

Cumberland Numbers:

Cumberland Number Handicapping is the method of handicapping used when the Cumberland Fleet – as disparate as it is distinguished – gathers together and wishes to race. Each yacht is allocated a Cumberland Number, usually by the Club's Chief Sailing Officer who normally operates the system, and this is used to assess its performance in the race relative to the others. Cumberland Numbering and the Cumberland Handicapping is unashamedly and with gratitude and due acknowledgement based on the Portsmouth Handicapping system originally devised by that great contributor to the enjoyment of our pastime Sinbad Zilwood Milledge, to whom thanks are eternally due and to whose memory every Cumberland Numbering calculation is respectfully dedicated.

Cumberland Numbers are subjective, ad hoc assessments of a yacht's potential speed. They are derived using any and all known information about the boat, including previous performance in Royal Thames or other races, Island Sailing Club Handicaps (as used in Round the Island Race), out-of-date CHS or IRC numbers, Portsmouth Numbers and a rough-and-ready assessment of main dimensions, hull form, sail plan and sail areas. They are not an objective rating, nor are they intended to be a substitute for a rating. Their process of derivation is empiric. Previous form is considered. They are intended only as an attempt to give some sort of common denominator between disparate yachts that do not normally race.

Cumberland Numbers are expressed as a Time Correction Multiplier, by which the Elapsed Time for the yacht to complete the course is multiplied to obtain the Corrected Time. The yacht with the lowest Corrected Time wins the race.

Typically, Cumberland Numbers range from about 0.865 for a Moody 33 cruiser through 1.000 (Nicholson 476) to 1.5 for a Farr 52 racer. A yacht new to the fleet will be allocated a number that, in the opinion of the Chief Sailing Officer and at his sole discretion, will place it on a par with yachts already in the fleet of similar size or design whose performance is known. Although not a Golden Rule, yachts rarely win a Cumberland Fleet race at their first outing. The Chief Sailing Officer will be pleased to relate a long and rambling anecdote from his days of smack racing on the East Coast as to why this should be so, and why it is entirely fair. Cumberland Numbers are adjusted once the make-up of the fleet is known in an attempt to level the more obvious differences in the boats that will be racing. For the sake of good order and discipline, the Cumberland Numbers to be used for a given race are never divulged until the race has finished.

Although the system may appear apparently ad hoc or indeed random experience over the past decade has consistently shown that Cumberland Fleet races are usually won by the yacht that has best sailed the course paying attention to sail trim and navigation.

Owners with concerns about the fairness or otherwise of their handicap are strongly recommended to relax and enjoy the sailing.

A Note About The Racing.

A oft-told story relates the tale of the salty old sea-dog who – with a nicely developed feel for the use of the subjunctive mood – said to his Owner one day after a long, hard beat *'if I were a genilium, Sir – which I hain't – I wuddint never sail to windward'*. The Cumberland Fleet being – by definition – comprised entirely of Gentlemen, their Ladies and their Friends, great pains are taken when setting the course to avoid anything that might be construed as actual beating, although sailing to windward to some degree cannot always be avoided. Emphasis is placed more on the sailing and navigation skills of the sailors than the weatherliness (or otherwise) of the yacht. Owners of comfortable cruising yachts may therefore enter a Cumberland Fleet race secure in the knowledge that – so far as is possible within the confines of getting back to where we started -- discomfort is avoided where possible.