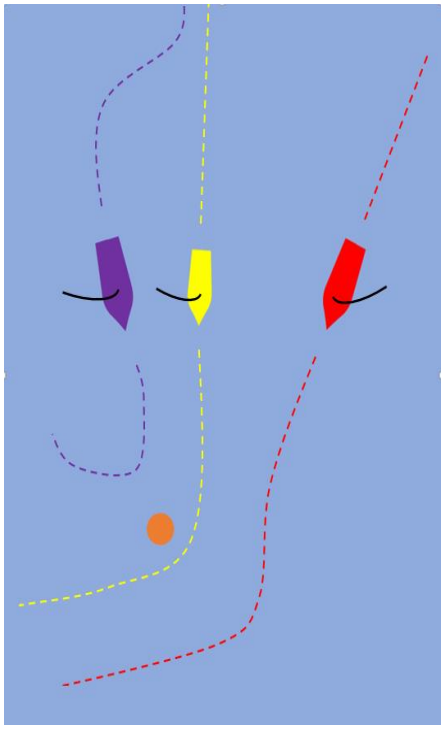
Colregs in pursuit races

DUBAI OFFSHORE SAILING CLUB

Overtaking a boat

Under Colregs, a boat that is overtaking must keep clear of the boat she is passing. The definition of the rule is “A vessel is deemed to be overtaking when coming up with another vessel from a direction of more than 22.5 degrees aft of her beam”.

In practice therefore on a downwind leg it makes no difference which tack either of the boats are on. An overtaking boat is obliged to keep clear.



The diagram to the left is a common occurrence at the leeward mark on our Wednesday night races.

The yellow boat is the slower of the three boats and is on track for the mark. The purple boat is overtaking her to leeward as both boats are on port tack. Under RRS the purple boat would be able to request for mark room, however under Colregs she is not entitled to this. The yellow boat is the vessel being overtaken and she must maintain her course. The purple boat has to keep clear.

The red boat is on starboard tack and is also sailing faster than the yellow boat.

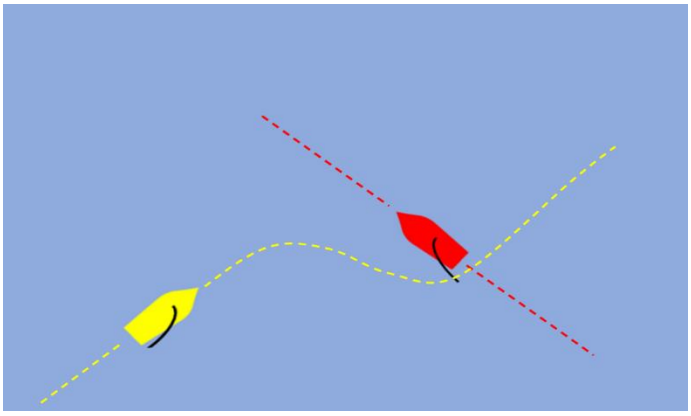
As the red boat has been approaching the slower yellow boat at an angle greater than 22.5 degrees from the yellow boat’s beam, she is overtaking and therefore needs to keep clear of the yellow boat irrespective of what tack either boat is on.

Whilst it is not always clear at any given moment who is overtaking who, if in any doubt then the boat that passed the previous mark last is the overtaking boat and should assume that she is required to keep clear. If it’s a short leg then whichever boat started the race before the other is likely to be the slower boat. A bit of common sense and sportsmanship is required here…

Port tack boats give way to starboard tack boats

When two boats are on a converging course, boats on port tack give way to those that are on starboard tack.

Whilst this is clear-cut when two boats are heading upwind and on opposite tacks, when heading downwind it is the overtaking boat that needs to keep clear (see above).



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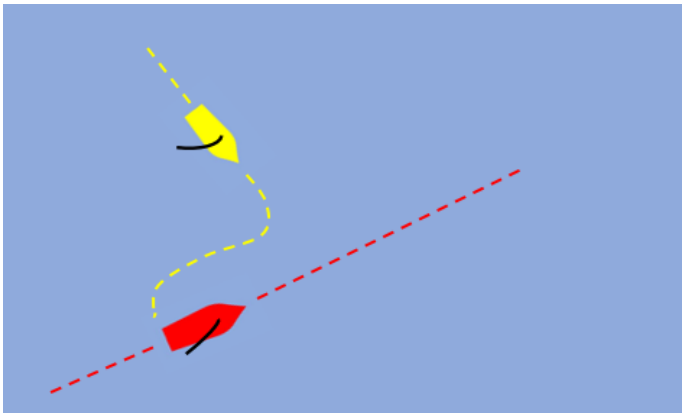
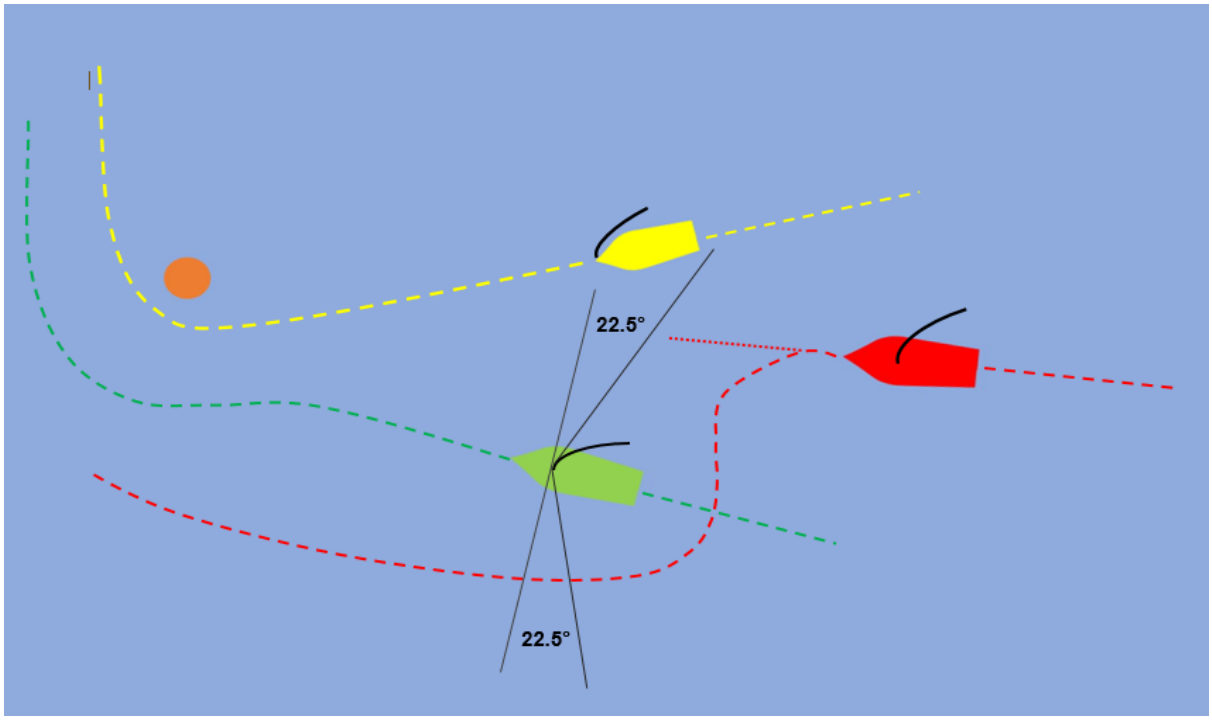
Windward boat

Boats to windward must keep clear of boats on a similar tack to leeward,

Please note however that this is not the case if the leeward boat is overtaking the windward boat (see “Overtaking a Boat” above where the purple leeward boat is overtaking the yellow boat to windward).



Converging boats approaching a mark



In this example the yellow and green boats are both travelling at a similar speed but are on a converging course. The yellow boat is to leeward of the green boat and is also less than 22.5 degrees off the green boat’s beam. The red boat is travelling faster than both the green and yellow boats and is hoping to overtake them both.

As the yellow boat is not overtaking the green boat, the green boat being to windward will have to alter her course for the yellow boat. The yellow boat needs to maintain her course.

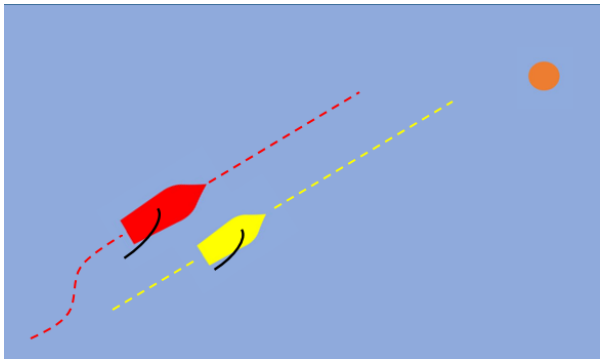
The red boat is the overtaking vessel and therefore needs to give way to both the yellow and green boats. Whilst technically the green boat must maintain her course

whilst she is being overtaken, the red boat needs to anticipate that the green boat will have to alter course because of the position of the yellow boat, and therefore the red boat must allow the green boat room accordingly.

The red boat either needs to sail outside the two other boats or to slow down and follow them around the mark before trying to get past them. Discretion is often the better part of valour.

Maintaining a course

The boat being overtaken has to maintain her proper course. She is not entitled to luff the overtaking boat or in any other way change here course if she is to leeward.

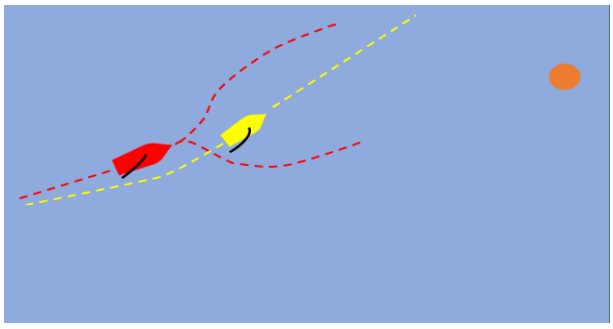


In this instance the red boat is overtaking the yellow boat to windward. If the red boat can pull clear ahead of the yellow boat before reaching the mark then it can round the mark without giving room to the yellow boat as the overtaking manoeuvre has been completed. If it can't then the red boat must continue to keep clear of the yellow boat as the mark is rounded.

Technically the yellow boat should maintain its course until the red boat has passed clear ahead, even if that means sailing beyond the mark. In practice the red boat will give the yellow boat room to bear away for the next leg then bear away herself. Again, common sense here please…

Protecting a line

A boat is entitled to sail higher than the mark in good time before an overtaking manoeuvre has started so as to try and force a faster vessel to overtake to leeward.



In the example to the left, the slower yellow boat has seen that she is likely to be overtaken by the faster red boat. The yellow boat can alter her course so long as she does it in good time before the overtaking has begun that it allows the red boat to decide on which course of action to take.

Once the overtaking has started, the yellow boat must maintain her existing course and has no rights to force the red boat higher or lower.

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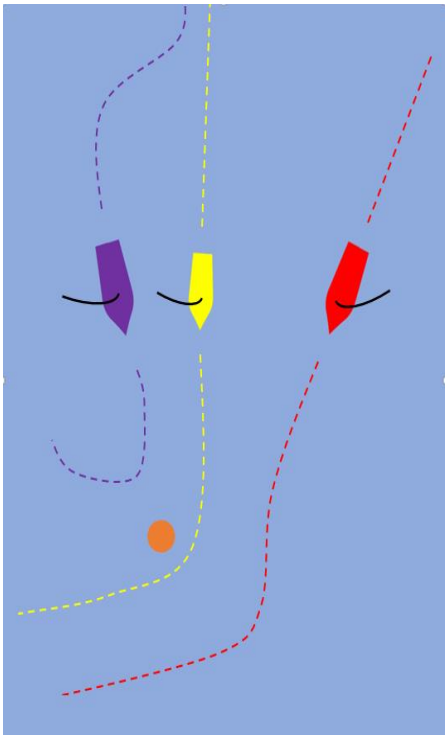
A few key points to remember

- **An overtaking boat keeps clear of the boat it is overtaking**
- **A boat being overtaken needs to maintain a steady course**
- **Port gives way to starboard**
- **Windward boats give way to leeward boats**

<u>An important point to note</u>

Unlike with RRS, there is no concept of mark room, overlap or zone when approaching a mark under Colregs.

If you are approaching a slower boat and establish an inside overlap then you are the overtaking boat and must keep clear. The slower boat is required to maintain her course whilst being overtaken.

Using the earlier example, the yellow boat is the slower boat which is being overtaken by the purple boat. Yellow must maintain her course. Purple has no rights to mark room and so will either have to slow down to drop behind yellow or will have to go about and re-approach the mark.

Irrespective of the size, speed, racing prowess, knowledge of racing rules or any other assumed rights Purple may feel she is due, she has no rights over yellow.