



Navigation rules on Swiss lakes

Michel Chevallier



Boats are registered vehicles

- ⚓ There is a Swiss sailing federation, as there is a Swiss tennis federation
- ⚓ It only defines rules related to competitions
- ⚓ Yet, boats, like cars, are vehicles registered with the state
- ⚓ And, as there are laws on the usage and maintenance of cars and the licenses required to drive them, there are laws on the usage, maintenance and licenses needed for boats
- ⚓ Therefore, sailing (or more broadly boating) is not strictly similar to other sports from the point of view of the law *(there is no law on tennis practice for instance)*
- ⚓ https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/1979/337_337_337/fr:
Ordonnance sur la navigation dans les eaux intérieures (ONI)
Available in F/D/It



The registration plate on one of our Melges 15



Before we start

Did you know:

*If you are caught drunk driving, you will not lose your sailing licenses,
but if you are caught drunk sailing, you may well lose your driving licenses*

As for car driving, the alcohol limit is 5 per thousand



A very close border



- ⚓ Switzerland shares 4 lakes with neighboring countries: Bodensee, Lago Maggiore, Lake Lugano and Lake Geneva.
- ⚓ For each one, there is an international agreement relative to navigation that slightly alters the Swiss basic law

Our base is on the GE-VD border and very close to France

Red square = sailing area for dinghy/ynghing/catamaran classes and Thursday practice



The Swiss-French agreement

- ⚓ L'Accord franco-Suisse sur la navigation sur la lac Léman of December 1976 is available at https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/1978/1987_1987_1987/fr
- ⚓ It states that each country is responsible for policing its own part of the lake, according to its own legislation
- ⚓ Boats that do not belong neither to France nor Switzerland must comply with the legislation of the country where they are launched into the lake (think of international regattas for instance when foreign boats join in)
 - ⚓ *Geneva added a layer of regulation: these boats must have a cantonal authorization*
- ⚓ If the skipper is not a resident of Switzerland or France, a license delivered by the country where the boat is registered is mandatory (with exceptions we'll see further down)
- ⚓ In case of doubts, it is always better to ask the Office cantonal des véhicules, as cantons have some leeway in the interpretation of the law and of the rules



French regulations- 1

⚓ France has its own regulations for the Lake Geneva to take into account when navigating on the French side:

⚓ *Règlement particulier de police de la navigation sur le lac Léman*

⚓ *Règlement de police de la navigation intérieure*

⚓ All French texts are available at

<https://www.haute-savoie.gouv.fr/Actions-de-l-Etat/Vos-loisirs/Lacs-et-cours-d-eau/Vos-loisirs-sur-le-lac-Leman-et-ses-rives/Naviguer-sur-le-lac-Leman#rnl>

⚓ When navigating in France, you must have onboard, as hard or digital copy:

⚓ Le Règlement de navigation sur le Léman (RNL)

⚓ Le Règlement général de police de la navigation intérieure (RGP)

⚓ Le Règlement particulier de police de la navigation sur le lac Léman (RPP)

⚓ This is the skipper responsibility. We advise you to download them to your phone

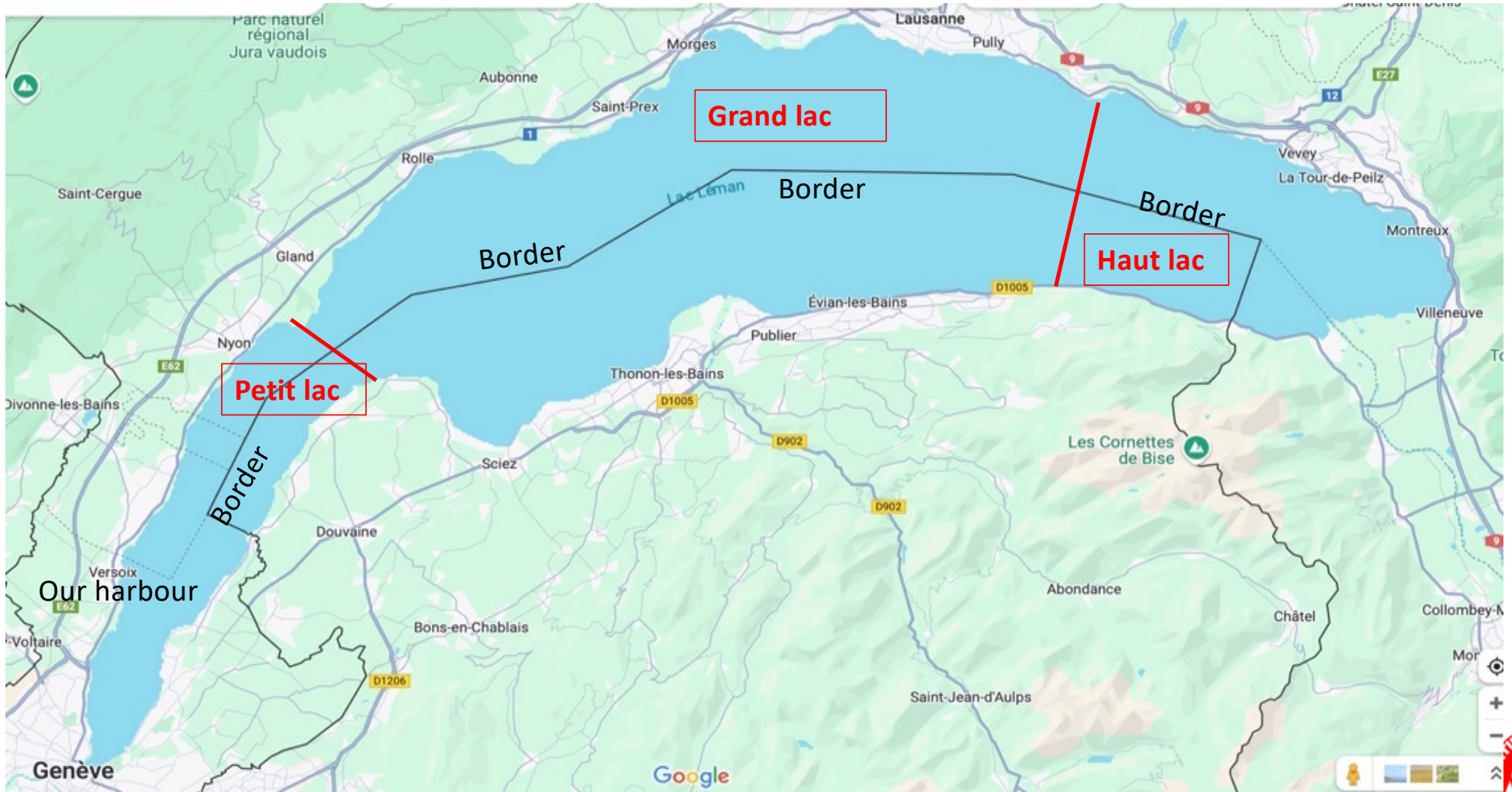


French regulations - 2

- ⚓ Wearing a life jacket (or not) is the responsibility of the skipper (same in Switzerland)
- ⚓ **But in France**, it is mandatory to wear a life jacket
 - ⚓ At night
 - ⚓ When the orange flashing lights are on
- ⚓ It is forbidden to be under sails in a harbor
- ⚓ Sailing is forbidden when a avis de tempête is on (orange light flashing at 90 flashes/minute)



One lake, two nations, three weather forecast areas





June 2026: take the G7 into account!




- ⚓ As you know, a G7 meeting will take place in Evian from June 15 to June 17
- ⚓ This has consequences for us sailors
- ⚓ From June 11 to June 18, all navigation on the French side of the lake will be forbidden
- ⚓ The Evian harbor will be closed
- ⚓ No drone flights are allowed from June 10 to June 18
- ⚓ Fighter planes and probably army speedboats will be ready at any time to catch any offender
- ⚓ Swiss authorities still have to issue their map for sailing restrictions on the Swiss side – if any



Licenses – sailing boats

- ⚓ Switzerland requires an official license in the following cases:
 - ⚓ *for sailboats whose sail area > 15m²
(called permis voile or D license, one must be over 14)*
 - ⚓ *for boats (including sailboats) whose engine > 8HP (6KW)
(called permis moteur or A license, one must be over 18)*
- ⚓ To sail our bigger boats (SU, GS, J70, J80, MissR and Bise V),  residents **must** have:
 - ⚓ SU, J's and Bise V: permis voile (D license)
 - ⚓ GS and MissR: both permis (A and D)
- ⚓ To skipper one of the above-mentioned sailing boats,  residents must own either
 - ⚓ A Swiss license
 - ⚓ A Cruising Club Suisse Sea license with the sailing option
 - ⚓ An international certificate issued on the basis of UNECE resolution Nr 40

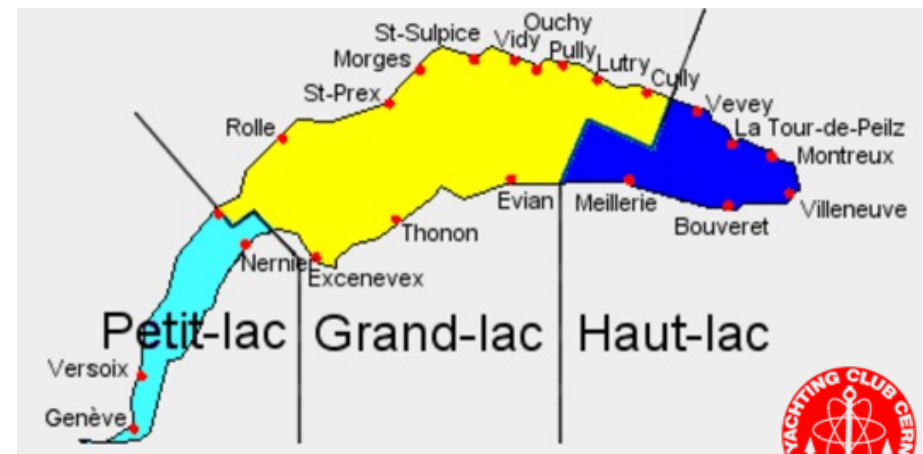
Licenses -motorboats

- ⚓ To sail our “big” motorboats (Q-Boat and Mother II),  residents **must** have a permis moteur (A license)
- ⚓ They do not need it for Baby Duck
- ⚓ To sail our “big” motorboats, as well as GS and MissR,  residents **must** have a motor license. It can be either:
 - ⚓ A Swiss permis A
 - ⚓ A Cruising Club Suisse license with the engine option
 - ⚓ A French permis de plaisance (option côtière, hauturière ou eaux intérieures)
- ⚓ When skippering a boat whose engine > 6 HP (or 4.5 KW, that is GS, MissR, Bise V and all our motorboats),  residents **must** have one of the above licenses



Strong wind and gale warnings

- ⚓ Meteosuisse is running a network of orange lights around the lake to warn of strong winds and gales (*avis de vent fort* and *avis de tempête*)
- ⚓ In the Petit lac, there are lights in Geneva (La Nautique), Versoix, Nyon and Nernier
- ⚓ The lights operate at **40** flashes per minute when the wind is forecast to blow between 25 and 33 knots (6 to 7 Bft) (strong wind warning)
- ⚓ The lights operate at **90** flashes per minute when the wind is forecast to blow above 33 knots (8 Bft) (gale warning)
- ⚓ The flashes operate for two hours after the start of the warning. If you don't see them anymore, it does not necessarily mean the warning is over
- ⚓ In France, no boat may leave a harbour when a gale warning is on



Strong wind and gale: what club rules say

- ⚓ Regarding weather conditions, the club rules state that:
 - ⚓ Boats should only be used in conditions that meet the experience of the crew and the skipper
 - ⚓ The skipper is responsible for his/her decisions
 - ⚓ Yingling, dinghies and catamarans may not leave the harbour with more than 5 Bft (21 knts) of wind, unless authorized by the Committee
 - ⚓ Surprises, Js, GibSea, MissR and Bise V may not leave the harbour with more than 6bft (27 knts) of wind, unless authorized by the Committee
- ⚓ On Thursdays, the Q-boat driver may cancel the event if he/she considers the wind too strong. All boats must abide, as it is a club event – as opposed to a private outing
- ⚓ If you are on the lake when a warning is activated, aim to Versoix if possible. Otherwise, especially in case of storm (orage), it may be safer to stay on the open water until it's over rather than try entering a harbour under very strong wind



Priority rules

⚓ The priority order is (boats on top have priority over boats below):

1 Passenger boats (Bateaux en service régulier) - they display a green balloon

2 Professional fishermen - they display a yellow balloon

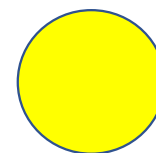
3 Sailing boats (we the YCC)



4 Rowing boats

5 Motorboats

6 Windsurfs, kitesurfs and paddles



⚓ As a common-sense rule, always keep away of

⚓ CGN boats (legally, you must not approach them at less than 50 m)

⚓ Fishermen, whether professional (yellow balloon) or recreational (no sign), and nets

⚓ Regattas

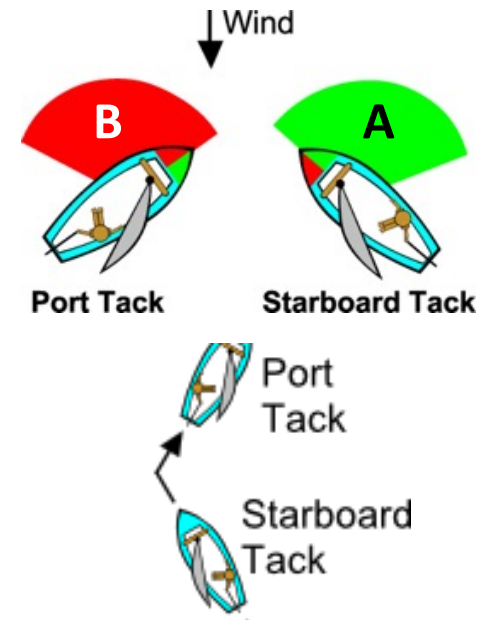
⚓ **Never pass too close** to another boat

⚓ This is an important mix of legal, safety and common-sense rules



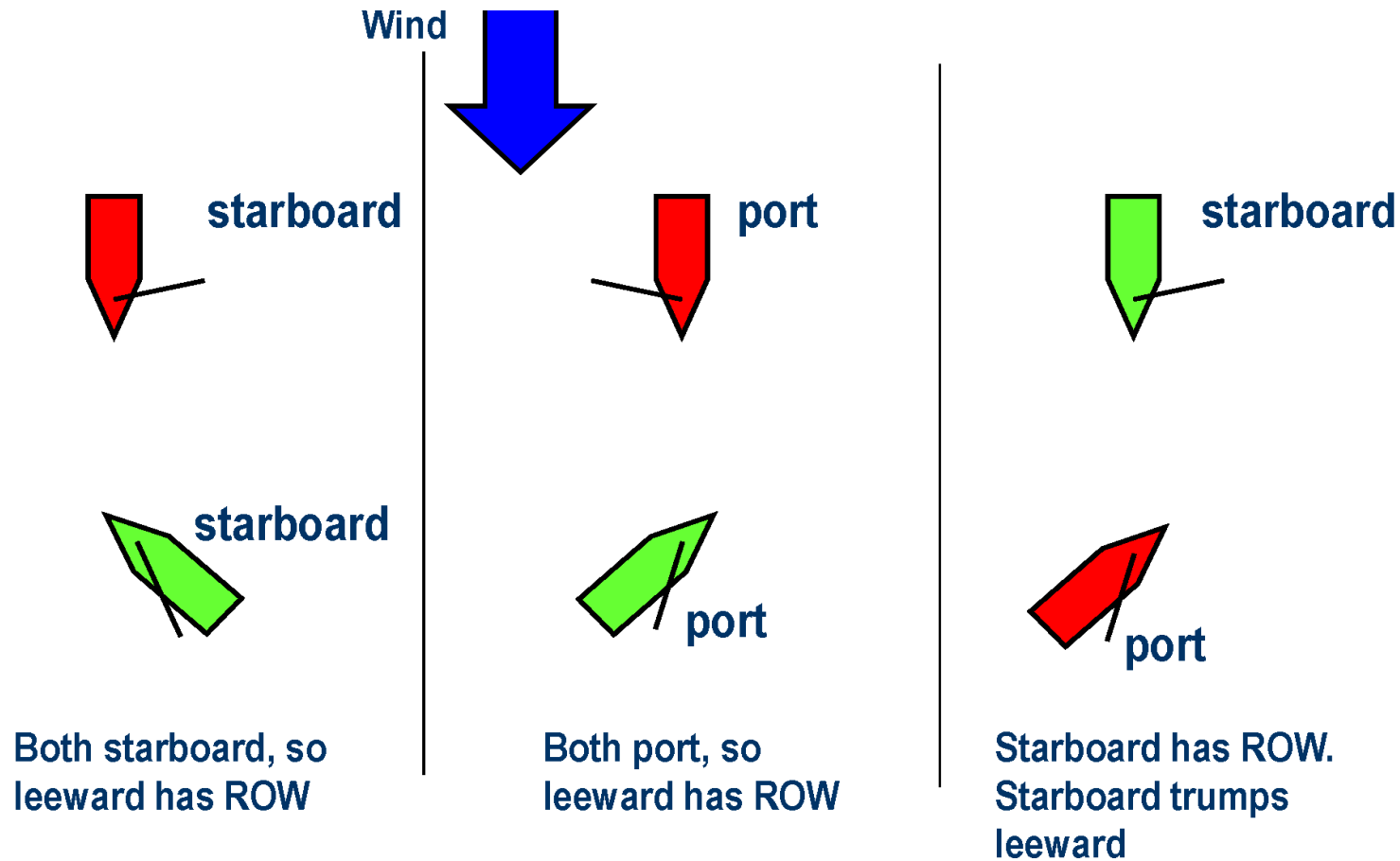
Priority rules between sailing boats

- ⚓ Right-of-way between sailing boats is decided on the basis of the wind direction
 - ⚓ **Port tack: wind from port – the color red is associated with port (French : babord)**
 - ⚓ **Starboard tack: wind from starboard – the color green is associated with starboard (French: tribord)**
- ⚓ When these boats meet, the boat receiving wind by starboard (**A**) has priority over **B**. B must tack or bear away to let A pass



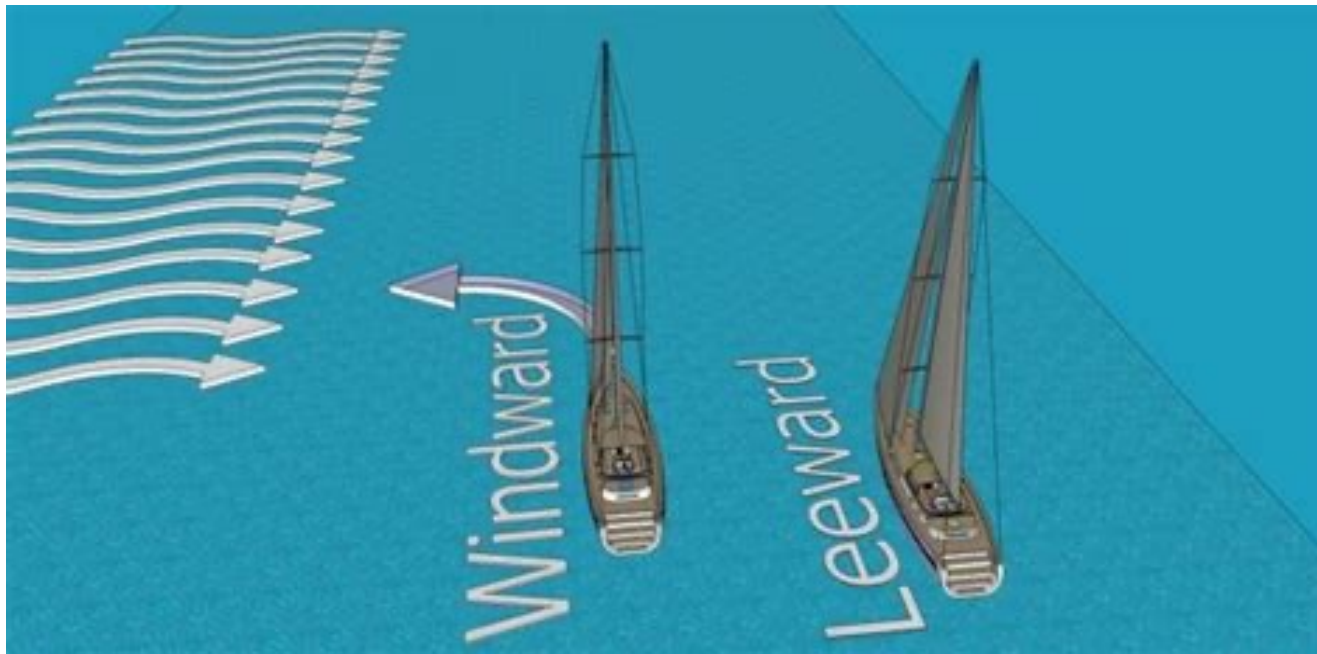
Two different depictions of starboard tack vs port tack

Priority rules between sailing boats - examples



Priority rules between sailing boats

- ⚓ What happens when 2 boats sail in the same direction?
- ⚓ The one leeward (furthest from the wind) has priority



- ⚓ Rationale: the windward boat has more space to maneuver and can do so without endangering the other boat

Priority rules between sailing boats - examples



Who has priority: the white or the red spinnaker?

Priority rules between sailing boats - examples



Who has priority: Nr 11 (A) or Nr 12 (B)?

Priority rules between sailing boats - examples



Who has priority: the blue or the white hull?

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Priority rules between sailing boats - examples



Who has priority: the boat on close haul course, or the boat on downwind course ?

Other priority situations

- ⚓ Harbour entrance:
 - ⚓ In Switzerland and on the Geneva lake, boats leaving a harbour have priority over those entering
 - ⚓ This exception from the general rule (at sea, boats entering a harbour have priority over the boats leaving) is written into the Swiss-French agreement on Lake Geneva and is thus valid also on the French side of the lake
 - ⚓ Under engine, the boat that sees another motorboat on her starboard must yield (*Remember motorboats must yield before all other boats, bar windsurf and kites*)
 - ⚓ The right of way under engine is similar to the right of way on the road: the vehicle coming from the right has priority
 - ⚓ It applies while on the lake, in the harbour or entering the harbour
 - ⚓ It also applies between sailing boats rowing in the harbour (typically dinghies or ynglings)
- ⚓ An overtaking boat must keep clear of the boat being overtaken



Other priority situations - examples



- ⚓ Passenger boats (bateaux en service régulier) have also priority in harbor situations. Here, the sailing boat must change its course to let the CGN come in

Personal flotation devices

- ⚓ By law, there must be one lifejacket per person in each boat
- ⚓ Lifejackets must have a hydrostatic push of at least 75 Newton, buoyancy aid are admitted for dinghies and catamarans
- ⚓ The club rules state that:
 - ⚓ If you have a non-club member guest onboard and he/she doesn't know swimming, he/she **must** wear a lifejacket
 - ⚓ If you take a child < 14 years onboard, you are responsible for providing a suitable lifejacket and make sure the child wears it
 - ⚓ The club recommends wearing a lifejacket when the wind > 4 bft (11 knts)
- ⚓ It makes sense to wear lifejackets with water temperature under 18°C (typically, until the end of May) and at night
- ⚓ The skipper may at any time order all persons on board to wear a life jacket



Lifejacket



Buoyancy aid



Skipper role and duties according to the law

- ⚓ The law mandates that people onboard a boat must abide by the skippers' decisions and orders
- ⚓ It may sound obvious but it is paramount to sailing safely
- ⚓ Plus:
 - ⚓ The skipper must do everything he/she can to prevent collisions
 - ⚓ The skipper must provide assistance when there is an accident close to his position
 - ⚓ His/her manoeuvres must be unambiguous and must not create danger for others
 - ⚓ Whatever you think of your skipper's decision, implement it first, and then discuss it - not the reverse order
- ⚓ The skipper is responsible for the safety of all on-board and for the respect of the lake rules
- ⚓ The skipper is fully in his/her own right if he/she grounds a crew member who ignores his/her orders



The log book

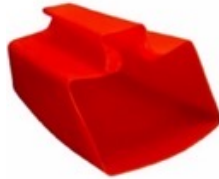
- ⚓ The log book can be requested by the authorities in case of an accident
- ⚓ Alternatively, it can be a tool in support of our good faith in such a situation
- ⚓ Therefore, it is extremely important to fill it correctly
- ⚓ Indications such as “very nice outing” provide zero value information
- ⚓ The skipper **MUST** register
 - ⚓ His/her first and last name
 - ⚓ All crew first and last names (no “Michel with friends” whose info value is again zero)
 - ⚓ Weather, wind strength and origin (3bft NE, strengthening to 4 around 5 pm. Showers towards the end of the outing)
 - ⚓ Where he/she went (sailed around Versoix, went to Geneva, went to Yvoire for supper...)
 - ⚓ Any other issue (lost a fender, found boat unlocked, repaired the cover)
- ⚓ After that, you may say whether you enjoyed it (or not). **But only after that!**



Mandatory equipment

⚓ Sailing boats with less than 15 m² sail area must carry by law
(remember: this is the sail area above which a license is compulsory)

⚓ A bailer or a bucket



⚓ A hook



⚓ A paddle



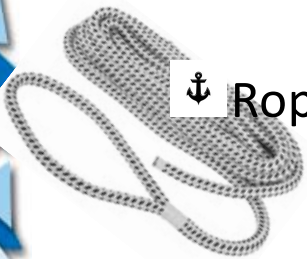
⚓ Red flag (distress flag)



⚓ Whistle or horn

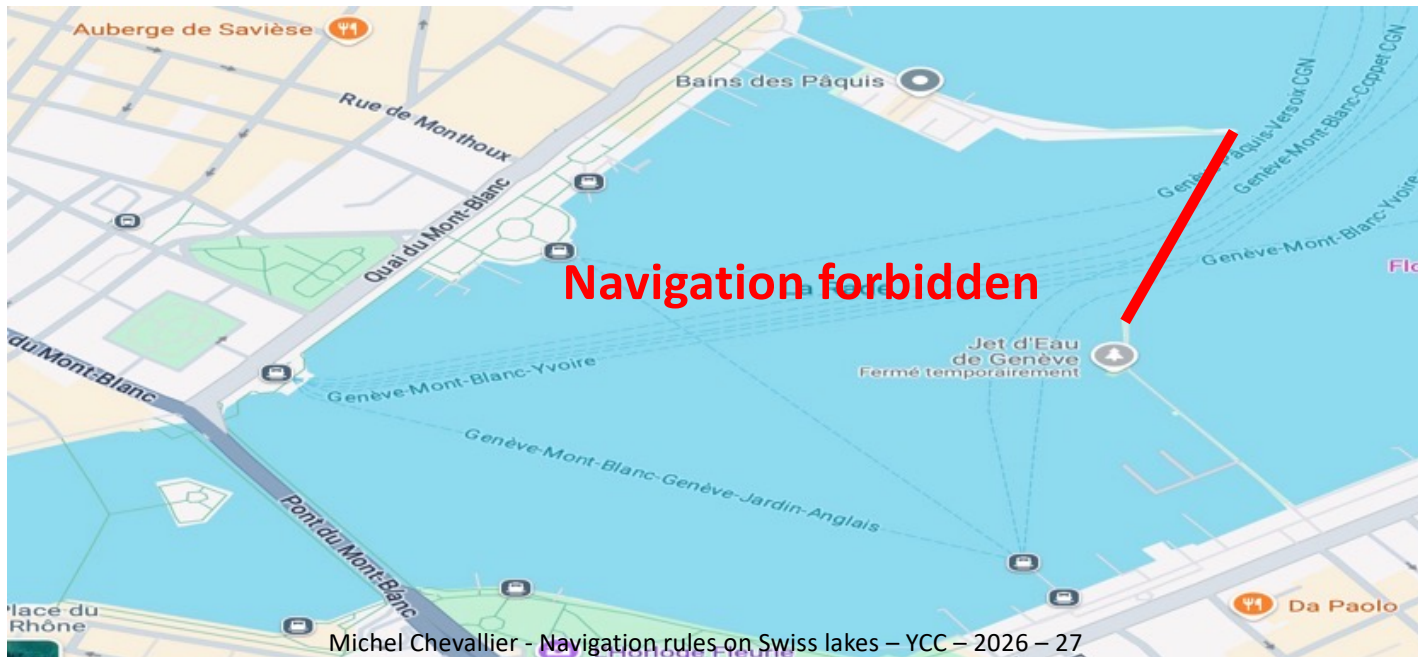


⚓ Ropes (useful for towing)



And also

- ⚓ By law, small boats (< 2,5m in length) and paddle must stay within 150m of the shore
- ⚓ It is forbidden to swim at less than 100m of the harbour entrances
- ⚓ Motorboat should not go faster than 10kph in the first 300m from the shore
- ⚓ Boats and trailer are inspected every 3 years by state inspectors
- ⚓ Sailing boats without engine (the ynglings) are not allowed downstream of this line:



Questions?

