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Is a 470 the boat for you?

Article by Ron & Susan Hofacker

There are lots of conceptions and misconceptions floating around out there about the 470 and the 470 Class that can affect your decision to purchase a 470 and become involved in the class activities. Some of them are:

1. "They are complicated boats and are hard to learn to sail."
2. "I don't have a chance against the "Hot Shots."
3. "I can't afford a 470"
4. "Now that I own the boat, what do I do with it?"



Christine Stookey and Louise Van Voorhis at the 1996 Olympic Games in Savannah.

Misconception 1

"They are complicated boats and are hard to learn to sail."

This partly true and definitely false. They are more sophisticated/complicated than say a Vanguard-15 or a JY-15. But, this doesn't have to be a problem for the beginner. My wife and I had never sailed before we got a 470 and learned to sail. We continue to learn about sailing and racing with it. I can teach a beginner the rudiments of sailing in a 470 in the same amount of time it takes in a so-called simple boat. The key here is to set the boat up "by the numbers" as you would with any boat, and go sailing. It isn't necessary to adjust the jib traveler, for example, to learn the basics. But when you're ready the capability is there. The boat grows with you as your skill increases. This is not a boat you will soon outgrow. On the other hand, there is no question that boat tuning is an element in winning races. Most people consider the 470 to be under powered so you are always trying to finesse a little more performance out of it. If you want to learn about the fine art of rig and sail trim the 470 can teach you. In some ways the 470 reminds me of my old MGB (a British sports car...). It was under powered and I "tinkered" with it all the time. But it was the most fun car I've ever had.



Susan Hofacker rigging up the 470 to race,
Photo by Houston 2012 Foundation

Misconception 2

"I don't have a chance against the "Hot Shots".

continuous improvements that this level of competition produces. What is your attitude on learning and improving? Are you interested in learning from the best? The 470 class can provide the opportunity to learn from the very best.

The United States 470 Fleet has 2 major groups of competitors:

- 1) The Weekend Warrior and
- 2) the Olympic, or International Competition level.

It is a current goal of the Class Association to try to coordinate the interactions of these two groups to the mutual benefit of all. The Weekend Warriors work with the new members on everything from sailing, boat rigging, and racing basics to hiring guest experts to demonstrate technical sailing, racing, and rigging techniques for the experienced racer who wants to learn more about how the experts are doing it. At the Olympic level, the United States Sailing Team Coaches work with the current Sailing Team Members to refine boat handling techniques, boat tuning and set up, and other elements of competing at an international level. In many cases the US Sailing Team members will teach 470 specific sailing clinics for the beginning 470 sailors. In this manner skills and techniques flow down from the very best 470 sailors to those just beginning, whatever their age may be.



Susan Hofacker and Sharlene Simpson racing downwind at the 2000 Olympic Team Trials, Photo by South Wind Magazine.



Rounding the Leeward Mark at the Local Sailing club, Photo by Chris Kulhman.

Misconception 3

"I can't afford a 470."

A brand new Olympic ready 470 with all the extras might cost \$14,000. However there are a number of alternatives to the "write the BIG check" option. An Olympic Level competitor frequently buys several boats during his/her campaign. These boats become available at reduced prices depending on the age and condition of the boat and equipment. This is a good option for the "newbe" because these boats are completely set and tuned up. Often times a Weekend Warrior will want to "upgrade" to a newer one of these Olympic competition boats and will want to sell his/her current boat. These may be excellent bargains from \$1000 to \$1500, with all the extras, plus more. These boats may require some TLC. These boats are competitive for many many years. A 1986 boat won the local Seabrook Sailing Club series races in 1999, for example. What we tell the beginners is to start out with the lower cost boat, learn how to sail it. If you like it, upgrade to a newer boat. The upgrade may only be another couple of hundred dollars. The costs of a new set of sails are sometimes higher than their boat's resale value. The Weekend Warrior can often find excellent sails with very little use from the "Olympic Hopeful" for very reasonable prices.

Misconception 4

"Now That I have boat the boat, what do I do with it?"

Work with your local fleet is the best bet. They can quickly help you with questions in a one-on-one manner. The Class Association tries to help as much as possible. You can contact us through The United States Fleet web site that contains information about boat handling, rigging, and getting around the course and 470 sailing events at <http://sailingsource.com/470na>.

"I've never been in a boat before", said the Mole.

"What?" cried the Water Rat. "Believe me, there is nothing half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats", he said dreamily. "Just - messing - about..."

Even if you're like the Mole and have never been in a boat before you may find that messing about with boats is

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owner. we'll be glad to get you started right.

Ron and Susan Hofacker started sailing in the Spring of 1979. Their first boat was a 6 year old 470. With some help from enthusiastic Galveston Bay 470 Fleet31 members, practice, and reading, became competitive by the Fall. From there they raced locally and worked with the fleet to grow from 3 boats to 25.



In 1994 they and Steve Tacconelly won the United States Sailing One Design Award. Susan is a past member of the United States Sailing Team. Not only have they raced hundreds of local races, they have raced many National and Olympic Level regattas. They currently hold the office of Co-President for the United States 470 Fleet and maintain the 470 North American web site, Galveston Bay Fleet 31 web site and local 470 fleet newsletter.

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