

Don't Panic!

So, you've made a good start, tacked off on the first shift, tacked back on the next shift and crossed the entire fleet. So what next?

For many Opti sailors the first time they lead a race happens when they least expect it, but like all new sailing skills it becomes easier with practice.

Taking a little time to lock in your lead can often pay off. Instead of searching for the next big gain try getting yourself on the same tack as the rest of the fleet. Sure this means you are unlikely to gain, but just as importantly you're not going to lose the advantage you have.

Getting on the same tack needs to be done with some care though. If you tack on your rival's air they will probably tack off, sometimes splitting from the bulk of the fleet. This is not what you want. So try to delay your tack a little, leaving the other boat to keep clear air from in front of you. This is called a *loose cover* position.

In a loose cover position you can afford to sail your boat low and fast, knowing that if the other boat points high they will simply sail up into your wind shadow. Then if you lift, the other boat will again find themselves in your wind shadow, being slowed or needing to tack onto a header.

Positioning yourself so you can keep sailing the shifts and sailing fast is a key factor in maintaining the lead you have. Then once you are in the top third of the beat you can start to cover more aggressively to give you a bigger lead for the run.

Remember that once you are in front you don't have to go further ahead, so stay with the pack and keep sailing fast right up to the time you cross the finish line first!

Good Sailing

Rob Brewer