

Getting Into Sailboat Racing in Marblehead: Constraints, Workarounds, and Why Rhodes 19 Fleet 5 Works

Marblehead is an incredible place to race sailboats. So much so that getting involved can feel harder than it should. The main barriers are straightforward: limited moorings in Marblehead Harbor, tight dry sail and storage capacity, and the real time and logistics of getting a boat launched, crewed, and to the course. The good news is that there are workable paths, and Fleet 5 is one of the best ways to turn those paths into actual start line participation.

Access To Boat Storage & Waters

Dry Sailing in Marblehead

For many racers, dry sailing in Marblehead is a solid option, especially with a smaller keelboat. Dry sailing keeps the hull free of marine growth, can simplify upkeep, and minimizes wear and tear. There is ongoing debate, and mixed results, on whether dry sailed boats are truly faster than painted boats. The fleet has seen it go both ways.

The primary dry sail options are the three main private yacht clubs, Boston, Eastern, and Corinthian, which offer dry sail storage and crane launching. Each comes with its own constraints, and those constraints vary by club. Typical considerations include membership application processes, initiation fees, crane use licensing, and dry sail waitlists.

Another dry sailing route is through public yards. As of the 2026 pre season, there are a few viable options. Marblehead Trading Company has confirmed there is space available for Fleet 5 boats through their existing operations. Up to four boats could immediately be added to their current dry sailing group out of Cliff Street. And if there is a larger volume of interest, there may be a way to use Parker's Boatyard as part of a broader solution.

Marblehead Moorings

There are real constraints to obtaining a mooring in Marblehead Harbor, but also some creative opportunities. The waitlist in the Main Harbor is, in practical terms, a long term project and is often cited as 20 plus years. However, the mooring application is not just one list. When you apply, you are asked to select from Main Harbor, Naugus, Peaches Point, or West Shore, and each area has its own reality.

West Shore is particularly interesting because it is actually in Salem Harbor. As of 2026, the waitlist there is roughly two to three years. And if you already own a boat, it is common to

secure a temporary mooring for the season while waiting for something permanent. In effect, for some sailors, that can make the waitlist problem far less of a problem than it sounds.

Naugus and Peaches Point are also worth attention. Peaches Point, depicted by the red circle in the Harbor Master image referenced in this writeup, has no waitlist as of 2026. The catch is significant. There is currently no launch service that accesses that area from a public dock or a private yacht club. That is a real constraint, but it is also a constraint that feels solvable with creativity and coordination, especially if there is demand. Peaches Point is close to both racecourse waters and local clubs, and the fact that the Town Class moors boats in 'H Section' and makes it work suggests this could be worth deeper exploration.

Alternatives: Ways People Are Making It Work

There are several paths beyond dry sailing or holding a Marblehead Harbor mooring.

Borrowed or chartered boats can absolutely work and can produce results. Adam Roberts joined Marblehead's Fleet 5 and quickly found success. He won Marblehead Race Week in 2024 and the National Championship in 2025. He did it in two different boats, neither of which he owned. That is a strong reminder that borrowed and chartered boats are not a second tier solution. Whether it is for a marquee event like Race Week, a full season, or a single race day, these options can get you sailing quickly and can make access nearly hassle free.

Crewing or driving for an existing Fleet 5 boat is another strong on ramp. Many boats get loaned out on occasion, and Fleet 5 has several sailors who actively enable that culture. Stefan Thibodeaux owns a Rhodes 19 and sails out of Winthrop. Yet as an active Fleet 5 member, you will often find Stefan sailing on someone else's boat in Marblehead, and you can also find his boat on the water with somebody else sailing it. He has chartered his boat for entire seasons, marquee events, and out of towners.

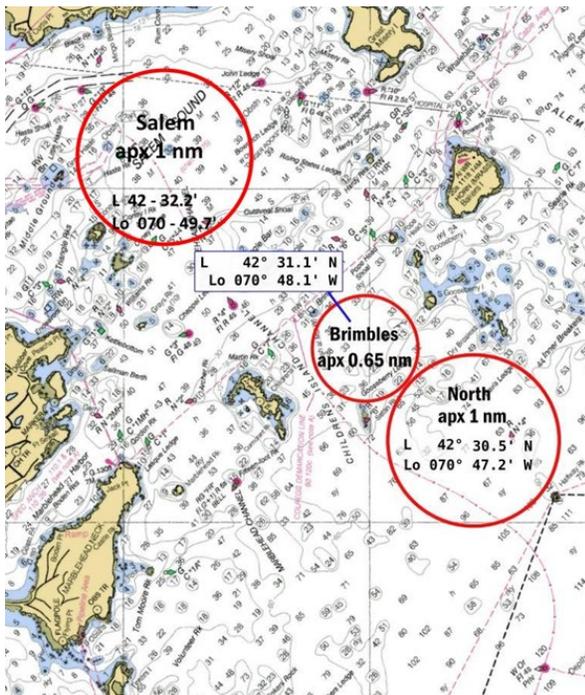
What is the going rate? It varies. A reasonable expectation might be around \$120 per day or \$500 for an event like Nationals, but the real story is that creativity exists. Arrangements have included buying sails and using the boat for the season at no cost, rates that vary depending on results, for example you win in my boat and you pay nothing, and sometimes no cost at all. Stefan's mindset, shared by many in Fleet 5, is simple. He would rather see you on the line than not.



Salem Harbor is more viable than many people assume. There are public launches that will take you to your mooring from both Marblehead and Salem dock locations. And if anyone doubts whether the commuter approach can work, Rich and Rosie Denton are proof that it can. They keep their Rhodes 19 on a Salem mooring and race actively. They could streamline their routine, but they choose to make a day of it.

Their Saturday routine looks something like this. Show up around 9:30am, kayak out to the boat, do a 15 minute bottom clean since they do not have bottom paint, and sail out to the racecourse. Sometimes, when conditions are right, they take the long way home and enjoy a sail around some of the islands in Salem Sound. It sounds like a long day until you compare it to the unexpected line at a yacht club hoist or the hour-long wait for the tide to cooperate. We've all done our share of nine-to-fives. At least Rich and Rosie's comes with salt air and a better expectation.

And if Salem can work as a commuter base, it is worth thinking bigger. Beverly and Manchester also sit on the same surrounding waters. The typical Marblehead course can be a reach for



those locations, but there was a day during the 2025 Rhodes 19 National Championship when the course was moved from outside Salem Sound to inside Salem Sound due to sea state. Based on the Sailing Instructions chart referenced in this writeup, the 'Salem' course vicinity to Salem, Beverly, Manchester, and Marblehead raises a fair question. Should an organizing authority consider that option on occasion to make surrounding ports more viable?

Why Rhodes 19 Fleet 5 Works So Well

The constraints described here are not meant to be comprehensive, and they are not unique to Rhodes 19. Marblehead racing has universal friction points: crew coordination, schedule conflicts, and the reality that weekends fill up fast, no matter what class you sail.

That said, the Rhodes 19 hits a unique sweet spot in Marblehead: two person crew, true one design racing, and a cost to competition ratio that is hard to beat. Historically, Fleet 5 has been one of the most active fleets in the harbor, with 25 plus boats consistently registered, and at its best, numbers that translate into a genuinely packed start line. And because the Rhodes class has strong marquee events like East Coast Championships, Race Week, and Nationals, you can find yourself regularly racing with 40 boats or more on a starting line.

It is also one of the most accessible ways to get into serious racing. A competitive, race ready Rhodes can often be found for under \$10k, which opens the door for sailors who want high quality competition without a major campaign budget.

And one of the biggest differentiators is simply how the boat feels on the racecourse. With only two people aboard, there is never a dull moment. Compared to some Marblehead boats where five sailors spend much of the race hiking (or just sitting) on the rail, the Rhodes has the same core workload, lines to manage, sails to handle, maneuvers to execute, with just two people doing it all. The result is a boat that stays engaging from start to finish for both skipper and crew.

We are also seeing that appeal draw people back. Jim Raisides and Charlie Pendleton sailed Fleet 5 for years, spent time in the J70 class, and in 2026 they are coming back to Rhodes 19 racing. It's likely these very factors that are bringing people like Jim and Charlie back.

If you have ever wanted to race in Marblehead but assumed the access hurdles made it unrealistic, consider this your nudge: there are paths, and Fleet 5 can help you find one. Whether you want to crew first, borrow or charter a boat, or buy in and solve storage with a plan, the best time to raise your hand is before the first gun. Reach out to Fleet 5 and we will help you get on the line.