

## **FLAG PROTOCOL**

As we are now cruising to the U.S., and the Americans are rightly fussy about how their flag is flown, here are some notes on flag protocol for boats, culled from the Internet.

### **The national flag**

The national flag should be flown from a staff at the stern of the boat or from the backstay. The national flag should be hoisted at 0800 and taken down at sunset, unless it is properly illuminated. Nautical tradition has it that the place of honour for a flag is the gaff rather than the mast top, so if your boat has a gaff, that is the proper place for the national flag.

When flown on the stern the national flag becomes an ensign. Some countries have marine or yachting ensigns, such as the U.K. and the U.S. British yachts fly a red ensign rather than a Union Jack. American yachts may fly a special yacht flag in home waters only.

Flying the nation flag or ensign upside down is an internationally accepted distress signal.

The national flag should fly from the stern only when the boat is occupied.

On sloops or ketches the practice is to fly the flag from the leech of the aftermost sail approx 2/3 the length above the clew, or from the same position on the backstay.

The advent of the modern high aspect ratio rig with the end of the boom well inboard the stern has made it practical to fly the flag from the stern. It should only be displayed when cruising, never when racing.

## **Visiting the U.S. and other countries**

When travelling abroad it is courtesy to fly the flag of each country you visit. However, when visiting the United States, no flag should fly higher than the U.S. national flag. On a sailing yacht this is not a problem as a U.S. courtesy flag can be flown from the cross trees using the flag halyard and the Canadian national flag can be flown from the stern. U.S. protocol has it that the flag should be flown on the starboard flag halyard. Other countries generally follow the same rule, although there are some differences. On a mastless powerboat the courtesy flag would replace any at the bow.

Don't fly a foreign courtesy flag after you return to home waters. Although it shows you've "been there" it is not proper flag etiquette. Never fly two national flags from the same halyard as no nation's flag should be flown above another.

## **The yellow flag**

*Pratique* is permission to enter a port after quarantine. On arrival at a foreign port the Q flag (plain yellow) should be flown. This requests customs and immigration officials to board, or the skipper goes ashore to register the boat and crew. Once *pratique* has been granted the Q flag is lowered and the courtesy national flag is hoisted.

## **Club flags**

The club burgee should be flown from the bow mast (or jack) on powerboats, or the starboard flag halyard (below the national courtesy flag if necessary).

Club officer flags are rectangular and can replace the club burgee, or be flown below it. If two officers are on the same boat, both may fly their flags, with the senior flown above the junior. The Past Commodore flag is flown owest as it is really a personal flag rather than an officer flag.

### **Novelty flags**

Guest, owner absent, meal, cocktail and novelty flags should be flown sparingly from the port hoist.

### **Dressing the boat**

On national holidays, regattas and special occasions boats can dress ship. The ship is dressed at 0800 at anchor only, except in a parade. Typically signal flags are run up from the bow to the stern alternating alpha and numeric flags. Cruising or racing prize flags may also be used.

Let us know if you have any other pertinent information about flag protocol by using the "contact us" link.