

Starting Slalom – A Relatively Brief Guide

If you are interested in taking part in Slalom races, there are many rules you will not be familiar with. These notes are intended as a basic guide to help you get started. Sources of more detailed information can be found at the end.

General Information

Divisions – slalom competitions are organised in Divisions. Beginners usually start in Division 4. The top level of racing in the UK is Premier Division. An event usually covers more than one Division, (i.e. there will be a Division 4 and Division 3 race at the same event). *It is possible for experienced white water paddlers to start racing at a higher level, but most people start in Division 4 allowing them to get used to racing on easier water.*

Classes – there are four classes of competition within each Division. These are: Men's and Women's Kayak singles (K1M and K1W), Men's and Women's Canadian singles (C1M and C1W) and Canadian doubles (C2). In C2 crews can be all male, all female or mixed – but they all race against each other. To start with you'll probably want to stick to the relevant kayak class.

Single, double and team events – a **single** event where there is one race. A **double** event is where there are two separate races at the same venue, one on Saturday and one on Sunday. Less common now are **team** events where you race as a team of three boats down the course – where these take place it is usual for the team event to be on Saturday and the individual event on the Sunday.

Difficulty of White Water – you might have seen the raging torrent of the Olympic slalom course, but at Division 4 events it is a little different. There is usually some simple white water, but nothing too testing. In fact the Division 4 race at our Club is one of the harder sections of rapids used at beginners events.

Equipment

Boat - you can use any boat you want when starting in slalom (there are rules relating to boat dimension, but these don't apply until you progress up the Divisions). If you want to progress to higher levels, you will need to get a slalom boat, but there is a good second hand market, with boats being offered for sale at most events.

Clothing – you need your usual paddling gear and **must** wear a helmet and buoyancy aid. However, as you will be fairly active during your race run and during practice, you may want to wear light clothing (thermals) with a canoe cag instead of a wetsuit. As a result you either have to put up with changing into and out of the same set of wet clothes between practice and the race and between race runs or will need to have several sets of clothes to paddle in. You'll also need warm clothes for the time when you are off the water.

Paddle – again any paddle will do, but if you progress in the sport you might want to think about a lightweight racing paddle – but by then you'll be getting quite serious about racing!

Entering Competitions

Where are races held? the dates and details of where races are taking place can be found in the **Slalom Yearbook**, on the slalom website (www.canoeslalom.co.uk), and details of races in the region can usually be found on the Club notice board and website too. There are lots of beginner's events near to our club throughout the year – including our own beginner's event in June.

BCU Membership – to enter you need to be a BCU (British Canoe Union) member to cover insurance. Under 18's can compete under the Clubs membership (ask a club coach or official

for the Club's membership number). Adults need to either be a BCU member, or take out taster membership of the BCU at the event (which costs a couple of pounds and covers you for the whole event). If you are going to do lots of races it is a good idea to join the BCU – and if you get promoted to a higher division you will need this to apply for a bib (there are lots of other good reasons why should join the BCU visit www.bcu.org.uk for details).

Entering Races – ideally you should enter in advance of the event, as this makes life easier for the event organiser. However, at Division 4 events many people enter on the day. You will need to fill out entry cards (**see below**), show proof of BCU membership (take your membership card) and pay your entry fee. If you enter on the day you need to go to Control. *(Note: in Division 3 and above it costs more if your entry is late, as you have to pay a late entry fee).*

Age Groups – as well as prizes for each class there is usually a prize for the highest placed paddler in various age groups, these are as follows

- **J12** – juniors whose 12th birthday is on or after 1st January of the current year
- **J14** – juniors whose 14th birthday is on or after 1st January of the current year
- **J16** – juniors whose 16th birthday is on or after 1st January of the current year
- **J18** – juniors whose 18th birthday is on or after 1st January of the current year
- **Masters** – (formerly Divisional Veteran) any one who is over 34 on 1st January of the current year
- **Senior** – any one between Junior and Divisional Veteran categories

Entry Cards – you must complete these to enter a race as they act as your scorecard – so if you are entering to race at both days of a double event you will need to fill out a card for each day's race. Equally if you enter more than one class each needs a separate entry card. These cards are available at most events or if you want to enter in advance we usually have a supply at the club. Details of how to fill these out are below.

Entry Fees – you will need to pay to enter races. If you enter in advance you have to send a cheque with your entries (the cheque is usually payable to the organising club). There is a reduced entry fee for juniors and there are different fees depending on whether you are entering one or two of the races at a double event. In 2010 entry fees for Div 4 races are Juniors: £4.25 single, £7.00 double and Adults: £6.25 single, £10.00 double. Entry fees for the current year can be found in the Slalom Yearbook, or on the Canoe Slalom website (see useful information). Also entry fees increase as you climb through the divisions.

Filling out Entry Cards

Details of how you fill these out can be seen below – you need to fill out the **RED** bits, the **BLUE** bits are for information.

Your Name goes here

This will be the number or bib number you are given

This refers to whether you are Senior (S), Divisional (DV) Veteran or Junior (J12, J14, J16 or J18) – see age groups above

M or W for man or Woman

This will be either K1, C1 or C2 depending what you are racing in (see classes above)

This will be 4 (until you get promoted)

After each run your card will be posted with your result on it

Penalties will be recorded against the relevant gate number

Your total penalties for the run will go here

The time for your run will be here

Your total for the run goes here i.e. time plus penalties

This will be 4 (until you get promoted). Also delete 'men / ladies' as appropriate

The event name

Date of the event

Details as on the front of the card

The card must be signed

You must fill out all these details in full
Your BCU number (or for juniors the clubs number) is essential

These are only needed in you enter a team race or you race C2 and need to put in your partners details

Entry fee – see above for details

At the Event

Start List – at events a start list will be posted. This should tell you the order that the event is running in and when you are scheduled to start, and importantly your **start number** – you will either have to collect a numbered bib to wear while competing or put a number on your boat with tape (so it can be read from the bank). Ask at control whether they have bibs for you to use.

Course - The aim is to negotiate a series of gates (colour poles) as you go down the course in the correct order. Gates are either:

- Downstreams (green and white poles), which you must go through in a downstream direction.
- Upstreams (red and white poles), which you must go through heading upstream.
- The gates are numbered and you must do them in the correct order (1 then 2 etc). To help the gates are numbered on both sides. The side you should go through the gate from has just the number, the side you must not go through from has the number crossed out with a **red line**.

It doesn't matter whether you go through a gate forward, backwards or sideways, as long as it is from the correct direction

Times – your time for a run is the time in second it takes you to get from start to finish **plus** any penalties you get on the way.

Penalties – you get a **2 second** penalty for touching the gate, with your boat, paddle or body. (*You only get 2 seconds no matter how many time you touch the same gate*). You can also get a **50 second** penalty for not going through a gate correctly including:

- Going through in the wrong direction (i.e. going upstream through a downstream).
- Not going through a gate (your head and part of your boat must go through at the same time).
- Going through a gate upside down.
- A pre-touch – this is if you hit a gate before you have gone through the previous one, for example you touch gate 8 before you go through gate 7 you get a 50 second penalty for gate 7, plus a 2 second penalty for touching gate 8.
- Deliberate displacement (you are not going through a gate and move the pole so you do go through).

The maximum penalty you can get for a gate is 50 seconds.

Obviously the aim is to go through all the gates as fast as possible, without touching any! If you do miss a gate it is worth going back for it before you move on – it will rarely take longer than the 50 second penalty you will get.

There are judges positioned along the bank during the race to look at and record the penalties you incur.

Racing

Practice – one thing you'll need when you are getting started is plenty of time to practice, learn the course and figure out all the tricky moves on the course. There's usually someone who will give you advice on how to get the gate you are struggling on or how to do things better – or simply watch a few other people and learn from them.

At an event there will usually be **free practice** which means anyone can go in any order. It is best if you stick to doing full runs down the course. You can break your run and re-try a section you are struggling on – but anyone coming down the course has priority over you and you have to give way to them. Also you must make sure that you don't sit in an eddy or gate and block the course for other people.

At a certain time (usually announced or shown on the start list) free practice will stop and **official practice** will begin – this is to give everyone a chance at an uninterrupted and full speed practice. Check the start list to find out when your official practice run is. In official practice you **must** do full runs and there is usually some-one setting paddlers off at intervals.

Start order / time – for your race runs you need to be at the start and ready to go at the time allotted to you on the start list (at most Division 4 events the starter is not that strict about the order, but it makes everyone's life easier if you are there and ready when you should be).

Race Runs - You get two race runs and count the best one of these, so there is a chance to improve on your first run.

Overtaking – a problem at beginner and lower Division events is that there is a wide range of abilities paddling. It may be that you catch up with the paddler ahead of you – if this happens the judge will blow a whistle to get the paddler who is being caught to stop and move out of your way. Of course it may be you that is being caught up and getting 'whistled off' – if it happens move out the way quickly and resume your run when told to by the judge. If some one who doesn't move out of the way when whistled off impedes you, go and ask control for a re-run (to take your run again).

Capsizing – if you capsize, it's ok to Eskimo roll and continue. But if you capsize and come out of your boat, your run is over! Remember if you capsize and go through a gate upside down, you get a 50 second penalty.

Safety on runs - while the organiser of an event has to put in place appropriate safety cover, there are several rules that are in place to ensure safety

- After your race run you **must** stay on the water until two more competitors have crossed the finish line (so you that if necessary you can rescue another paddler).
- Also, if necessary you must go to the aid of/rescue another competitor (during practice or the competition).

Checking how you did - when you can get off the water, go and check how you did. Your entry card will be posted by **Control** with your time and penalties marked on. You can see which gates you hit or missed and where there is room to improve. At some event, scores are put into a computer and displayed on screen so you can easily see what position you are in. At lunchtime, after all the first runs are complete a results sheet from the first run is usually posted – remember you only count your best run so it could all change after the second runs.

Protests – if you think that you have been given a penalty incorrectly you can protest (occasionally errors are made). Usually it is best to make a polite enquiry at Control to find out why you were given the penalty. If you are not happy with the explanation you can make a protest, but this means filling out a form, paying a deposit which you lose if your protest is not upheld. If you first make a polite enquiry and are given a reason, it means the judge has recorded why you got the penalty so a protest is unlikely to be successful. **What you must not do is go and talk to the judge about the penalty – you can be disqualified for this.**

Between runs – its worth spending time watching other people racing as you can learn a lot and pick up how to do the course better from people racing in higher divisions. It is particularly useful to watch some of the judges paddling as they are often ranked much higher so cannot compete at the event but are using the opportunity for race practice.

After second runs are complete a provisional results list is posted. This is confirmed when the allotted time for protests has elapsed (usually 15 mins after the last racer). **Also at**

Division 4 events where you have been given a bib to race with, remember to take your bib back to control after your second run.

Results and Prizes

The organiser will present prizes as soon as possible after the event has finished. Be patient as it does take a bit of time for them to check the results are correct before handing out the prizes. At most events there are prizes for the highest placed in juniors in a number of age groups (e.g. J12, J14, J16), so you may get a prize even if you are not in the top places.

If the event is a double event, the course is usually changed after prize giving. Usually as soon as it is done you can practice the course for following day.

Promotions

As you improve you can gain promotion to the higher Division. In Division 4, one paddler in five is promoted to Division 3 (e.g. if there are fifteen paddlers in a class, the first three will be promoted). **It could be you!**

If you get promoted - you will get a certificate at the event that gives you full details of what to do next. Basically, you have to send off to claim your ranking position in Division 3 and obtain your bib. You keep that bib for the season, entering events and racing under that number. At the end of the season you send the bib back. The following season you send off for a new bib with a different number which you use for the whole season, or until you get promoted again (the number and your ranking position are based on your results in your best 3 races in Division 3 during the previous season).

If you get promoted you can no longer race in Division 4 in the class you were promoted in, you **must** race in Division 3. To race in Division 3 you must have or have applied for your bib, otherwise your results will not count.

In higher Divisions, promotion based on achieving a certain level based on your result in your best three races. **Now you are getting past the basics and beyond the scope of these notes – see the notes below for where to get more information.**

Useful Sources of Information

Slalom Yearbook – This contains the full rules for slalom competitions and details of all the events in a year. These supplied to all ranked paddlers at the start of the season, or can be bought. There is usually a reference copy in the office at the club (please do not remove it).

Slalom website – contains useful information, details of events and results from races.

www.canoeslalom.co.uk There is a link to this on the club's website.

Club Paddlers - There are quite a few people in the Club who are involved in slalom and will be happy to answer your questions – coaches or Club officials will point you to someone who can help you.

Finally, these notes have been created as a brief guide to starting in slalom, please let me know if there are any omissions or areas that are not clear so they can be improved for the future

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