

# Teaching day sailing

I am sometimes asked to what **standard navigation and pilotage should be taught during a day sailing course. Often the question comes from cruising instructors who are used to a far more systematic and detailed approach than is appropriate for day trips in a dinghy.**

Whilst many people cruise their dinghy in the open sea, the preferred balance on the course would be to include some sheltered estuary sailing and an open sea trip. In this way students can be exposed to tidal flows and their affect, differences in sea state, eg wind over tide, and develop an appreciation of the need to keep a check on their position. A balance of chartwork, planning and sailing is good. As always, try to deliver as much of the course as possible afloat, apart from the journey planning.

## Pilotage, not navigation

Keep insights brief and punchy. Generally people sail with the tide or against it, so plotting tidal vectors is

unnecessary. However aim to give students lots of practice of the simple arithmetic required to plan a passage.

## Weather forecasts

Provide a wide range of sources of forecast because students will vary enormously in their preferred source. Familiarise yourself with Ceefax, a few favourite websites and services such as Weathercall, as well as the traditional shipping forecast and those available from the Coastguard via phone or radio.

## Think about the 'what ifs'

Ensure your students get plenty of practice thinking through what could go wrong on their passage, and planning how to get out of or avoid trouble. Studies show that those who plan their response to an emergency react better than those who are unprepared.

## Teach basic chartwork

A laminated chartlet is far superior to a complete chart for dinghy use,



particularly if combined with a china graph pencil and GPS set. Study the worked examples in the Advanced Handbook (G12 ) which should give you a good idea of the right standard.

## Estimate your speed

If you carry a GPS set during the course it can be fun to take turns guessing speed through the water and checking with the GPS. It is a skill worth practicing because one of the most common mistakes is to over estimate your speed and miss the tide.

## Do a day trip

Day one of the course should ideally be spent on general sailing skills, background knowledge and planning.

The second day should include a significant time carrying out a planned passage, with each student taking responsibility for at least one leg.

## Use transits

The easiest way to sail in a straight line on the correct course is to line up a transit.

## Don't waste decisions

Remember, a decision made by the instructor is a decision wasted. As the instructor, you are responsible for the safety of your group. But you are also responsible for ensuring they learn from as many of their own decisions as possible. It is far better to allow them to make a decision and put it to you for comment, than to take the decision away from them at the outset.

