Guide For Your First Topper Event

 Going to your first event can be daunting for both kids and parents. But also potentially great fun. What follows are a few ideas to make the first events easier, and hopefully very enjoyable

1. Notice of Race (NOR)

All events publish a Notice of Race prior to the event. This will usually be found on the Topper website, or the Club website, or both. This gives a lot of valuable information about the race. An Entry form is also published and ideally submitted in advance of the event. However, it is sometimes possible to enter and register on the day.

The start time (warning signal) will be clearly indicated on the NOR, and will usually be later on the first day of a two or three day event to allow sailors time to travel. Depending on the venue, and distance from the shore to the sailing area, the fleet will launch 30-60 minutes before 1st warning signal (1st gun). You should aim to be at the venue about an hour before launch, or 2 hours before the " 1st gun".

Sailing Instructions (SI's) will also be published prior to the event. These will contain more detailed information about the races, including the shape of the course to be sailed.

It is really important to read both the NOR and the SIs.

2.Venue

Ask around in your club and see if others have been to the venue before, perhaps with other classes. They may be able to give you ideas on where to stay if it is a 2 or 3 day event. Perhaps other club members are going? Most people are delighted to see new sailors joining "their" class, and happy to share the knowledge they have. Sometimes it is cost effective for a couple of families to share self-catering accommodation, especially if only one parent and child is travelling from each family.

The Topper Traveller events are completed in one day, and have a relatively late start time, to facilitate sailors travelling to and from the venue in one day. These are an ideal place to start attending events.

3.Weather and Tides

You should get into the habit of checking the weather and the tides for the few days coming up to the event. Met Eireann gives the sea area forecast for the following few hours, but many sailors use dedicated sites such as www.windguru.cz which gives detailed forecasts 5 days in advance for many of the well known venues in Ireland. Tidal information can be obtained on www.easytide.co.uk

4.Arrival

After arriving at the venue, it is probably best to report to the Registration desk and complete the formalities. Tell them its your first event, and perhaps they can find someone to show you where to go. It is usually fairly obvious where to unload your boat, and it is best to get it rigged early. Then find the Changing Room and change into your sailing gear. As with any public place, don't leave any valuables lying around Changing Rooms. There will be a briefing for sailors prior to launching, which you should listen out for, and the race officer will welcome all the competitors and let them know any relevant information.

5.Clothing

Hikers

*You may have a wetsuit already and this will be ok to wear BUT if you are thinking of racing regularly, it might be a good idea to get a pair of hiking pants. These 'hikers' are made of wetsuit material, but only cover your legs and torso. They can either be 3/4 length or full leg. The 3/4 length one are useful in the summer as they are lighter, but also can be worn in the winter, with 'raceskins' (thin neoprene leg and torso covering) underneath them for extra warmth. The hikers have thick pads on the back of your thighs to make it less painful when you are hiking out on your boat and add extra comfort.*

*Layers*

*It is also just as important to layer up properly before going out sailing. Two or three, thin or medium layers are much warmer than one thick one. Rash vests are good for your first inner layer, the one closest to your skin. The mid layer is up to you, but items such as 'hot tops' or neoprene tops offer good insulation. Tops with titanium on the inside are expensive but offer great warmth and protection and are probably worth the extra cost. Finally the outer layer needs to be waterproof; you should wear a cag or an aquafleece. A cag is waterproof and wind resistant and provides protection. An aquafleece is similar, but with a fleece lining on the inside for more warmth. If you are really cold, you could even wear both! It is important to layer up properly before setting out, you will stay warm and therefore enjoy your day and perform better in the races!*

*Gloves*

*Very important for both warmth and grip. Some have finger tips open for better pinch and touch. Some are too thick and reduce dexterity. Everyone will have their own favourite, but if your body is warm, your fingers will not feel as cold.*

*Footwear*

*Sailing boots made of neoprene for warmth and grip. For added warmth consider adding wet suit socks or thin "Hot socks" inside. These are socks made of wetsuit material, of varying thickness and make a huge difference in the winter especially.*

*Hat*

*You will need a wooly or fleecy hat in the winter( and sometimes summer too) as you lose a lot of body heat through your head. In sunny weather, a peaked cap or visor will suffice.*

6. Suncream

*Winter or summer, rain or shine, get into the habit of applying suncream before you go out. Because of reflection,the suns rays are stronger on the water, even in an overcast day. The cumulative sun exposure you would otherwise get over the years, would lead to considerable sun damage to your skin. Sun damage leads to premature skin ageing, or to skin cancer. Use sun protection.*

7. Watch

*During a sailing event, a watch is as important for your races as your boat and sail. Without a watch, you will be unable to start on time, and therefore you will be left at a huge disadvantage to others. Sailing watches with countdown timers and beeping are recommended but as long as you have a clear view of how many seconds are left to your start, you will be fine. Asks around for advice on the different watches, but the "big yellow ones" are the most popular with junior sailors.*

*8. Boat*

*If this is your first event, you may be borrowing a boat, or thinking about buying one. There is nothing wrong with a second hand boat, but make sure it is good condition. The Topper hulls are very durable and rarely cause a problem. Sails may need to be replaced if they are worn and soft. You will get better performance from a stiffer sail. There is only one Topper manufacturer, and so all the sails are the same. It is often the ropes which may need attention or replacing. Check the traveller, the main sheet and the halyard (toggle at the top of the mast) in particular, as you don't want a worn rope to snap during a race. The 6-to-1 downhaul, 4-to-1 outhaul and 3-to1 kicker, and racing blocks make a huge difference to your boat and help make the difference between a regular fun-boat and a competitive racing boat.*

*Check you have a bung, and that it is in position. And check it again every time you go on the water. Otherwise water will get into the hull and make your boat very heavy, and very slow!!*

*The 4.2 sail is a smaller sail, aimed at younger and lighter sailors. At each event, there will be a separate competition for the "4.2s". They generally sail a shorter course, usually just a triangle, starting after the main fleet, but in the same sailing area.*

9. Food and Drink

*Once you begin racing and get out on the water, food and drink are very important! Make sure you eat and drink enough between each race, it makes a huge difference to your performance in the next race. Sandwiches or rolls, fruit and granola bars are all good things to eat between races. You should also drink a large amount of water while racing. 1 litre for every hour you are on the water is recommended. That is a large amount of water, so don't worry if you don't drink the whole amount, but make sure you keep yourself properly hydrated. Remember, a 2% drop in dehydration is a 20% drop in concentration! Aside from water, isotonic drinks such as Lucozade sport and MiWadi can also be good to drink while on the water.*

10. Flags and signals

*On the water, communication from the race officer is made by means of flags and signals from the committee boat. You should familiarise yourself with the starting flags and sequence of these flags. Generally, there will be a "gun" or hooter sound at 5 minutes before the start, followed by a second sound at 4 minutes, another at one minute and a fourth sound at "GO". A sequence of flags will accompany these sounds. In general, at 5 minutes, the class flag goes up ( the Topper class is the "T" flag, which is red, white, and blue, simiilar to the French national flag). At 4 minutes a second flag is hoisted. At one minute, the second flag is lowered, and at "GO" the class flag is lowered. Thus there are both visual and auditory signals indicating the time at 5 minutes, 4 minutes, 1 minute and "GO"*

11.Support RIB

*Food and drink should be kept in a "dry bag". Dry bags are waterproof bags with a special water tight seal. These should be put in a support RIB. If you do not know anyone going out in a RIB, you can ask somebodies parent to take it for you and they should take it for you. The Topper Class is a 'friendly class' so if you a stuck, do not hesitate to ask. If you do not know anyone, and don't feel like asking a stranger to take your lunch, you can clip your dry bag around your mast. But please do ask.*

*You should also send extra layers of clothes for you, on your support RIB. A cag, or extra rash vests should be brought out in case you get cold during the day, or a sudden change in weather. Again, if you do not know anyone going out in a RIB, you can ask a parent to take them out for you or put them in your dry bag, along with your food.*

*In between races, you can sail over to the support rib and get your food/drinks. Refuel yourself between each race. It's also quite sociable.*

*Some clubs will have a few sailors attending an event. Quite often the parents will club together to pay a "coach" to attend the event and give advice to the sailors, between races. This is usually an ex-topper sailor. No coaching is allowed during a race, but in the Topper events, an exception is made for those at the back of the fleet. If you are in that position, you may find a stranger offering helpful words of advice. The Topper Class feel it is important to encourage young sailors, and it can simply be a great achievement to consistently make it around the course in your first events.*

12.After Racing

*When you come in off the water, many clubs will have a warm drink or food available. De-rig your boat quickly, and head in to change into warm clothes. If there is a second days racing, get those wet clothes hung up to dry. It's not so pleasant getting into soggy sailing*

*gear the next morning. Many families bring a "Dri-Buddy", an ingenious portable clothes drier. Then something to eat, and socialise and early bed for the sailors. Parents are allowed to stay up late socialising!*

*Next day, same routine. Down to the club, rig the boat, change, launch, race!*

*At the end of the event, there is usually a prize giving ceremony. Often there are "extra" prizes for fair-play, or the best capsize, or some other category. So do stay. It gives you another opportunity to get to know people, and you never know, it could be you!*

Finally

*Have fun. The Topper Class caters for newcomers as well as the competitive top sailors. It is known internationally as the "Friendly Class" and we suggest that at each event you make "5 new friends"! You will soon be the one offering advice to next years newcomers.*

Possible Birthday and/or Christmas presents.

*Sailing gear can be expensive, so many people build it up by getting items for birthday or christmas presents. Give the list to your parents, godparents, aunties, grandparents if they don't know what to get you for your next birthday. Lots of options in lots of price ranges - from about 4-5 euro/pounds for a bung, to about 75-150 euro/pounds+ for hikers. (Make it easier by checking out the websites yourself first, and looking around at what other sailors are using!)*

*Hikers*

*Sailing gloves*

*Sailing watch*

*Dry bag*

*Hot socks*