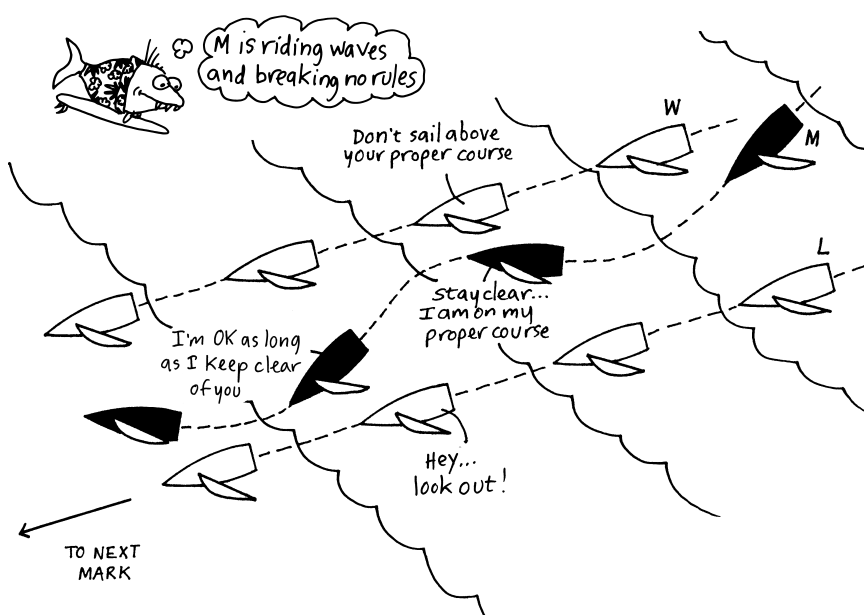


PROPER COURSE

A course a boat would choose in order to *sail the course* as quickly as possible in the absence of the other boats referred to in the rule using the term. A boat has no *proper course* before her starting signal.

This is the most subjective definition in the book. It is also very important, particularly in applying rule 17 (On the Same Tack; Proper Course). The concept is very straightforward: your *proper course* is the course you think will get you from the starting line to the finishing line as quickly as possible, taking into account all the factors that will affect your speed. Typically, different sailors will have different ideas on what their fastest course is; thus different boats will have justifiably different *proper courses*.

One way to visualize this concept is to imagine a Time Trial. You and nine other sailors show up to race around a fixed-length triangle course, one at a time; the one with the fastest time wins. Around the windward-reach-reach course there are wind shifts, grandstands and a small man-made island on the second reach for the press and photographers. You start. You've already calculated the fastest path up the first beat, accounting for wind shifts, waves,

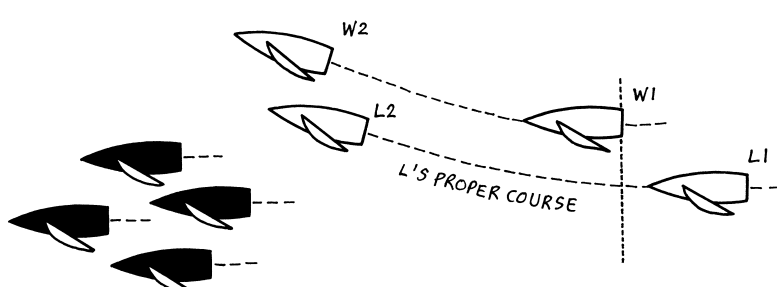


M is surfing waves in order to increase her speed in an attempt to arrive at the next mark as soon as possible. Therefore, her luffs are justifiable changes in her proper course; and when she bears away she is keeping clear of L. M has not broken any rule.

current, time lost while tacking and so on. Down the first reach, as you approach the grandstand area you notice it's creating a huge wind shadow so you bear away to avoid the light air and break through to leeward as quickly as possible. On the second reach, you've calculated that passing to leeward of the press island is the shortest, fastest route to the leeward mark. You finish.

The next boat starts. But this boat goes a different way up the beat. And it doesn't think the grandstand's wind shadow is that bad, so it doesn't bear off as much. And finally it passes the press island to windward and finishes. Both boats were trying to race and finish as quickly as possible and so they were both sailing *proper courses*. In fact, all the boats may have had different opinions as to the fastest course that day. The course each boat sailed was a *proper course*.

Clearly it is possible that there may be several *proper courses* at any given moment, depending upon the particular circumstances involved. However, because it is often difficult to prove when someone is actually on a *proper course* as opposed to sailing extra high or low for tactical purposes, Case 14 suggests, "Which of two different courses is the faster one to the next mark



L is "limited" to sailing no higher than her proper course because she became overlapped from clear astern. However, L decides that she will arrive at the gybe mark sooner by luffing and sailing to windward of the pack in front of her. Because she would do this even in the absence of W, it is a legitimate proper course for L and W must keep clear under rule 11.

cannot be determined in advance and is not necessarily proven by one boat or the other reaching the next mark ahead." For protest committees, two reasonable criteria for judging a *proper course* are whether the boat sailing it has a logical reason for its being a *proper course* and whether she applies it with some consistency. (See also Case 134.)

"Isn't my proper course my fastest course to finish in the absence of all the other boats in the race?"



No. The phrase "in the absence of the other boats referred to in the rule using the term" clarifies which boats to "remove" when determining whether a course is a *proper course* or not. It does not mean "in the absence of all the boats in the race." Let's say you and another boat are sailing down a reach. You catch up and become overlapped to leeward of the other boat (W). Rule 17 (On the Same Tack; Proper Course) tells you that you cannot sail above your *proper course* while overlapped with W. Because W is the "other boat" referred to in rule 17, your *proper course* is your fastest course in the absence of W.

As you and W continue down the reach, you begin catching up to a group of boats in front of you going slowly. Now you have to decide whether to head up and try to pass the group to windward, or bear away and try to pass them to leeward. You decide that you will arrive at the gybe mark faster by heading up and passing the group to windward, but by heading up, you will collide with the windward boat. In this case, heading up can be considered your *proper course* because you would do so even in the absence of W.

The point is: your *proper course* should be based on what will get you to the next mark and ultimately to the finishing line as quickly as possible, not on a tactical consideration such as heading up to cut off a nearby windward boat.



"If I am subject to rule 17 and my spinnaker collapses or I come off my foils because my wind is being blocked by the windward boat, can I head up to fill my spinnaker or begin foiling again?"

If you are sailing on your *proper course* and then your wind is affected by the windward boat, you may not head up without breaking rule 17. The reason is that your *proper course* is based on the windward boat not being there, in which case your wind would not have been affected.

Notice also that there is no *proper course* before the starting signal. That is because a *proper course* is the course sailed to complete the leg you are on as soon as possible. Obviously, you are not on the first leg of the race until you are allowed to start; therefore, there is no *proper course* until after the starting signal is made.