



Too much information!

The extent to which instructors cover theory subjects on practical courses is a tricky subject. Some students may be particularly interested in studying certain areas in depth, while others will pick up a new concept far better by seeing it in practice on the water. Paul Mara gives a few pointers on how to tackle the subject of tides and tidal streams, without bogging students down with too much detail.

Traditionally, on powerboat courses, a fair amount of time has been devoted to the causes of spring and neap tides, with reference made to the relative positions of the moon and the sun at various times of the lunar cycle. Interesting, but it can take more time to explain than the most important bit – the effect on the water we're about to go boating on.

So, is it really necessary to explain this subject in such detail? Perhaps more importance should be placed on the shape of the moon in the sky – is it full, new or somewhere in between? You could ask your students to have a look that night and report back in the morning. Keep your explanation as simple as:

If it is full or new, it will be around spring tide. The gravitational influence will be greater, so there will be a bigger range between high and low water. With the bigger volume of water comes a faster tidal flow. Likewise, if the moon is half way between, it will be near to neap tides. The moon's effect will be less, with a smaller range and less tidal flow.

Early in the course, introduce a local tide table. Using the information for the day, get your students to work out the times of high and low water, and build up a picture in their minds as to whether the tide is flooding, ebbing or slack. Go outside and get them to note the water level and the time, follow it up with further observations later in the day. It is this practical experience that will stay with your students long after the course when they venture out on their own boats.

When working at Dover, we used to joke that if the tide is out then it must be in, 22 miles across the English Channel in Calais. Initially, students would accept this theory as, from basic observations sitting on a beach, we are used to seeing the tide come in and go out. But what really happens? It certainly comes up the beach, but where is the water coming from? Explain to your students how it actually moves around the coast, so the direction of the flow is across the beach, not up and down. Emphasise the importance of the tide's influence on the boat, where it will take them and how they can use it to best advantage.

The rule of twelfths can be a useful aid to explain the progressive flow rates of the tide, especially the fact that the tide flows faster during the third and fourth hours of the cycle. Showing them the physical effects out on the water will reinforce their theoretical understanding.

With increasing fuel costs, using the tide to your advantage can give a significant financial reward. Link that to the inefficiency of going against the tide and its impact on the environment. Your students will soon understand it's not just about using more power to get there quickly.

Once your students understand the basics of what happens, you can introduce the additional effects of the wind. Obtaining and understanding a forecast is a subject in its own right. Talk about the effect of wind against tide. Look again at whether it

is springs or neaps, whether the tide will be flooding, ebbing or slack and what the wind direction will be. This introduces an important safety lesson: How rough will it be? Will it be safe to go? How will the conditions change? When will the tide turn? Will we get back safely?

We have all experienced the inquisitive student, who wants to know everything about everything and why it all happens. To help with these, a diagram of the astronomical influences, along with notes to support what has been said here, will be included in the revised edition of the course note book, Start Powerboating.

So, rather than a lesson majoring in basic astronomy, let's teach the practical aspects of tides and tidal streams, and their influences on our boating activity.



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Take a look
at page 18
for details
of regional
instructor
conferences.

A great way
to keep
up to date.

2009 Powerboat Trainers Course

The annual Powerboat Trainers course continues to generate interest. With the introduction of the selection process in 2005, we have seen a healthy increase in the number of passes at the end of the course.

Until now, the course has taken place in early March, meaning that many candidates were rusty following a winter ashore. When we introduced the selection, it took place at the end of the season, meaning that anyone who received an action plan found it difficult to achieve the desired improvement with little chance to practice over the winter before the course.

Following feedback from candidates and the training team, we have reviewed the schedule. The selection will now take place at the start of the season, with the course itself running in October or November.

We are happy to receive applications at any time throughout the year, and encourage suitably qualified and experienced instructors to submit their application to their Regional Development Officer for approval.

Further details and an application form can be found at www.ryatraining.org/runningcourses/trainers.