

CRASH AND LEARN

[Peter Beardsley and Francis Shiman-Hackett learn to sail the Vector and prepare for their first competitive test, the Newport Regatta.](#)

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By Peter Beardsley and Francis Shiman-Hackett

Skiff sailing took center stage at the Sydney Olympics; the speedy 49ers were the most popular class with spectators and television crews. But while many Americans now know what a skiff looks like, few have ever sailed one. Vanguard is hoping the Vector, a 2001 Sailing World Boat of the Year winner, will bring the challenge and excitement of skiff sailing to the American public. For a first-hand view of what it's like to sail the Vector and the growth of this fledgling class, Sailing World assigned Peter Beardsley and Francis Shiman-Hackett to learn to sail and race the boat. They'll file regular internet reports and wrap up their experiences in a spring 2002 magazine feature.

July 2001

Getting Up To Speed

Francis:

After our first morning on the boat at the Vector demo day on May 12, I was itching for more breeze to see what it could really do. We got a little taste that afternoon when the breeze picked up to 15 knots. We launched the spinnaker a short way off the beach and went tearing off on a plane. The movement of the boat felt almost effortless as it surged forward in puffs and jumped off waves we overtook. I was becoming more comfortable steering for balance. Easing sails and hiking didn't seem to do much in terms of balance. Steering constantly and smoothly was the only way to keep upright.

Peter wasn't available to sail for the next few weeks, but I was eager to learn more about driving the boat so I recruited a few substitutes to stand in for Peter as crew. My second time sailing the Vector I took Bill Finn, a teammate on the UMass Sailing Team, with me. Bill's had a lot of experience on the wire and this made a vast difference in our performance. The level of teamwork involved in sailing a boat like the Vector makes the skill level of the crew at least as important as that of the skipper.

We flew out of Newport Harbor on a reach but soon ran out of wind and discovered the biggest difference between skiff sailing and "conventional" sailing. Drifting in the Vector is a test of endurance and flexibility. In order to keep the boat upright at least one of us had to be continually moving in response to the swells and subtle shifts of breeze. When the wind returned we reached from the Newport Bridge all the way in to Sail Newport at just below a beam reach. We planed past a 12-Meter at nearly double its speed, awing the tourists on board.

My boatspeed improved a lot on the second day. I learned to work the mainsheet hard and developed a feel for how to keep the boat flat upwind. With only a 2-to-1 purchase on the main, my arms were exhausted by the end of the day. The wind was only strong enough to hold one person on the wire and while we didn't get onto a full plane upwind, this practice session gave me an opportunity to get a better feel for what was fast upwind.

A few weeks later Peter and I were back on the boat together. This time in Bristol, R.I. Raising the mast and rigging the boat consisted of little more than attaching shrouds, halyards, and trapeze bungees.

We took a ride towards Providence with the chute up in a 15-knot southerly and ended up with a long beat back to Bristol. The Vector gets going so fast off the wind it is easy to get into trouble by rocketing farther downwind than you realize. Halfway back Peter's trap harness broke and we found out just how much power comes from the double trapeze. With Peter hiking and me on the wire, I had to depower the boat hard to keep us upright. We worked on our upwind technique as best we could, powering the boat up at a low angle, and, once we were planing, working the boat up until we were pointing. When you're planing upwind, determining your actual pointing angle is difficult. The boat accelerates so much when you bear off that you can sail a beam reach with the sails trimmed hard and the telltails streaming.

The following day we sailed in a steady 10 knots with some light rain. The flat water made it easy to work up our apparent wind to the point that we were heading nearly dead downwind with the sails trimmed way in. We got our jibing angles down by comparing our speed and heading with both of us on the wire, one of us on the wire, and only hiking.

My fifth day on the Vector, our last practice day before the Newport Regatta, was in Newport in 25 knots of breeze. We now had a brand new boat and didn't have too much trouble rigging it. The only mistake we made was raking the mast so far forward that the boat was unmanageable downwind. This produced an exciting ride and some really spectacular crashes. More than once the bow drove directly into a wave and we were launched out of the boat. I learned my lesson on rig adjustment.

We didn't have the nerve to adjust the rig on the water, but we were still able to rip around the bay. On one tight reach we kept even with a Dart 16 catamaran.



Stuart Streuli

PETER BEARDSLEY AND FRANCIS SHIMAN-HACKETT

As we derigged I felt prepared for the Newport Regatta. In five days of sailing I had gone from being unable to keep the boat upright in a straight line to fine tuning my upwind speed and working out the subtleties of rig adjustment.

July 14 to 15, 2001
The Newport Regatta
Peter:

A moment of truth for Francis and I. While we knew we could sail a Vector, we both secretly worried whether we could actually beat other Vectors around a racecourse. Seeing the all-star cast that had sailed in the RIISA Regatta in mid June (the first regatta with a Vector start, which we missed due to prior commitments) did little to assuage our fears.

However, we did have a new boat on our side, and while the fleet would still be strong at the Newport Regatta, July 14 and 15, there were fewer former collegiate All-Americans in the pack. Furthermore, my friends on the Laser and Vanguard 15 course would be south of the Newport Bridge—we were racing north of the bridge—far enough away for me to avoid any jeers, at least until the post-race festivities.

Sailing to our racing area north of the bridge was its own adventure, with a light northerly and an ebb tide doing their best to keep the Vector settled well into foot mode. After a few hours, the seabreeze finally filled north of the bridge, allowing us to start a race in 12 to 14 knots of breeze. Our start left much to be desired; we were at half speed, two boatlengths shy of the line, and away from the favored end. We had clear air, but this was a small consolation in a seven-boat fleet on a 30-boatlength line. We rounded the windward mark in last place, but we were not too far behind others in the back of the pack. The first course was a triangle, and the drag race to the jibe mark was welcomed (compared to a windward-leeward), with the Vector planing and Francis on the wire. Then we capsized

HOT VECTOR TIP: Make sure that the spinnaker sheet runs cleanly across the beam of the boat, and that the vang and cunningham lines trail aft of the spin block. Failure to do so will result in those lines inevitably finding their way into the spinnaker sheet block, preventing one from easing or trimming the spinnaker, and causing the boat to capsize. The recovery will be made more difficult as in order to right the boat, the spinnaker must be doused. However, the chute will not come down unless the fouled block is cleared, and because of the Vector's flared wings, this mess will lie three feet underwater, and it may take as long as five minutes to untangle the muddle.

This was a bit unpleasant, made worse by the wind shutting off once we finally rounded the leeward mark, preventing us from finishing. Still, when the time limit expired, we were ahead of one boat, and barely trailed another. This comforted us as we started the second race in fickle breeze, the northerly and southerly battling for supremacy on our little patch of water. Somehow in the confusion, we anticipated the return of the southerly, which temporarily put us in first place until the race committee abandoned for the day. The three cannons, of course, meant that the seabreeze would kick in five minutes later, which it did, gusting over 20 knots. Not satisfied with double trapping off the stern and the spray in our faces under main and jib alone, we set the spinnaker, and promptly zoomed past a surprised Flying Dutchman, which was also under spinnaker. Francis estimated our speed to be somewhere around 20 knots. I wouldn't know, since I'd definitely never gone that fast in a sailboat before.

Sunday's first race was reminiscent of the second attempted race on Saturday, with 180-degree windshifts and light air. We won the start, but struggled to keep pace upwind. While Dave Kirkpatrick and crew went into major foot mode to sail through our lee, Tracey Hayley bopped in and out on the trap, while her much heavier crew, Ezra Smith, sat to leeward. Francis and I could not trap in four knots of breeze, and could only watch as their rig powered up to windward and they sailed away. However, because the other four Vectors (there were now eight) had trouble making it to the start on time, we rounded the windward mark in fourth. In the light air, the Vector like sailing hot angles downwind on the windward-leeward course, and smart jibing angles allowed us to sail into third place, and halve the distance between us and the leaders. As we struggled to hold our position, the southerly began to fill and the fleet hoisted spinnakers on the final beat. This did not make the race committee's life pleasant, as the smaller but faster Vectors, 505s, and Flying Dutchmen all sailed into the Yngling fleet, causing 100 boats to finish within a thirty second span. Francis and I had held our third place, finishing a boatlength behind both Tracey and Dave. However, we discovered the next day that the race committee had successfully petitioned the jury to discard the race due to the confusion at the finish.

The next race featured steadier, stronger breeze, and, again, we lacked upwind boatspeed compared to the fleet. Even a few degrees of leeward heel, however unintentional, seemed to result in a large loss of speed. We had also experimented with me trimming the main upwind while Francis focused on driving, much like a 49er or an Australian 18. While Francis and I initially liked this change, he said he preferred the feel he received from the main. The race was fairly uneventful, and though we again closed on those ahead of us with our downwind speed, we still finished in the back of the pack, though this time, we were only a minute behind the first place finishers.

In the final race, our upwind performance again left us trailing the fleet, though our downwind speed came to the rescue. While we could double-trap if we sailed a hotter angle, we would sail so far from the mark in doing so that the speed increase was not worth it. Instead, Francis and I relied on good communication and spinnaker sheet pressure, steering up in the lulls and down in the puffs, while always trying to keep our apparent wind far enough forward. This, combined with some timely jibes into puffs, catapulted us into fourth place, rounding the leeward mark less than half a boatlength out of third. I'm not sure which was more exciting, passing half the fleet, or finally not losing ground upwind on the final beat, as we held onto fourth, a boatlength from third.

We were still baffled about our poor upwind speed. Some two-boat testing on the way in on Sunday corrected our problem slightly, though not enough. On the whole, we were happy with the regatta, still remembering the speedy sail home on Saturday. And if Sunday's first race hadn't been tossed out, we would have finished a respectable fifth, one point out of fourth. Our next regatta is the Newport Unlimited on August 25 and 26. Hopefully we will have some time to practice before then to work out the kinks and train with other Vectors as the fleet grows.

For more on the Vector, log on to www.teamvanguard.com

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