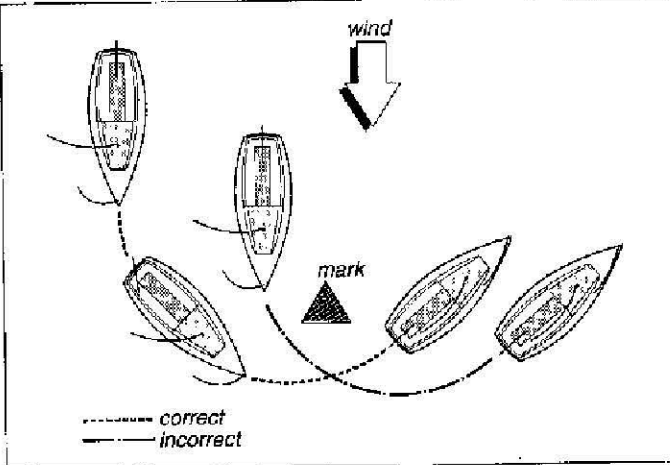
Any moderate-air day will provide perfect conditions for practicing buoy roundings. Find a small mooring buoy, a lobster- or crab-pot buoy, or your own milk-jug buoy, and practice rounding it in every way you can imagine. Practice to determine when you can tack from port onto star-

**Figure 3:** If you want to avoid a gybe at the leeward mark, sail up to 3 boatlengths past the buoy and then head up and tack to round it

**Any moderate-air day will provide perfect conditions for practicing rounding buoys. Practice as many types of buoy roundings as possible**

board to safely round a windward-mark buoy. Practice smooth leeward-mark buoy roundings, and try to have the boat accelerating as you trim in the sails and pass close to the leeward-most part of the buoy.

Practice all types of roundings until they become automatic. Once these maneuvers are part of your sailing repertoire, you will be able to round any buoy with confidence.



**Figure 2:** As you approach a leeward buoy, stay approximately 2 boat-lengths wide of the mark, and then as you steer the boat toward the buoy, trim in the sails and hike out to pass very close to the leewardmost portion of the buoy at full upwind speed

*Shirley Reekie runs the sailing program at San José State University in California and has concluded that there are 33 possible mark-rounding situations.*

**MORE INFO**

- Sailing Made Simple*, by Shirley Reekie, Leisure Press, Champaign, IL, \$18.95
- Sailing Fundamentals*, by Gary Jobson, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, \$15.95
- Start Sailing Right*, by Derrick Fries, U.S. Sailing and the American Red Cross, Newport, RI, \$9.25