

Lessons Learned from Kattack

By Robert Baker, Fleet 4 Captain, Skipper *Planet B*

In the 2010 Fleet4 business meeting, I proposed to the 21 fleet members that we purchase the Kattack system for our 2011 season. I had become familiar with the race replay features of Kattack after it was used in the J/105 North Americans and some other events which caught my attention. What better way to learn from your mistakes, and help mid-fleet boats move up the score sheet, than to be able to review your races? As an added bonus, I discovered that the software could also produce a series of reports on each race which would detail the sailing data per leg for each boat, VMG, distance sailed, min/max speed and so on.

As a background, our fleet is centered in Toronto on Lake Ontario—Canada’s largest city, serving as the headquarters for many of Canada’s major firms. Over the years, we’ve found a number of companies who like to offer their key customers a fun day on the water and ask us each year to organize a sailing-race day. We provide our boats with a driver and teach their guests how to sail and crew in a number of white sail races. They say it’s a great alternative to the corporate “golf day.” Great fun for their top customers...and it provides revenue for our fleet. Deciding to subscribe to the Kattack service was a fairly easy decision as our fleet enjoys the resources to manage it.

As a group, we decided that each boat would buy their own Kattack Live Tracker and manage its data plan. The other option was to rent the device for one year, which costs a little less and included the data plan. However, we all felt that if the system did what we expected, we would all want to do it again the next year, so buying made more sense. The fleet would be responsible for some extra units (and their data plan) to serve as mark and boat signals, and would pay for the Kattack subscription fee. I agreed to manage the project throughout the year. I placed our order in early 2011 and took delivery in April, just prior to the sailing season start.

As the organizer and promoter of the service, I communicated directly with Tom Verburgt, President of Kattack, who responded promptly to any and all questions I submitted...even the dumb ones (and there were a lot of those). Having gone through the process, I can see where I made a few mistakes. My biggest blunder was not insisting that everyone add funds to their boost account BEFORE their phone accounts expired. Although I handed them out in a spring meeting, most skippers tucked them away in a drawer and didn’t look at them again until our first event in mid-May. By that time, most of the units had no funds in their data account and had the accounts deleted. This meant we had to start from scratch, getting new phone numbers and accounts. Some head scratching later, let’s just say we got everyone “tracking” just in time for our first major regatta. The rule is—don’t let your boost account run out of funds!

My main goal for the season was to use the information captured by the Kattack system to help teams improve their position by recognizing their mistakes evident upon review. This was helped by a meeting I organized after three regattas. I prepared a PowerPoint presentation, and we all got together at a local pub in a reserved room. We had two projectors running—one showing the PowerPoint slides and the other available to review the Kattack race being discussed.

It became evident from review that the winners of the races did the basics right. They got to the

line on time, sailed with a reasonable VMG and maintained clean air. Once ahead, they covered loosely and extended while the boats behind struggled with each other. In other words, Kattack shows you probably what you already know...but you might not quite believe. I polled the fleet and found that most boats think that their point or speed suffers compared with the competition. But a review of the Kattack data didn't support this in most cases. This was an interesting finding. Good starts and tactics won out time after time—and Kattack proves it. Everyone thought the presentation was helpful, they enjoyed the night and came away with ideas to work on for improving their race results.

For 2012, we will continue using the system and will work on helping everyone improve. I see that 3 or 4 boats who were struggling have really managed to pull up their socks and had better results in many races near the end of the season. Some of this improvement must be attributed to the lessons learned from the Kattack software.