

**Driver Questionnaire/Tips – Becky Lathrop, Sr. Driver Updated 7/28/21**

**\* Do you look at anything in particular when you're driving through the slalom course, regardless of the skier's skill level? E.g. Do you look further down the course?**

Yes, I actually look toward the end of the slalom course as if a pilot looks at the end of a runway. It helps me better center the boat & gives me the “bigger picture” so I’m not driving buoy to buoy & trying to anticipate what the skier is doing behind me without looking at him/her. Always keeping an eye on the target out front – the middle of the course & down toward the end.

**\* Do you put a marker on your boat to help guide you through the course?**

I typically don’t, but I do use a reference point on the bow/front of different boats (whatever that might be). Other drivers have asked my permission to put a piece of duct tape on the bow of my boat (closed bow), which I might look at occasionally, but again, I try to focus on the end of the slalom course. Looking down to one side will make me drive to that side & also not give me the opportunity to “feel” where the skier is at all times & what they might be doing. Also, if driving in a record tournament, I ask the officials viewing the TV screen for boat path to ensure I am in middle for the very first skier & check from time to time to ensure I am still in the middle. Now we have Sure-Path, new technology for both drivers & TC’s. This is an excellent tool, on providing instant boat path feedback to the driver as it is mounted in the boat (this is a relatively new tool/requirement for tournaments, so more to come on that!).

**\*Do you believe there is a difference between: 1) Driving a straight path through the center of the course and; 2) Driving it straight and in tolerance, however having more of a priority on making it feel good for the skier?**

Absolutely! There are many good drivers out there that can drive a straight path, but sometimes it feels hard to the skier. It is important to both maintain the integrity of the boat path but equally as important to ensure you are “in sync” with the skier & that you are working as a team to provide the best pull possible. Remember, the pylon is the center point of the boat being measured, so sometimes it appears the boat is “moving” when in fact, the center point/pylon is in the middle. I driver should also be open to constructive criticism from the skier, officials, etc. & working on changing things as you receive feedback. Technology also changes with time & staying up to date & changing your style to match the technological advances is key.

**\* Are there any random tips you can give to weekend wallys who are out there driving each through the course?**

Certainly! Pay attention to detail – especially what you do “outside the course” to set the skier up for the best possible run in the course. **SAFETY FIRST!!!** Here are just a few suggestions to do a good job for the skier prior to entering the slalom course (there are many more, so add to this list as you see appropriate):

- Never tug on the rope or make it tight while they are resting and/or sitting in the water at each end of the course. This may send the wrong signal (i.e. - we’re rushed, let’s go, I’m bored, etc.). Just relax & leave the rope a little loose, then tighten up when you’re both ready to go.
- Pull them out of the water based on their request & size (i.e. – slow, fast, easy, etc.). The best way to know is to ask in advance.
- Set up straight for the course as soon as you possibly can. This gives the skier the confidence that you will be able to pull them straight into & through the course AND it will give them a better gate set-up. However, courses without islands may require you to

start at an angle, so you don't send bow rollers down every pass. Important to take stock of the lake & try to determine proper boat path BEFORE you jump in the seat. I would also ask those who ski in places you're not familiar with about the lake design, set up, depth, etc.

- When you drop a skier, always keep them in sight, not just for safety purposes, but to know where you both are at all times. When you drop them, it should be an easy swing out & not a hard whip/swing unless it's absolutely necessary based on the site.
- Finally, always smile – it creates a positive & relaxed atmosphere for everyone!

**\* Who would you prefer to drive short line skiing: A) A big 'muscle-man' skier who pulls super hard on and off line but is consistent or B) a lighter skier who is consistent as well but you can feel his load on the line, for a longer duration from ball to ball.**

I personally like driving for EVERY level skier! This gives me opportunities to learn more, to anticipate every skiing level that's different, to give everyone a good pull, & to experience ALL different types of pulls so I can become a better driver for everyone. However, if you are planning to drive shorter line skiers, then you should practice it before ever jumping in the driver's seat at a tournament. This will give you AND the skier more confidence if they know you've pulled several skiers through shorter lines.

**\* What's the most common Zero Off letter/number you hear?**

Right now, I am seeing more A's & C's in tournaments. However, B's seem to be where folks start to determine what works best for their style. Specifically, I see several A1 & A2's, more than any other letter setting at this time. It may also depend upon the boat engine size, manufacturer, etc. for when skiers make changes. I even see folks use different settings for head winds & tail winds from time to time. But based on continued software changes & updates, skier styles, etc., I believe the ZO settings are a moving target. When skiers are willing & based on what I "feel" them doing in practice, I may suggest a change to see how it feels to the skier. Only for their benefit, but it's helpful sometimes to listen also to what the boat is doing when you make changes (I have a sensitive ear to the engine accelerating/decelerating at different times/places to see if it's affecting the skier positively or negatively).

**\* What are your necessities to have in the boat with you when driving a tournament?**

Again, these are just a few suggestions & can vary based on personal preferences (I'm sure there's more, but again, add to the list as you prefer!):

- Boat weight – typically, this is furnished by the tournament site (usually one 50 pound weight should work). But it is critical to balance the boat for all levels of skiers & speeds. Please keep in mind though, it's more important to balance the wakes for the skiers, than for drivers. Ultimately, the skier is always first when it comes to driving!
- Bottle of water (occasionally, I like my fountain Diet Coke, but trying to cut back!)
- Sunscreen! Or long-sleeve SPF shirt or T-shirt!
- Snack if get caught in boat for a while (only with permission from boat owner to eat in boat)
- Rain-x, if feasible, for windshield application (never apply AFTER windshield is already wet, only beforehand if you have the opportunity)
- Small hand towel for rain to wipe windshield (with or without rain-x)
- Sunglasses, regular glasses (if needed to read/see Zero Off, dashboard instruments, etc.)
- Hat (I have my Aussie hat with a little "bling" to keep sun & rain off my face, not to mention rope/handle shots – it really helps!)

- Rain gear, towel to sit on, etc.
- If you do take your cell phone, please don't answer it when you're trying to focus. Or if there is a break in the action & someone at the tournament is trying to reach you. Sometimes I use it to receive feedback from someone watching boat path....BUT NOT for regular communications! You need to be focused.

**\* Favorite boat of all time to drive?**

I have been a Nautique promo person for over 25 years now & even with recent technological changes with other boat companies, I am still enjoying driving & skiing behind a Nautique. However, I do like driving other boat manufacturers' boats, as it makes me more knowledgeable & allows me to practice with each, sharpening my skills. Drive as many different boats as possible to become more versed in how they all work. This is important for people not only skiing, but considering who their "ski partner" might be, & ease of driving! It is important to know the difference between driving the different boat manufacturers, as the propeller rotation is different between Nautiques vs. Mastercraft & Malibu. Your "steering" & countering will be different for each & one should try to learn the nuances to give a better pull to the skier.

**\* What's your driving Personal Best/Any Records driven?**

I don't really keep track, but I have been blessed to pull many National, International, Regional, Personal Bests, & championship scores. I was fortunate to have pulled a World Record at 36 mph (1 @ 43) the same year I pulled a 34 mph skier through 41 off. Recently, many personal bests & several 39's & 41's for different skiers, both men & women: Men 2 National Record (2@43), Men 8 National Record (2@39) – both in same tournament round, OW Pro Event high score (3@41), Under 21 World Record (1 @ 43). I've also had the great opportunity to drive many pro events & the Big Dawg series, etc. Over the years & even recently, I have been blessed to pull many Open Men & Women skiers, amateurs, in slalom, trick, & jump, which allows me to become a better driver. Like any other sport or activity, practice, practice, practice will make us all better at whatever we do! But remember, it's not about the driver – it's about doing what's right for the skier, abiding by the rules, being fair & consistent for every skier, & allowing them to perform their best!

**Other Misc. Topics:**

- I recommend driving with one hand only/left hand & other hand on throttle, even with ZO. Sometimes driving with two hands, folks tend to "over-steer." Give it a try with just one!
- Always check rope length by looking at pylon – explain to others in boat it's a Team effort (driver, judge, & skier!) & just having second set of eyes to confirm. Especially if there is no color separation between line lengths.
- Never leave driver's seat with engine running.
- PMA (Positive Mental Attitude) & a smile on your face!