

## GUY CRIBB TECHNIQUE

# SLALOM SERIES WITH GUY CRIBB

Over the next few months Guy Cribb, Britain's current National Slalom Masters Champion (and 12 times former national champ) will lead us through the ins and outs of slalom sailing. From how to organise a local event for you and your mates, to world cup level overtaking moves, acceleration and speed sailing. Tune in and sheet in, *speed is back!*

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN THOURARD Mistral and Intuition

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Because I won the last race, here's me starting last in this race - the pursuit is on!

### A HISTORY LESSON

Slalom racing was the pinnacle of windsurfing in the early nineties: professional world tour events had quarter of a million dollar prize funds which created insanely competitive racing and innovated the fastest sailing kit in the world - a title that to this day the windsurfer still holds.

Slalom was the cause of an explosion in development. Sails became increasingly powerful, and boards so fast that the sport reached such an extreme it literally imploded. Suddenly boards were virtually impossible to sail, while sails were impossible to rig or waterstart, and as quickly as speed sailing and racing developed it vanished (notorious boards like Dunkerbeck's 'Sputnik 270' providing the nail for the coffin).

Wave sailing took over as the extreme end of the sport in the mid-nineties and remains now as the pinnacle of windsurfing (and arguably all watersports). Freestyle has boomed for the last decade or so, initially bringing with it fantastic early planing boards and sails, and then changing the face of wave sailing with a new generation of extra tricky sailors. However, rather like slalom fifteen years ago, freestyle has spiralled out of control and well out of the reach of your average windsurfer: there's only so many cornetto, solaro or raspberry ripple 540s you can try before losing track of what's going on.

On the professional world tour today there's more than twice the number of slalom events and competitors, than there is in waves or freestyle. Plus in the magazines for the last year there's been twice the advertising for slalom as for other kit.

Windsurfers still hold the world speed sailing record by the skin of our teeth, or Antoine's teeth, and the pressure is on in the entire sailing world to be the first to break 50knots. Windsurfing fast, and overtaking your mates, is what it's all about again. Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines, speed is the new style.

### SLALOM RACING

The professional world tour slalom events involve the world's best windsurfers racing neck and neck around a 'downwind slalom' course with line starts and finishes. This involves thousands of pounds worth of kit, boats, race officers, precision timing, flags and all sorts of organisation to ensure the Formula One status of our professionals - check it out at [www.pwaworldtour.com](http://www.pwaworldtour.com)

However none of this is necessary to hold racing locally, in fact, you don't even need an assistant: it's easy to organise events where the race officer is also one of the racers so nobody misses any windsurfing time.

Whether there are two or two hundred of you, slalom racing is easy to arrange and loads of fun. Don't stop reading now if you think you'll never be any good at slalom because you don't have slalom kit, or can't make all your gybes, neither are vital!

Slalom sailing is all about acceleration, top speed, tactics, perhaps at the highest level smooth gybing, but most of all, fun. And if you have a weakness in any of these areas there is no better way of improving your technique than being on the slalom race course (obviously with the exception of being on an Intuition course...)

Windsurfing is an inherently competitive sport, filled with dedicated enthusiasts who won't be beaten by anything (hence their oft absurd appearing perseverance). As such few of us would like to be last at anything and may be scared off racing for that reason. However, slalom sailing has a format that's perfect for local racing, as it is easy to arrange and eliminates processions of frequent winners, or more importantly frequent losers.

It's called pursuit racing, or reverse grid starts, and ensures whether you're a beginner with a wooden boom or Antoine Albeau with your world championship kit, your chances of winning, or losing, are almost equal.

A pursuit race is basically where the winner of a race has to start last in the next race, the person who finished second has to start second from last and so on. So the loser of the first race has a head start and the rest of the fleet are each pursued by faster sailors trying to overtake them.

When run correctly, everyone has an equal chance of winning the race regardless of their ability, abolishing the monotonous winning streak that top racers would otherwise have, but more importantly preventing the less experienced from always being last, a position no-one wants to frequent, and few would put up with for long.

This kind of racing is very easy to organise, with absolutely no skills needed, no time wasted, no paperwork, timings or results. All you need is a course. And even a course doesn't necessarily need marker buoys (although they help.)



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The leeward/ downwind end of line gets the start advantage to make up for the fact they will have to sail a slower more upwind first leg of the course.

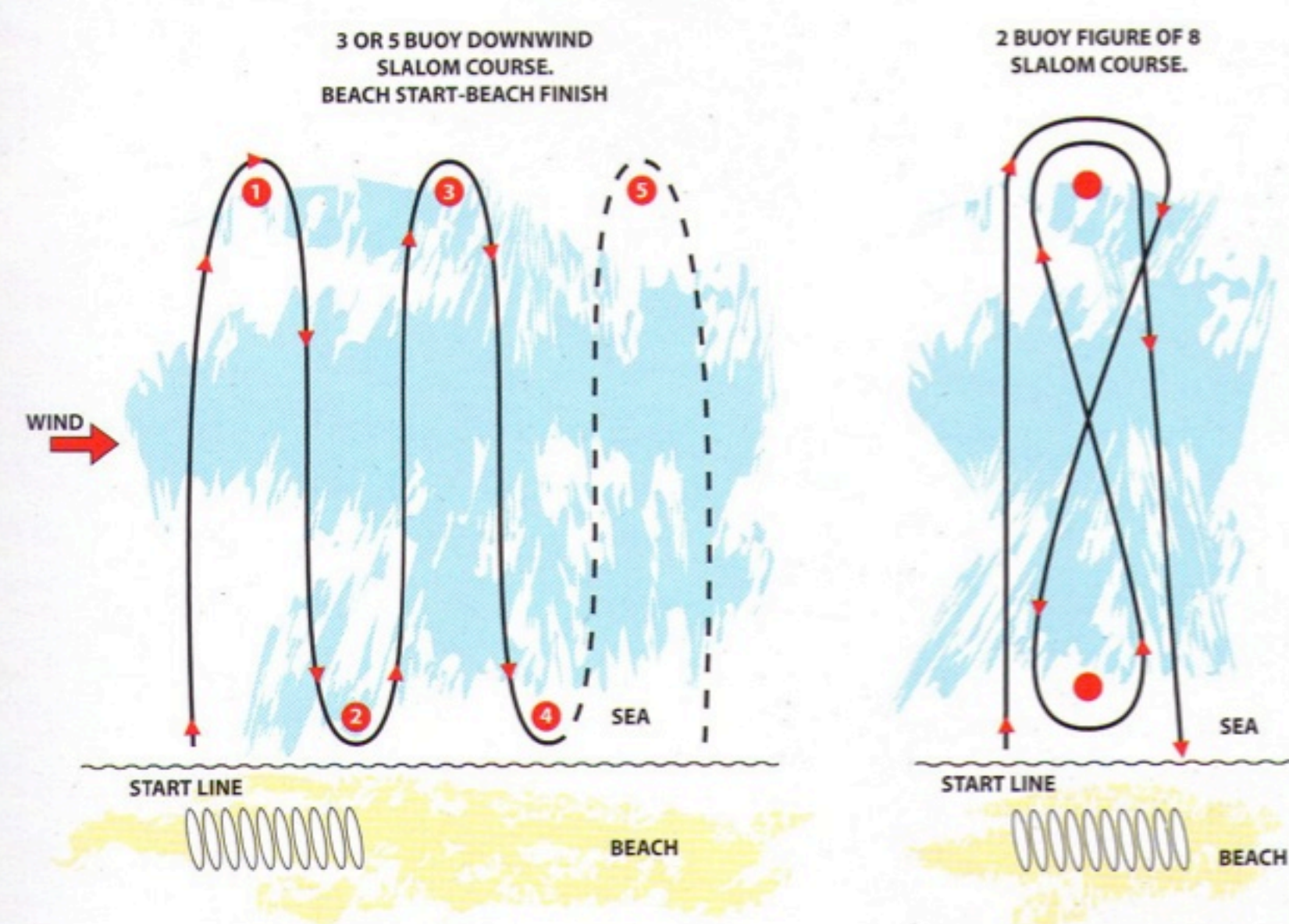


## INGREDIENTS FOR AN IDEAL EVENT

**Group of windsurfers:** 3 - 30 people

**Wind:** side shore or side onshore

**A course:** about 5 - 10 minutes long (ideally three marker buoys, or fixed things in the water, for a downwind slalom course it should be zig-zagging downwind, see diagram)



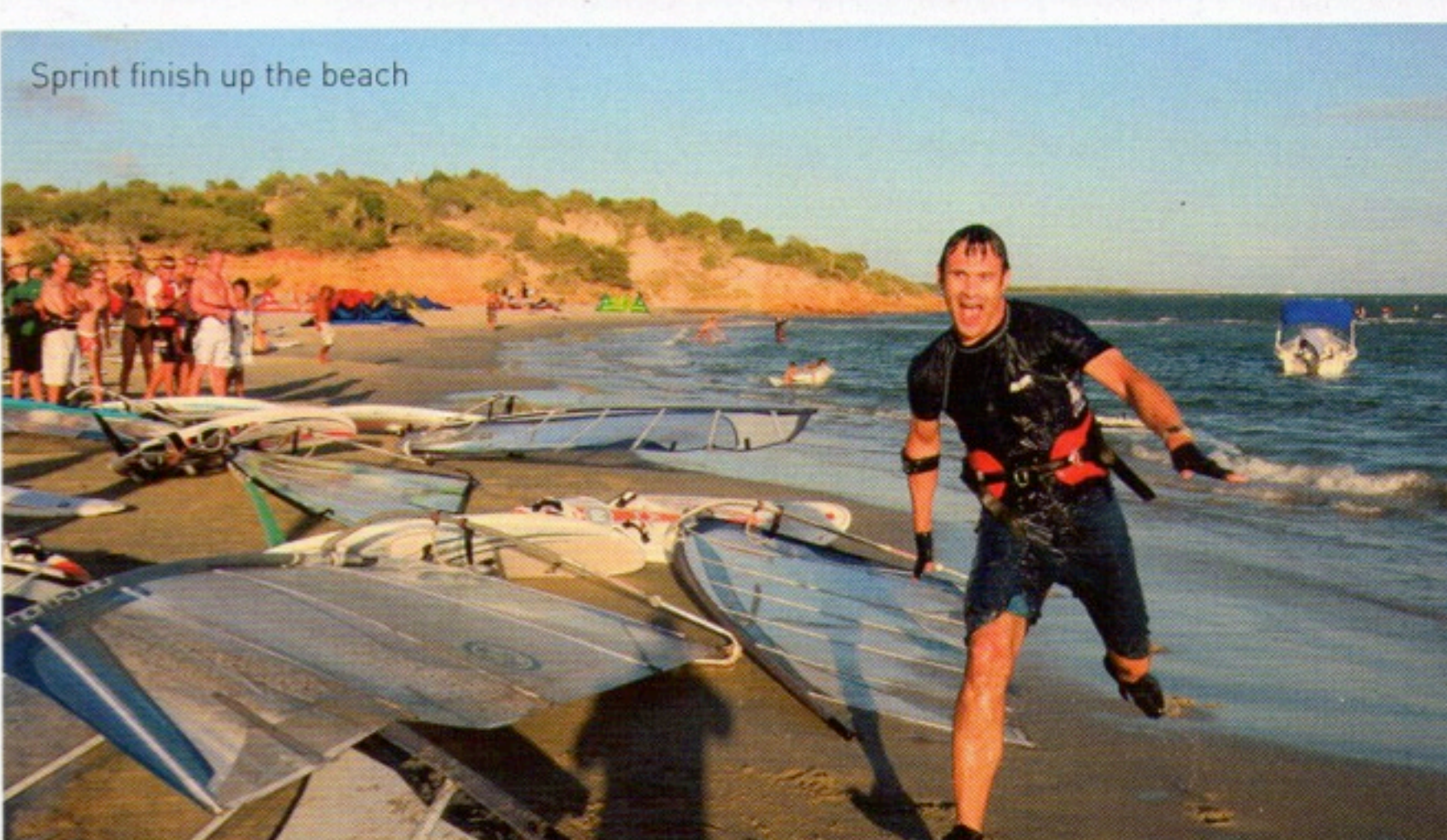
## METHOD

### RACE 1

Line all the sailors up in a line parallel with the wind. Have someone run up the line from the leeward end and allow each board to pass behind them. This way the most leeward board starts slightly earlier than the windward board, making the start fairer.

Alternatively set the windward end of the line slightly further back than the leeward end- so that the leeward sailors start fractionally ahead and just shout "Go!"

Sprint finish up the beach



The ideal finish should be on the beach, not just for the ease of co-ordinating the event this brings, but also for the hilarious sprint finishes. At the finish remember your finishing position, who you finished behind, or who you finished in front of.

### RACE 2 (the pursuit race)

The winner of race 1 should place their kit downwind of everyone else on the beach. The person who finished second should place theirs immediately upwind of the winner, and so on, until the person who finished last in race one is stood upwind of everybody else.

The startline is now a reverse grid position, with the upwind advantage going to the loser of race one.

To start this race, the race officer should walk down the line from the upwind end, letting the upwind sailors, who came last in the first race, not only start first, but with an upwind advantage.

In these shots we are lucky enough to have a local Venezuelan girl carrying the flag for our start line.

If you don't have a Venezuelan girl on hand, the winner of race one should walk slowly down the beach from the upwind end of the line to their kit at the downwind end.



If there is a regular winner, then the starting procedure can be further handicapped by walking slower down the beach, letting the less experienced racers have a greater head start.

If everyone is starting in the water in a beach start position, and it's too deep for the winner of race one to walk in front of everyone, they can sail in front

instead, albeit totally sheeted out so they are literally just drifting downwind. Pursuit racing is where it's at. It eliminates 'cheque book racing,' constant winners (or more importantly losers), but remains insanely competitive and great for your windsurfing development and enjoyment. Why not set up some local racing at your beach?

Ideal ingredients for slalom- 15 Village People in skin-tight rubber





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## POOLE SLALOM/ SETTING UP LOCAL SLALOM

We've been using this format for the infamous Poole Slalom: local racing events that attract up to thirty competitors of various abilities and have a membership of over seventy, and this is all within a few months of starting up...

Poole Slalom races every Thursday evening when it's windy, and if there's no wind the event rolls over to the best forecasted day of the weekend. If there's no wind there's no event. This summer we have raced almost every week! Four or five of us take turns co-ordinating these events: making the decision on which day to run it and choosing the venue. Then on the day organising the races, which mostly use the pursuit format and are therefore very easy to run. We communicate via an email group that sends an email to all participants. This email group is for the sole use of the promotion and organisation of the Poole Slalom events, so we don't see spam like adverts or other nonsense clogging up our inboxes.

This email group and a certain level of insurance and infrastructure can be arranged very simply with the UKWA by following this link (and won't take more than a few moments to create).

<http://ukwindsurfing.com/information/clubs/poole-slalom/>

Alternatively search the UK Windsurfing site for 'clubs'.

As such there's plenty of other regional groups getting off the ground now too, meaning more local racing events.

## THE COURSE

Ideally, you should race on a downwind slalom course (see previous diagram), especially if winds are marginal as there is more opportunity for overtaking. In strong winds a figure of 8 course is good too, and easier to arrange. Or you can just use one buoy a long way out and make the racing "master blasters."

The buoys should be laid by the more experienced windsurfers (hook anchor on boom and drag buoy, do not tie chain around neck...) In Margarita this year I made two buoys out of sail bags filled with empty water bottles, and an old bit of rope tying this to another sail bag full of stones. It worked fine, so there should be few excuses about not having buoys to use.

If there are no marks to sail around, or no long distance blasts out to a headland / pier / buoy and back, a good system is to gybe around each other. This is especially good in a pursuit race. The leader gybes when they want, the next sailor has to gybe around them, and the next around them, and so on. This keeps the faster sailors behind the fleet for a while. However there is almost always a marker to use somewhere for one of the gybes, so try to use it.

The best solution is to buy a set of gybe marks and anchors, as we have done in Poole Slalom for around £90. Maybe your local shop can buy it!

## THE RULES

The number one rule in windsurfing is that the more experienced windsurfer gives way to the less experienced. In the event of a collision everyone should head up to wind as this is the fastest way to stop, and then use your kit to shield you from any potential impact. The professional world tour events only have one rule: no dangerous sailing.

Other than that you can do what you like since any collision is bad news for your results, so everyone avoids them at all costs.

We have drawn up a set of basic rules for local racing, and suggest you abide by them. No dangerous sailing, for everyone's safety.

## OPPOSITE TACKS

The sailor with their right hand in front has right of way, therefore the sailor with their left hand forwards needs to leave room for the right sailor to pass.

## INDICATE EARLY

Make it known which side you intend to pass long before a collision course is created. Remember that the right hand forward person has right of way, so they should hold their course and expect the left hand sailor to take avoiding action.

## SAME TACK-OVERTAKING BOARD KEEPS CLEAR

Overtaking boards keep clear of everyone, including people waterstarting. It is also advisable not to take risks trying to gybe in narrow spaces, better to go around any fallen sailors at the mark.

Feel free to adopt these rules or this racing format for yourselves and reproduce this feature in any publication.

Safety is paramount.

Next month we get on with slalom technique, tune in and put your foot down!

**Guy Cribb INTuition**

**Britain's Professional Windsurf Coaching**

Cribby runs windsurfing courses all over the world, specialising in teaching you how to waterstart, carve gybe, sail faster in more control and sail in waves. There is no better way to improve your windsurfing than in his capable hands, with 12 British Championship titles and 20 years of professional windsurfing coaching.

For all info on his exclusive windsurfing holidays and clinics, which have almost perfect wind statistics and only sail from the best venues and centres in the world at exactly the right time of year to ensure the best holiday and windsurfing for you, please visit [www.guycribb.com](http://www.guycribb.com) or phone Planet Windsurf for bookings 0870 749 1959 or email [guy@guycribb.com](mailto:guy@guycribb.com).

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