



Scottish Rowing  
**Racing Control Committee**  
Recommended starting procedures for Head races

## **Introduction**

Starting arrangements at Head races in Scotland vary from event to event, in contrast to regatta starts which are prescribed in some detail in the Rules of Racing. The variations between events or even between divisions within events can cause uncertainty or confusion among competitors at a time when they should be able to focus on performance. These recommendations are intended to provide clarity and consistency for competitors and to ensure that starting arrangements are as effective as possible. The recommendations reflect comments from a number of Senior Umpire reports and incorporate the results of discussions among Scottish umpires during their annual training day in 2017.

## **Personnel required at the start**

The following personnel are required at the start:

- marshals to organise the crews before the start and to manage the movement of crews towards the start area
- timers to record the start order and times
- at least one umpire

The number of marshals and timers needed will depend on local circumstances, including the number of crews involved, the length of the marshalling area, and the timing arrangements. It is the responsibility of the event organisers to provide the marshals and timers.

The marshals and timers must be two different groups of people. Experience shows that trying to double up leads to delays if the timers have to move from the marshalling area to the start zone before the race can begin. In any case, at most heads the marshals will still be needed to manage the movement of crews towards the start zone.

## **Timing arrangements**

Event organisers will have their own timing arrangements and equipment. Whatever methods and equipment are used, they should include the following features:

- A primary method of recording the time at which crews cross the timing line
- Backup timing information. This can be as simple as a spare stopwatch running to the same time as the primary stopwatch
- A separate written record of the order in which crews cross the timing line
- An audio recording of the timing team, or
- a video recording of crews crossing the timing line, with date and time stamp

## **The start zone**

There are two important marks in the start zone.

### The Timing Line

- Marks the point where crews enter the course and the clock starts running
- Timing team positioned here
- Must be clearly marked so that it's visible to crews as they approach and pass

### The Control Line

- Before the timing line
- Point from which final spacing of crews is managed
- Positioned to give crews 10-15 strokes to build to race pace before they reach the timing line
- 90-100m should allow a suitable build distance for a range of boat classes
- Ideally the control line should also be marked so that it's visible to crews as they approach and pass but won't be confused with the timing line

## **Briefing**

A briefing should be held involving all the marshals, timers and any umpires who will be working at the start. All three groups need to be aware of the procedures to be followed and of the timetable.

## **Communications**

Good communications are needed between the marshals, the timing team and the umpires in the start area. At the very least there should be a radio with the marshals, with the timers and with the umpires. If the marshals are covering a long stretch of river then they may need more than one radio. Officials in the start area will also need to be in contact with any time gate or checkpoint where late crews will be held on the way to the start.

## **Marshalling**

Clear instructions should be provided to crews about the marshalling arrangements at the start. Signs on the bank should be used wherever possible to help crews and marshals make sure that boats head to the correct locations. If the first boats to arrive in the marshaling area are not correctly positioned it is difficult to correct this as more and more boats arrive. Marshals must take firm control of crews as they arrive and continue to maintain that control.

## **Umpires**

If only one umpire is available at the start they should take charge at the control line.

If two are available then the other umpire should be at the timing line.

Many racing incidents happen out of sight of the umpires on the course and as long as positions where there is a known safety issue (for example, approaching bridges) are covered, then it may be more useful to position a second umpire at the start rather than to use them on the course itself.

## **The Start**

The umpire at the control line should be in position at least 10 minutes before start time so that they can review the general preparedness of marshals, crews and timing team.

As soon as the umpire at the control line is satisfied that everything is ready, they will notify everyone that the race is about to begin, and instruct the marshals to begin moving crews towards the start zone.

The marshals will manage the movement of crews towards the start zone to make sure that there is a steady flow of crews at about 10 second intervals. The marshals need to be aware of any planned gaps between boat categories.

Crews should not be moving at race pace. Marshals must maintain a firm grip on crews as they move to the start zone, and be active in getting crews to speed up or slow down to maintain the correct gaps. Incompetent crews must not be allowed to introduce gaps into the flow, and anyone who is having difficulty manoeuvring into position should be bypassed and then put back into the flow at the end of their category.

## The Control Line

The control line is the last point at which the spacing of crews can be managed.

The umpire will watch approaching crews to see if any adjustments to spacing are needed. They will give any final instructions to crews to speed up, slow down, or even stop as they approach the control line so that an even flow of crews to the timing line is maintained.

As crews come through the control line the umpire will give the instruction:

**'Number x ... Build!'**

Crews will then have 10-15 strokes to build to full pressure before they reach the timing line.

### Timing Line

As a crew crosses the timing line, the umpire or a member of the timing team will shout:

**'Number x ... Now!'**

This tells the crew that they are now being timed. It tells the other members of the timing team that the crew has crossed the timing line, and it serves as an audible mark on any recording that is being made.

### **Checks**

The umpire at the start should notify all other officials once the final crew has started.

Wherever possible the timing team should carry out quick cross-checks of their records before leaving the start area so that problems are identified as soon as possible. Depending on the timing arrangements being used, this might mean simply checking that times have been recorded for all crews who started and that all lists show the crews starting in the same order. The timing team should confirm to the umpire at the start that all is in order. If any potential problems are found these should be reported to the Senior Umpire and the race organiser immediately so that investigation and correction can begin without delay.

### **Instructions to crews**

Annex A to this note contains a brief description of the start procedure which event organisers can include in instructions to competitors. It should be edited to fit local conditions.

Racing Control Committee  
29 January 2017

## Annex A

### Suggested text for instructions to competitors

*[Include local instructions about marshaling arrangements and, if possible, a map or diagram of the start area]*

The marshals will instruct crews to move towards the start zone. Crews will be controlled by marshals so that they approach the start zone at approximately [x] second intervals.

There are two lines in the start zone.

#### 1. Control Line

This is the final point at which the spacing of crews is controlled. Listen carefully for instructions from the umpire. You may be instructed to speed up, slow down, or even stop as you approach the line so that the correct spacing can be maintained.

As you pass the **Control Line** the umpire will issue the command

**'Number x ... Build!'**

You will then have 10-15 strokes to build to racing pace before you reach the **Timing Line**.

#### 2. Timing Line

The **Timing Line** is the second line in the start zone. This is the point where your time starts being recorded.

As you cross the **Timing Line** a member of the timing team will call

**'Number x ... Now!'**