

Why Race?

I was recently reading an article in a radio control sailplane newsletter entitled “Why Compete?” by a gentleman named Jeff McKee. He summed up his reasons to compete with three statements:

- 1) *To improve your skills*
- 2) *Achieving a goal*
- 3) *Competition goes well beyond who wins*

It started me thinking about sailboat racing, and why I race. I race for exactly the same reasons. I’ve taken what Jeff wrote and tweaked it for our pastime.

To improve your skills. This includes boat handling, sail shape, and above all confidence. No one wants to set sail with the wind only to have to motor back to the marina. The more time you spend in your boat, the more time you can spend discovering new things. Notice how the boat moves faster in light air when heeled to leeward? Notice that those telltails are more than just sail decoration? Notice how the boat heels less when the main is depowered? Notice that you are now sailing in white caps? Not that any of us really needs an excuse to sail, but racing gives you one more reason to get out on the water.

Achieving a goal. Both Jerry Snell and myself have discover that you can spend all

day ripping back and forth in front of the marina thinking, “Man, I can sail!” only to have the other club members leave you in the dust the first time you try to go up wind with them. Sailing your boat to a mark on the water will teach you tons. Racing gives you goals spelled out in advance. Here’s the course, get around it. Not only is it you against the elements of wind and water, but you can see how others deal with the different conditions.

Competition goes well beyond who wins. Winning is nice, but most racers attend for the fun, camaraderie and practice. Competitions are a great place to meet people, exchange ideas, and gain valuable experience. You don’t have to have a dedicated racing boat to enter. There are handicapping numbers designed just for that purpose. Any boat, sailed well, can win. Skipper expertise is more important than what type of boat you have.

Sailing in any competition will teach you important lessons that will ultimately make you a better sailor, even if your main focus is cruising.

May you always sail the lifted tack.

Tim Lynch