San Francisco Bay Safety

Navigation, and Performance Guide

This guide is designed to help Corsair and Farrier crews arrive prepared, sail safely, and race fast on San Francisco Bay in July. The event format includes Friday short-course racing in the South Bay, Saturday a longer race through central and western parts of the Bay, and Sunday regatta-style racing in the central Bay.

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What to Expect

San Francisco Bay rewards preparation and punishes late reactions. The organizing materials emphasize breeze, current, cold water, traffic, and the need to keep the racing fair and manageable across a wide range of multihulls.

Typical race planning for this event assumes a wide range of Bay conditions, including building afternoon winds, strong current effects, short chop, and high-workload transitions between displacement mode and fully powered reaching.

Always focus on these five priorities:

1. Sail the boat under control first, then chase speed.
2. Reef early and use a realistic depowering plan for gusts and acceleration zones.
3. Treat current as a major tactical factor, not background noise. Buoys leaned over by 2-3kt currents are a big clue.
4. Wear PFDs underway and review man-overboard procedures before the first start.
5. Stay clear of ferries, ships, buoys, and other hard objects; they always win.

Boat Preparation

Essential setup

Prepare the boat for solid summer Bay breeze and gusts. The event tips call for tuning and inspecting the boat for approximately 18 to 25 knots and for showing up with a tested first reef and a dependable depowering plan.

Key checks:

- Inspect standing and running rigging, especially spreader tips, shroud pins, trapeze-style attachment points if fitted, and chafe zones.

- Confirm rudder and tiller systems are tight, smooth, and free of play.

- Check daggerboard or centerboard controls, uphaul/downhaul purchases, and any shock-cord retrieval systems.

- Inspect furler, screecher tack fittings, spinnaker retrieval gear, and halyard exits for chafe.

- Tape pins, rings, cotters, and sharp edges that can cut sails, sheets, or people.

Reefing and depowering

We strongly recommend arriving with a real reef plan, not a theoretical one.

Action items:

- Rig and test the first reef before race week.

- Make sure reefing lines run cleanly under load.

- Brief the crew on who eases main, who handles traveler, and who calls for reefing.

- Agree on a simple trigger: reef before the boat starts burying the leeward float or becoming sticky and overloaded.

> ***Extra tip:*** *In heavy air, depower progressively before the boat gets out of shape: flatten the main, use the traveler actively, and avoid waiting until a big mainsheet dump feels necessary. If the boat is loaded up to the point that you feel you need to ease a lot of main just to stay in control, that is usually the signal to reef.*

Outboard and auxiliary power

Motor reliability matters in the Bay, especially near shipping lanes, in steep chop, and during long transits. The event notes specifically call for a fully reliable outboard that can be started quickly in rough water.

Action items:

- Test-start the outboard repeatedly while the boat is moving.
- Carry enough fuel for race-day transit, delays, and contingency use.
- Check kill switch, fuel vent, primer bulb, and propeller condition.
- Practice dropping, starting, and steering with the motor in breeze.

Shakedown sail

A real shakedown in the breeze is one of the best ways to remove uncertainty before the event.

Use the shakedown to test:

- First reef set and shake-out.
- Screecher furling under load.
- Spinnaker hoist, douse, and recovery in pressure.
- Crew movement and weight placement on reaches and in chop.
- MOB drill under sail and under power.

> ***Extra tip:*** *Use the shakedown to establish a simple "rough-tune" starting mode the crew can return to quickly during pre-starts. A slightly eased, balanced setup makes it easier to park, accelerate, and re-launch the boat without over-trimming or loading it up too early.*

Crew and Seamanship

Nurture a cold-water mindset, PFDs underway, clear roles, and a reviewed MOB plan.

Crew briefing checklist

Run this briefing before every race day:

- Helm: starting approach, steering mode, bear-away limits, and abort calls.

- Main trimmer: traveler, sheet, vang or twist controls, and reef trigger awareness.

- Headsail or reaching sail trimmer: furling sequence, unload calls, and douse timing.

- Bow or mast crew: mark-rounding roles, hoist/douse sequence, and snag prevention.

- Lookout: ferries, ships, exclusion risks, shoal water, and crossing traffic.

- Safety lead: MOB gear, VHF, phone, and emergency contacts.

> ***Extra tip:*** *Keep trim changes simple and coordinated: on multihulls, it often works best to trim from the front of the boat aft, with the helm steering to apparent wind and jib telltales while the rest of the crew avoids unnecessary adjustments. Stable trim plus quick steering reactions is often safer and faster than constant trimming.*

Cold-water discipline

Even in July, Bay water is cold enough that an unexpected swim can quickly become serious. The practical response is to avoid going overboard, wear flotation, and rehearse recovery steps before the race day gets busy.

Action items:

- Wear PFDs whenever underway.

- Clip or secure handheld electronics so they stay with the boat.

- Place handheld VHFs in ziplock bags to keep water out of microphones.

- Keep a throwable flotation device accessible.

- Review the first three MOB calls and the recovery role for each crew member.

Navigation and Bay Awareness

Currents matter all day

NOAA's San Francisco Bay Operational Forecast System provides nowcasts and forecasts of currents, water levels, temperature, and salinity out to 48 hours, with map plots and station views across the Bay. Use it before each race day, then compare the model with what is actually happening on the water.

For race planning, current affects:

- Laylines near marks and shorelines.

- Crossings near channels.

- Time-to-line and acceleration at starts.

- Risk around buoys, docks, and fixed objects.

- Transit planning before and after racing.

Traffic and hard objects

Stay clear of ferries and commercial traffic, and the local tips add that fixed buoys hurt in current and that large ships require a steerage way and room.

Action items:

- Pass well astern of large commercial traffic.

- Give commuter ferries extra respect because they move fast and predictably on schedule. Recognize that SF Pier 39 tour boats on Saturday's course do not follow prescribed routes.

- Avoid close ducking of marks or buoys when current is running hard.

- Start any avoidance maneuver early, while the boat is still easy to control.

Chop, angles, and multihull handling

Steer with true wind-angle awareness, turning on top of short chop, and practicing sail choice and recovery in stronger winds. On the Bay, fast boats lose more distance from a bad mode than from a small tactical mistake, so preserving flow, angle, and balance is usually the right priority.

Performance reminders:

- Do not bury the leeward float; ease, twist, or reef before the boat loads up.

- Avoid over-trimming when the boat loads up; power out of the main before speed collapses.

- Actively position crew weight to optimize the main hull. E.g. upwind, weight forward to raise the stern.

- Keep crew movement quiet and coordinated in chop.

- Enter maneuvers with speed and enough sea room.

Extra tip 1: *In short Bay chop, enter tacks with speed and pick the moment carefully—turning while the boat is already slow is a common way to get stuck. Let the jib help carry the bow through the wind and allow speed to rebuild before trimming fully on the new tack.*
Extra tip 2*: Downwind, try to set the sails so they depower together when the helm bears away in a puff. A boat is easier to keep on its feet when the main, jib, and reaching sail are unloaded in sync, rather than one sail staying powered up after the others soften.*

Read the Bay, not just the forecast

South Bay, central Bay, and ocean-influenced zones often behave differently, and that visual clues such as wet decks in the morning or sun over Berkeley can hint at a stronger afternoon build. Micro-zones matter, so crews should watch the water surface, cloud breaks, shoreline heating, and pressure differences across the course.

Recommended Apps and Tools

Primary tools

Tool	Best Use	Why it matters
NOAA SFBOFS	Current planning and verification	*SFBOFS provides short-term nowcasts and forecasts for San Francisco Bay currents and water levels, with map plots and station data across the Bay.*
NOAA PORTS	Real-time local observations	*PORTS provides station-based information for the San Francisco Bay region and is useful for checking observed conditions near race areas and transit routes.*
PredictWind	High-resolution wind forecasting and routing	*PredictWind provides marine forecasts and routing tools that integrate wind, wave, and current data for route and departure planning.*
Windy or SailFlow	Wind forecasting and routing	*More affordable options than PredictWind*

Practical use sequence

1. Check SFBOFS the night before and again in the morning for current direction and timing.

2. Check NOAA PORTS before departure for observed local conditions.

3. Check PredictWind or equivalent for wind trend, gust structure, and expected transitions through the afternoon.

4. Compare all three with what is visible on the water once outside the marina.

Course-Type Advice

Friday: South Bay short courses

Expect more emphasis on starts, lane holding, current positioning, mark roundings, and clean maneuvers. The webinar summary describes Friday as short-course racing in the South Bay, and the organizing notes point toward multihull-specific configurations such as upwind-reach-downwind triangles or similar shapes.

Action items:

- Protect clear air off the line.

- Favor simple, repeatable maneuvers over aggressive low-percentage calls.

- Use reef and traveler earlier if breeze ramps quickly.

- Keep mark roundings conservative if the current is setting boats into the turn.

> ***Extra tip****: For starts, avoid charging the line fully lit-up too early. A controlled approach from a repeatable "park and go" setup is often cleaner, safer, and more effective in fast-accelerating trimarans.*

Saturday: Longer Bay race

Saturday is planned as a longer iconic course through central and western parts of the Bay. This race increases the importance of transit planning, current timing, traffic management, and stamina over several hours.

Action items:

- Carry enough layers, water, and quick calories for the whole crew.

- Check the engine before leaving the dock.

- Brief the crew on no-go zones around major traffic and fixed structures.

- Keep a larger safety margin around maneuvers when fatigue rises.

Sunday: Central Bay regatta racing

Sunday is expected to be regatta-style racing in the central Bay, again likely using multihull-friendly course shapes. This puts a premium on clean starts, quick mode changes, and disciplined depowering in afternoon build conditions.

Action items:

- Keep the boat easy to steer through transitions.

- Avoid loading the platform just to hold a marginal lane.

- Build speed first out of tacks and jibes, then squeeze height or angle.

- Stay mentally fresh between races; small reset routines help.

> ***Extra tip****: Treat jibes as choreographed maneuvers, not casual turns. Preload sheets, communicate early, manage crew weight deliberately, and expect the boat to re-accelerate quickly as soon as it comes out of the turn.*

Simple Go/No-Go Checks

Use this quick self-check before every departure:

Question	GO if YES
First reef rigged and tested?	Reef can be set quickly without confusion.
Outboard reliable?	Starts immediately and runs cleanly.
Crew roles assigned?	Everyone knows job, backup job, and MOB role.
PFDs on and VHF ready?	Safety gear is on deck, charged, and accessible.
Current reviewed?	Team understands the key set and drift for the race area.
Traffic plan discussed?	Crossing and avoidance rules are clear.
Sail handling practiced?	Hoists, douses, furling, and reefing have been rehearsed.

Race-Week Action List

Seven days before travel

- Complete a shakedown in the breeze.
- Test reefing, furling, spinnaker recovery, and engine start.
- Inspect rig, foils, rudders, and safety gear.

Two days before racing

- Review SFBOFS current timing and likely race-area patterns.
- Check NOAA PORTS stations that match expected transit and race zones.
- Review wind trend and timing in PredictWind.
- Reconfirm crew assignments and communication words.

Each morning on site

- Check reef decision before leaving the dock.
- Confirm VHF, phones, and battery levels.
- Rebrief MOB and traffic avoidance.
- Pack layers, gloves, water, sunscreen, and snacks.
- Launch with enough time to observe conditions before the first sequence.

Final Reminders

San Francisco Bay rewards crews that are prepared, conservative early, and fast once settled into the right mode. The organizing notes and local tips point in the same direction: arrive with a tested boat, a clear crew plan, a serious respect for current and traffic, and a willingness to reef before the boat gets overloaded.

Boats seeking crew and sailors seeking rides should contact the organizing committee to join the crew-and-boat marketplace.