

What to Wear on the Newport – Bermuda Race

I became involved in the technical sailing clothing business back in 1975 because at the time there was so little choice, particularly for the competitive dinghy sailor. Thirty years on things have gone to the other extreme, there is literally so much choice, from so many brands that the chances are you will end up confused on what is right for you. The danger is you will leave the decision making for another year and end up cold wet and uncomfortable.

A few key headline points to consider which emphasises the need to have the right clothing

- Being cold and wet makes you tire easily and reduces your reaction time.
- With the right choice you should never have to be cold again.
- Cotton clothing absorbs moisture and up to 25% of its own weight, once it is wet it will stay wet for the duration.
- Wet or damp materials transfers heat 20 times quicker than dry fabrics do.
- Cotton should remain onshore and be replaced by technical quick dry polyester materials

Conditions

The race can begin in cold and windy conditions, and end in the sweltering heat and light airs, and probably most things in between. Night sailing is always a lot colder and depending on the size of boat could be between three and six days. These diverse conditions mean your kit bag will need a wide range of gear.

Layering – a personal climate control system

I believe it is best to look at your options in terms of layers. Hot or cold, the layering system makes enormous sense and it is your personal climate control system.

The Base Layer is vital. One of its main purposes is to keep you dry next to the skin and it does this by wicking moisture away from the body. In an hour of moderate exercise the body gives off half a litre of water – it has to go somewhere - and if you are wearing cotton it literally absorbs the water much like blotting paper. Once wet or even damp, it will transfer heat from your body 20 times faster than dry fabric. Remember that sailing is a sport where you can be sitting still for long periods then along comes a sail change or requirement to put a reef in and all hell breaks loose for a few minutes. You then sit down again. If you are wearing cotton clothing next to the skin it will absorb the moisture and suck the heat out of your body, leaving you feeling cold and clammy and tired.