

Ten Rules for Racing

Perhaps the worst plight of a vessel is to be caught in a gale on a lee shore. In this connection the following ... rules should be observed:

1. Never allow your vessel to be found in such a predicament.

LF Callingham: *Seamanship: Jottings for the Young Sailor*

For my last column, I have updated some rules that I posted online a couple of years ago. I think that they remain as true today as they were then. My theme is that it is always easier to avoid problems than it is to solve them.

10. Inform yourself. Read the supps. Check the schedule. Don't get taken by surprise.

9. Ask the Chief Steward. If you have a problem, the Chief Steward is the person to see. He or she can answer your question, solve your problem, or put you in touch with the person who can.

8. Maintain situational awareness. Keep your eyes moving. Check your mirrors. Check the flag stations. Be aware of other cars around you, and of how they are moving with respect to yours. Be aware of cars coming up on you.

7. Save some bandwidth. If you are spending your entire mental budget on simply lapping at some speed, you won't have any brainpower left over to deal with emergencies or unusual situations. I have interviewed drivers coming off track whose eyes had glazed over. They had overloaded their ability to process information.

6. Be predictable, especially in mixed-class race groups. Hold your line. Don't suddenly change your line, thinking that it will allow faster cars to pass. They saw you before you saw them, and they most likely made a plan based on your trajectory. Don't surprise them.

5. Make a plan. Be ready for the unexpected or unusual. What will you do if the car in front spins after you have committed to a turn? What will you do if you lose oil pressure? Are you even checking the oil pressure? In the moment, it will be too late to think about what to do. It's better to have thought scenarios through in advance, and to be ready.

4. Obey the Rules of the Road. Read section 6.11.1 of the GCR (or page 13 of the Portable Driver's Advisor). The rules for on-course conduct are really quite simple. They boil down to seven words: "No Contact", "No Blocking", and "Leave Racing Room". Please remember that "incidental contact" does not exist anywhere in the rules.

3. In a spin? Both feet in. I continue to be amazed at how many drivers forget this simple rule from drivers' school. Almost every month, I see a collision caused by a driver failing to keep the brakes on when spinning, reaching the top of some slope, and then rolling back into traffic.

2. Do you have an exit strategy? Practice getting out of your racecar with your eyes closed. If it catches fire, you will have little time to get out and possibly little visibility. Can you get out in 6 or 7 seconds? After you crash, it will be too late to practice. Did you arm your fire system before going on track? Make that part of your pre-session checklist.

1. Cool down before you engage. If you have an issue with an official or another driver, take a few minutes to change, have a drink, and decompress before confronting the person. Things sometimes look different after reviewing all the facts. Don't burn any bridges before you have to.

And, above all:

0. Work on your decision-making skills. I see a wide variety of bad outcomes. Yet virtually all of them go in the bucket labeled "Poor Choices". Ask yourself, does the gain justify the risk in making this move? Can I achieve the same result by waiting until the next turn or the next lap, or by taking a different approach? Is this really a good idea? So often, I see incidents that have everyone asking, "*What* was he thinking?"

This ends my series. I am very grateful to the Club Racing Board and SportsCar for providing me this space and to readers for your comments and feedback. I shall look forward to seeing you at the track.