



Intro to Racing With PTSA

Updated November 2025

Whether you are new to racing, or just new to racing with PTSA, here's how to get started.

You don't have to be a member to race. Of course, if you like it and race a lot, we would appreciate it if you do join up and help keep the club going. Most of the races are free and expenses are paid for by memberships, sponsors and donations.

The SAILING INSTRUCTIONS (SI's) document is basically the Bible for a race, regatta, or race series. It should contain all you need to know to race in a given event. See the racing page on ptsail.org.

There will be sign-up's ahead of time for most of the bigger races. Otherwise, just show up and identify yourself to the race committee before the race. Usually the race committee is on the committee boat somewhere out on the bay a half an hour or so before the race. It will be flying a big orange flag. Sometimes the race committee starts races off of City Dock instead. See the sailing instructions for more on this. *Race committee* is just a fancy name for the people who run the races. If you'd like to get involved in that, volunteers are always welcome.

The racing rules can be pretty complicated. But you don't have to have them all memorized in order to race. The key one to know is: don't hit anybody. Knowing the rules will help you do better and it will be safer for all competitors. See the racing page on the PTSA web site for more info on this. We don't do protests in PTSA races. The honor system prevails. If you think you fouled someone it is up to you to do your penalty turn(s). A foul is when you break one of the racing rules of sailing.

PTSA runs two kinds of races: one-design, and PHRF. One-design means all the boats are the same so that the order in which they finish is the same as the actual finish. Thunderbirds race one-design, all other boats race PHRF. PHRF is a handicap system where each boat gets a rating which is used to determine the actual finish. So first across the finish line is not necessarily the winner of the race. This keeps the races as fair as possible so that a small slow boat can still win vs a bigger faster boat. If you race a lot you will want to get an official rating from the PHRF organization, otherwise the race committee can work with you to determine a rating. Actually, there is a third type of race. A few of our more fun races like the Shipwrights Regatta are scored first across the finish line wins (but there is also a trophy for last place!). It's all explained in either the general sailing instructions or those for the specific race/regatta.

We run a lot of races so there should be some that interest you. These are all listed on the racing page of the PTSA web site.

Here is some possibly confusing terminology sometime used in Sailing Instructions:

Into to Racing with PTSA

- Windward mark – this is usually a temporary mark put out by the race committee and as the name suggests is, or should be, directly upwind from the start line. This might be a bit confusing because if there is a big wind shift right before the start it won't be directly upwind.
- Leeward mark – this one should be directly downwind from the start line. Usually the races for the Thunderbird one design class are windward/leeward courses to ensure lots of tacking and tactical necessary decisions.
- Jibe mark – some races will be triangle shaped, they will include the windward and leeward marks as explained above. The third point in the triangle is the jibe mark so named because boats normally have to jib when rounding it due to the wind direction.

Questions? Send an email to: info@ptsail.org

We hope to see you out on the water.