

FIRST BOAT

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[Pica: Rules For Sailing and Rowing](#)

Vin Pica discusses the boating rules affecting wind- and paddle-powered vessels...

Guest blog by [Vincent Pica](#)



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As you can tell, I have been using this rainy and dreary morning in here to dig deeper into the Rules which govern our behavior on the creeks, bays and the open sea. As Ishmael said in “Moby Dick”,

“Whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul, then I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.”

Since it is damp and drizzly, let’s labor on and know that better days will arrive – Summer isn’t over yet...! As you’ve noticed, these articles have focused largely on powered vessels, as do the COLREGs themselves.

But what about those vessels that are powered by the most ancient of power sources – wind and human muscle?

Read on, sailor.

Rule 25: What Does It Say?

It covers sail boats and “vessels under oars.” With respect to sail boats, the Rules look to find a way to telegraph to you that the vessel you are closing on at night is underway, but not a power boat... How...? Well, it is lighted like a power save one feature. It has no mast light..! Sail boats are required, like powered vessels, to have side lights (red and green) and a stern light – but no mast light.

If she is under 20 meters (remember the 3x + 10% rule of thumb), she may exhibit an all-around light at the top of her mast – white shining astern, red and green abeam and ahead, port and starboard. The light itself shall (must!) conform to the exact degree specifications we talked about with respect to Rule 21 (see [Light It Up!](#), 8/7/12) – remember those “jet wings” we talked about...

What if you come upon a vessel at night which is exhibiting the side-light-stern-light configuration of a sail boat but also, high above, you see two lights – red over green? Under Rule 25 (c), a sail boat may also exhibit the red-over-green configuration at the top of her mast to make her easier to see – “red over green, I’m sailing tonight and want to be seen!” BTW, she cannot do it in conjunction with the all-around light we described above, regardless of her size. Under Rule 25 (d), a sail boat under 7 meters (~23 feet) “may” exhibit the lights configuration of her larger cousins but, if she isn’t fitted with them, she “shall have ready at hand an electric torch [a flash light, Bunky] or lighted lantern showing a white light which shall be exhibited in sufficient time to avoid collision.” Often, the sailor will shine the light on the sail as it creates a larger palette.

Row, Row, Row Your Boat...

What about rowing – which includes kayaks that are now, due to their growing popularity, amongst the highest sources of accidents and death at sea (or “at bay” or “at creek”, as it were.) The Rule for (wo)man-powered vessels – of any size – is just like 25 (d) for sail boats – she “may” exhibit the lights configuration of her wind-powered cousins but, if she isn’t fitted with them, she “shall have ready at hand an electric torch or lighted lantern showing a white light which shall be exhibited in sufficient time to avoid collision.” How many kayakers out there have a flash light under their decks...? Or life jackets on them..? The stats on those that don’t are getting deadlier and deadlier by the year... Don’t be a statistic!

Lest we forget our new emphasis on Shapes, are sailing vessels required to display a Shape and when? Yes, there is a Shape for sailing vessels – it is called the “cone, apex-downward.” It looks (or is supposed to look) like an ice-cream cone. It is to be exhibited forward “where it can best be seen.” And when is it to be displayed? When the sails are up – and the engine is on... in short, she has to declare that “I am just a funny looking power-boat right now” and be expected to act accordingly – and be treated accordingly. (Just remember that there are no “100-0” accidents out there. She is still unable to respond as quickly and sharply as a powered vessel since her sails give her considerable “windage.”) BTW, sailing vessels under 12 meters (~26 feet) “may” exhibit the Shape but are not required to.

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux@aol.com or go direct to the D1SR Human Resources department, who are in charge of new members matters, at [DSO-HR](#) and we will help you “get in this thing...”