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DATA-SNOOPING, TECHNICAL TRADING RULE PERFORMANCE, AND THE BOOTSTRAP

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies in the finance literature have investigated technical analysis to determine its validity as an investment tool. Several of these studies conclude that technical analysis does have merit, however, it is noted that the effects of data-snooping are not fully accounted for. In this paper we utilize White's Reality Check bootstrap methodology (White (1997)) to evaluate simple technical trading rules while quantifying the data-snooping bias and fully adjusting for its effect in the context of the full universe from which the trading rules were drawn. Hence, for the first time, the paper presents a means of calculating a comprehensive test of performance across all trading rules. In particular, we consider the study of Brock, Lakonishok, and LeBaron (1992), expand their universe of 26 trading rules, apply the rules to 100 years of daily data on the Dow Jones Industrial Average, and determine the effects of data-snooping. During the sample period inspected by Brock, Lakonishok and LeBaron, we find that the best technical trading rule is capable of generating superior performance even after accounting for data-snooping. However, we also find that the best technical trading rule does not provide superior performance when used to trade in the subsequent 10-year post-sample period. We also perform a similar analysis, applying technical trading rules to the Standard and Poor's 500 futures contract. Here, too, we find no evidence that the best technical rule outperforms, once account is taken of data-snooping effects.

Technical trading rules have been used in financial markets for over a century. Numerous studies have been performed to determine whether such rules can be employed to provide superior investing performance.[1] By and large, the recent academic literature suggests that technical trading rules are capable of producing valuable economic signals. In perhaps the most comprehensive recent study of technical trading rules using 90 years of daily stock prices, Brock, Lakonishok, and LeBaron (1992) (BLL, hereafter) found that 26 technical trading rules applied to the Dow Jones Industrial Average significantly outperformed a benchmark of holding cash. Their findings are especially strong since every single one of the trading rules they considered was capable of beating the benchmark. When taken at face value, these results indicate either that the stock market is not efficient even in the weak form – a conclusion which, if found to be robust, would go against most researchers' prior beliefs – or that risk-premia display considerable variation even over very short periods of time (*i.e.*, at the daily interval).

An important issue generally encountered, but rarely directly addressed when evaluating technical trading rules, is data-snooping. Data-snooping occurs when a given set of data is used more than once for purposes of inference or model selection. When such data reuse occurs, there is always the possibility that any satisfactory results obtained may simply be due to chance rather than to any merit inherent in the method yielding the results. With respect to their choice of technical trading rules, BLL state that "… numerous moving average rules can be designed, and some, without a doubt, will work. However, the dangers of data snooping are immense."[2] Thus, BLL rightfully acknowledge the effects of data-snooping. They go on to evaluate their results by fitting several models to the raw data and resampling the residuals to create numerous bootstrap samples. The goal of this effort is to determine the statistical significance of their findings. However, as acknowledged by BLL, they were not able "to compute a

[1] See, for example, Brock, Lakonishok and LeBaron (1992), Fama and Blume (1966), Kaufman (1987), Levich and Thomas (1993), Neftci (1991), Osler and Chang (1995), Sweeney (1988), Taylor (1992), and Taylor (1994).

[2] Brock, Lakonishok, and LeBaron (1992), page 1736.

comprehensive test across all rules. Such a test would have to take into account the dependencies between results for different rules."[3] This task has thus far eluded researchers.

A main purpose of our paper is to extend and enrich the earlier research on technical trading rules by applying a novel procedure that permits computation of precisely such a test. Although the bootstrap approach (introduced by Efron (1979)) is not new to the evaluation of technical analysis, White's Reality Check bootstrap methodology (introduced by White (1997)) adopted in this paper permits us to correct for the effects of data-snooping in a manner not previously possible. Thus we are able to evaluate the performance of technical trading rules in a way that permits us to ascertain whether superior performance is a result of superior economic content, or simply due to luck.

Data-snooping need not be the consequence of a particular researcher's efforts.[4] It can result from a subtle survivorship bias operating on the entire universe of technical trading rules that have been considered historically. Suppose that, over time, investors have experimented with technical trading rules drawn from a very wide universe – in principle, thousands of parameterizations of a variety of types of rules. As time progresses, the rules that happened to perform well historically receive more attention and are considered 'serious contenders' by the investment community, while unsuccessful trading rules are more likely to be forgotten.[5] After a long sample period, only a small set of trading rules may be left for consideration, and these rules' historical track record will be cited as evidence of their merits. If enough trading rules are considered over time, some rules are bound by pure luck, even in a very large sample, to produce superior performance even if they do not genuinely possess predictive power over asset returns. Of course, inference based solely on the subset of surviving trading rules may be misleading in this context

[3] Brock, Lakonishok, and LeBaron (1992), page 1743.

[4] Indeed, BLL report that they did not consider a larger set of trading rules than the 26 rules they report results for.

[5] See also Lo and MacKinlay (1990) for a similar point.

since it does not account for the full set of initial trading rules, most of which are likely to have under-performed.

The effects of such data-snooping, operating over time and across many investors and researchers, can only be quantified provided that one considers the performance of the best trading rule in the context of the full universe of trading rules from which the best rule conceivably was chosen. A further purpose of our study is to address this issue by constructing a universe of nearly 8,000 parameterizations of trading rules which are applied to the Dow Jones Industrial Average over a 100-year period from 1897 to 1996. We use the same data set as BLL to investigate the potential effects of data-snooping in their experiment.[6] Our results show that, during the sample originally investigated by BLL, 1897–1986, certain trading rules did indeed outperform the benchmark, even after adjustment is made for data-snooping. We base our evaluation both on mean returns and on a version of the Sharpe ratio which adjusts for total risk.

Since BLL's study finished in 1986, we benefit from having access to another 10 years of data on the Dow Jones portfolio. We use this data to test whether their results hold out-of-sample. Interestingly, we find that this is not the case: the probability that the best-performing trading rule did not outperform the benchmark during this period is nearly 12 percent, suggesting that, at conventional levels of significance, there is scant evidence that technical trading rules were of any economic value during the period 1987–1996.

To determine whether transaction costs or short-sale constraints could have accounted for the apparent historical success of the trading rules studied by BLL, we also conduct our bootstrap simulation experiment using price data on the Standard and Poor's 500 (S&P 500) index futures. Transaction costs are easy to control in trading the futures contract and it also would not have been a problem to take a short position in this contract. Over the 13-year period since the futures contract started trading in 1984, we find no evidence that the trading rules outperformed.

[6] We thank Blake LeBaron for providing us with the data set used in the BLL study.

While the current paper adopts a bootstrap methodology to evaluate the performance of technical trading rules, the methodology applied in this paper also has a wide range of other applications. This is important, because the dangers from data-snooping emerge in many areas of finance and economics, such as in the predictability of stock returns (as addressed by, for example, Foster, Smith, and Whaley (1997)), modeling of exchange and interest rates, identification of factors and “anomalies” in cross-sectional tests of asset pricing models (Lo and MacKinlay (1990)), and other exercises where theory does not suggest the exact identity and functional form of the model to be tested. Thus, the chosen model is likely to be data-dependent and a genuinely meaningful out-of-sample experiment is difficult to carry out.

The plan of the paper is as follows. Section I introduces the bootstrap data-snooping methodology, section II reviews the existing evidence on technical trading rules, and section III introduces the universe of trading rules that we consider in the empirical analysis. Section IV presents our bootstrap results for the data set studied by BLL, while section V conducts the out-of-sample experiment. Finally, section VI discusses in more detail the economic interpretation of our findings.

I. The Bootstrap Snooper

Data-snooping biases are widely recognized to be a very significant problem in financial studies. They have been quantified by Lo and MacKinlay (1990)[7], described in mainstream books on investing (O’Shaughnessy (1997), page 24) and forecasting (Diebold (1998), page 87), and have recently been addressed in the popular press (*Business Week*, Coy (1997)): “For example, [David Leinweber, managing director of First Quadrant Corporation in Pasadena, California] sifted through a United Nations CD-ROM and discovered that historically, the single best prediction of the Standard & Poor’s 500 stock index was butter production in Bangladesh.” Our purpose in this study is to

[7] Lo and MacKinlay (1990) quantify the data-snooping bias in tests of asset pricing models where the firm characteristic used to sort stocks into portfolios is correlated with the estimation error of the performance measure.

determine whether technical trading rules have genuine predictive ability or fall into the category of "butter production in Bangladesh". The apparatus used to accomplish this is the Reality Check bootstrap methodology which we briefly describe.

White (1997) provides a procedure, building on work of Diebold and Mariano (1995) and West (1996), to test whether a given model has predictive superiority over a benchmark model after accounting for the effects of data-snooping. The idea is to evaluate the distribution of a suitable performance measure giving consideration to the full set of models that led to the best-performing trading rule. The test procedure is based on the $l \times 1$ performance statistic:

$$\bar{f} = P^{-1} \sum_{t=R}^{T} f_{t+1}(\hat{\beta}_t), \tag{1}$$

where l is the number of technical trading rules, P is the number of prediction periods indexed from R through T so that $T = R + P - 1$, $\hat{\beta}_t$ is a vector of estimated parameters, and $f_{t+1}(\hat{\beta}_t) = f(Z_t, \hat{\beta}_t)$. Generally, Z consists of a vector of dependent variables and predictor variables consistent with Diebold and Mariano's (1995) or West's (1996) assumptions. For convenience, we reproduce key results of White (1997) in the Technical Appendix.

In our application there are no estimated parameters. Instead, the various parameterizations of the trading rules (β_k, $k = 1,\ldots,l$) directly generate returns that are then used to measure performance. In our full sample of the Dow Jones Industrial Average, P is set equal to 27,069, representing nearly 100 years of daily predictions. R is set equal to 251, accommodating the technical trading rules which require 250 days of previous data in order to provide a trading signal. For the purpose of assessing technical trading rules, each of which is indexed by a subscript k, we follow the literature in choosing the following form for $f_{k,t+1}$:

$$f_{k,t+1}(\beta) = \ln[1 + y_{t+1} S_k(\chi_t, \beta_k)] - \ln[1 + y_{t+1} S_0(\chi_t, \beta_0)], \quad k = 1, \ldots, l \tag{2}$$

where

$$\chi_t = \{X_{t-i}\}_{i=0}^{R}, \tag{3}$$

X_t is the original price series (the Dow Jones Industrials Average and S&P 500 futures, in our case), $y_{t+1} = (X_{t+1} - X_t) / X_t$, and $S_k(\cdot)$ and $S_0(\cdot)$ are "signal" functions that convert the sequence of price index information χ_t into market positions, for system parameters β_k and β_0.[8] The signal functions have a range of three values: 1 represents a long position, 0 represents a neutral position (*i.e.*, out of the market), and –1 represents a short position. As discussed below, we will utilize an extension of this set-up to evaluate the trading rules with the Sharpe ratio (relative to a zero risk-free rate) in addition to mean returns. The natural null hypothesis to test when assessing whether there exists a superior technical trading rule is that the performance of the best technical trading rule is no better than the performance of the benchmark. In other words,

$$\text{H}_0\text{:} \max_{k=1,\ldots,l} \{E(f_k)\} \leq 0. \tag{4}$$

Rejection of this null hypothesis would lead us to believe that the best technical trading rule achieves performance superior to the benchmark.

White (1997) shows that this null hypothesis can be evaluated by applying the stationary bootstrap of Politis and Romano (1994) to the observed values of $f_{k,t}$. That is, we are resampling the returns from the trading rules. This yields B bootstrapped values of $\bar{f}_k$, denoted as $\bar{f}^*_{k,i}$, where i indexes the B bootstrap samples. We set B = 500 and then construct the following statistics,

$$\bar{V} = \max_{k=1,\ldots,l} \{\sqrt{P}\,(\bar{f}_k)\} \tag{5}$$

$$\bar{V}_i^* = \max_{k=1,\ldots,l} \{\sqrt{P}\,(\bar{f}^*_{k,i} - \bar{f}_k)\},\ i = 1, \ldots, B. \tag{6}$$

We compare $\bar{V}$ to the quantiles of $\bar{V}_i^*$ to obtain White's Reality Check P-value for the null hypothesis. By employing the maximum value over all the l trading rules, the

[8] Note that the best trading rule, identified as the one with the highest average continuously compounded rate of return, will also be the optimal trading rule for a risk averse investor with logarithmic utility defined over terminal wealth.

Reality Check *P*-value incorporates the effects of data-snooping from the search over the *l* rules.

This approach may also be modified to evaluate forecasts based on the Sharpe ratio which measures the average excess return per unit of total risk. In this case we seek to test the null hypothesis

$$H_0: \max_{k=1,\dots,l} \{ g(E(h_k)) \} \leq g(E(h_0)) \tag{7}$$

where h is a 2×1 vector with components given by

$$h^1_{k,t+1}(\beta) = (y_{t+1} S_k(\chi_t, \beta_k)) \tag{8}$$

$$h^2_{k,t+1}(\beta) = (y_{t+1} S_k(\chi_t, \beta_k))^2 \tag{9}$$

and where the form of $g(\cdot)$ is given by

$$g(E(h^1_{t+1}), E(h^2_{t+1})) = \frac{E(h^1_{t+1})}{\sqrt{E(h^2_{t+1}) - \left(E(h^1_{t+1})\right)^2}}. \tag{10}$$

The expectations are evaluated with arithmetic averages. Relevant sample statistics are

$$\bar{f}_k = g(\bar{h}_k) - g(\bar{h}_0), \tag{11}$$

where $\bar{h}_0$ and $\bar{h}_k$ are averages computed over the prediction sample for the benchmark model and the k^{th} trading rule, respectively. That is,

$$\bar{h}_k = P^{-1} \sum_{t=R}^{T} h_{k,t+1}(\beta), \; k = 0,\dots,l. \tag{12}$$

Once again, the Politis and Romano (1994) bootstrap procedure is applied to yield *B* bootstrapped values of $\bar{f}_k$, denoted as $\bar{f}^*_{k,i}$, where

$$\bar{f}^*_{k,i} = g(\bar{h}^*_{k,i}) - g(\bar{h}^*_{0,i}), \; i=1,\dots, B \tag{13}$$

$$\bar{h}^*_{k,i} = P^{-1} \sum_{t=R}^{T} h^*_{k,t+1}(\beta), \; i=1,\dots, B. \tag{14}$$

The above procedure is now repeated to obtain White's Reality Check *P*-value for the Sharpe ratio performance criterion. Note that by using a zero risk-free rate in constructing the Sharpe ratio, we are making it easier to find "good" trading rules.

II. Technical Trading Rule Performance and Data-Snooping Biases

After more than a century of experience with technical trading rules, these rules are still widely used to forecast asset prices. Taylor (1992) conducted a survey of chief foreign exchange dealers based in London and found that in excess of 90 percent of respondents placed *some* weight on technical analysis when predicting future returns. Unsurprisingly, the wide use of technical analysis in the finance industry has resulted in several academic studies to determine its value.

Levich and Thomas (1993) researched simple moving average and filter trading rules in the foreign currency futures market. They applied a bootstrap approach to the raw returns on the futures, rather than fitting a model to the data and resampling the residuals. Their research suggests that some technical rules may be profitable. Evidence in favor of technical analysis is also reported in Osler and Chang (1995) who used bootstrap procedures to examine the head and shoulders charting pattern in foreign exchange markets. However, Levich and Thomas (1993) note the dangers of data-snooping and suggest that "Other filter sizes and moving average lengths along with other technical models could, of course, be analyzed. Data-mining exercises of this sort must be avoided."[9] With the development of White's Reality Check, it is no longer necessary to avoid such data mining exercises, as we can now account for their effects.

Our study uses Brock, Lakonishok, and LeBaron (1992) as a springboard for analysis. Their study utilizes the daily closing price of the Dow Jones Industrial Average from 1897 to 1986 to evaluate 26 technical trading rules. These rules include the simple moving average, fixed moving average, and trading range break. BLL found that these rules provide superior performance. One drawback to their analysis is that they were

[9] Levich and Thomas (1993), page 458.

unable to account for data-snooping biases. In their words, "… the possibility that various spurious patterns were uncovered by technical analysis cannot be dismissed. Although a complete remedy for data-snooping biases does not exist, we mitigate this problem: (1) by reporting results from all our trading strategies, (2) by utilizing a very long data series, the Dow Jones index from 1897 to 1986, and (3) emphasizing the robustness of results across various nonoverlapping subperiods for statistical inference." As explained in the previous section, our method provides just such a data-snooping remedy.

Three conclusions can be drawn from these previous studies. First, there appears to be evidence that technical trading rules are capable of producing superior performance. Second, this evidence is tempered by the widely recognized importance of data-snooping biases when evaluating the empirical results. Third, the preferred way to handle data-snooping appears to be to focus exclusively on the performance of a small subset of trading rules, in order not to fall victim to data-snooping biases. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the introduction, there are reasons to believe that such a strategy may not work in practice. Technical trading rules that historically have been successful are also the ones most likely to catch the attention of researchers, since they are the ones promoted by textbooks and the financial press. Hence, even though individual researchers may act prudently and do not experiment extensively across trading rules, the financial community may effectively have acted as such a "filter", necessitating a consideration in principle of all trading rules that have been considered by investors.

III. Universe of Trading Rules

To conduct our bootstrap data-snooping analysis, we first need to specify an appropriate universe of trading rules from which the current popular rules conceivably may have been drawn. The magnitude of data-snooping effects on the assessment of the performance of the best trading rule is determined by the dependence between all the trading rules' payoffs, so the design of the universe from which the trading rules are drawn is crucial to the experiment. We consider a very large number (7,846) of trading rules drawn from a wide variety of rule specifications. To be considered in our universe, a trading rule must have been in use in a substantial part of the sample period. This requirement is important for the economic interpretation of our results. Only if the trading rules under consideration were known during the sample would the existence of outperforming trading rules seem to have consequences for weak-form market efficiency or variations in *ex-ante* risk-premia.[10] For this reason, we make a point of referring to sources that quote the use of the various trading rules under consideration.

The trading rules employed in this paper are drawn from previous academic studies and the technical analysis literature. Included are filter rules, moving averages, support and resistance, channel break-outs, and on-balance volume averages. We briefly describe each of these types of rules. An appendix provides the parameterizations of the 7,846 trading rules used to create the complete universe. Few of the original sources for the technical trading rules report their preferred choice of parameter values, so we simply choose a wide range of parameterizations to span the sorts of models investors may have considered through time. We realize that our list of trading rules does not completely exhaust the set of rules that were considered historically. However, our list of rules is vastly larger than those compiled in previous studies, and we include the most important types of trading rules that can be parsimoniously parameterized and do not rely on "subjective" judgments. The notation used in the following description corresponds to the appendix of parameterizations.

A. Filter Rules

Filter rules were used in Alexander (1961) to assess the efficiency of stock price movements. Fama and Blume (1966) explain the standard filter rule:

> An *x* per cent filter is defined as follows: If the daily closing price of a particular security moves up at least *x* per cent, buy and hold the security

[10] Suppose that some technical trading rules could be found that unambiguously outperformed the benchmark over the sample period, but that these were based on technology (*e.g.*, neural networks) that only became available after the end of the sample. Since the technique used was not available to investors during the sample period, we do not believe that such evidence would contradict weak-form market efficiency.

> until its price moves down at least *x* per cent from a subsequent high, at which time simultaneously sell and go short. The short position is maintained until the daily closing price rises at least *x* per cent above a subsequent low at which time one covers and buys. Moves less than *x* per cent in either direction are ignored.

The first item of consideration is how to define subsequent lows and highs. We will do this in two ways. As the above excerpt suggests, a subsequent high is the highest closing price achieved while holding a particular long position. Likewise, a subsequent low is the lowest closing price achieved while holding a particular short position. Alternatively, a low (high) can be defined as the most recent closing price that is less (greater) than the *e* previous closing prices. Next, we will expand the universe of filter rules by allowing a neutral position to be imposed. This is accomplished by liquidating a long position when the price decreases *y* percent from the previous high, and covering a short position when the price increases *y* percent from the previous low. Following BLL (1992), we also consider holding a given long or short position for a prespecified number of days, *c*, effectively ignoring all other signals generated during that time.

B. Moving Averages

Moving average cross-over rules, highlighted in BLL, are one of the most popular and common trading rules discussed in the technical analysis literature. The standard moving average rule, which utilizes the price line and the moving average of price, generates signals as explained in Gartley (1935):

> In an uptrend, long commitments are retained as long as the price trend remains above the moving average. Thus, when the price trend reaches a top, and turns downward, the downside penetration of the moving average is regarded as a sell signal… Similarly, in a downtrend, short positions are held as long as the price trend remains below the moving average.

> Thus, when the price trend reaches a bottom, and turns upward, the upside penetration of the moving average is regarded as a buy signal.[11]

There are numerous variations and modifications of this rule. We examine several of these. For example, more than one moving average (MA) can be used to generate trading signals. Buy and sell signals can be generated by cross-overs of a slow moving average by a fast moving average, where a slow MA is calculated over a greater number of days than the fast MA.[12]

There are two types of "filters" we will impose on the moving average rules. The filters are said to assist in filtering out false trading signals (*i.e.*, those signals that would result in losses). The fixed percentage band filter requires that the buy or sell signal exceed the moving average by a fixed multiplicative amount, b. The time delay filter requires that the buy or sell signal remain valid for a pre-specified number of days, d, before action is taken. Note that only one filter will be imposed at a given time. Once again, we consider holding a given long or short position for a pre-specified number of days, c.

C. Support and Resistance

The notion of support and resistance is discussed as early as in Wyckoff (1910) and tested in BLL (1992) under the title of "trading range break". A simple trading rule based on the notion of support and resistance (S&R) is to buy when the closing price exceeds the maximum price over the previous n days, and sell when the closing price is less than the minimum price over the previous n days. Rather than base the rules on the maximum (minimum) over a prespecified range of days, the S&R trading rules can also be based on an alternate definition of local extrema. That is, define a minimum (maximum) to be the most recent closing price that is less (greater) than the e previous closing prices. As with the moving average rules, a fixed percentage band filter, b, and a

[11] Gartley (1935), page 256.

[12] The moving average for a particular day is calculated as the arithmetic average of prices over the previous n days, including the current day. Thus, a fast moving average has a smaller value of n than a slow moving average.

time delay filter, *d*, can be included. Also, positions can be held for a prespecified number of days, *c*.

D. Channel Break-Outs

A channel (sometimes referred to as a trading range) can be said to occur when the high over the previous *n* days is within *x* percent of the low over the previous *n* days, not including the current price. Channels have their origin in the "line" of Dow Theory which was set forth by Charles Dow around the turn of the century.[13] The rules we develop for testing the channel break-out are to buy when the closing price exceeds the channel, and to sell when the price moves below the channel. Long and short positions are held for a fixed number of days, *c*. Additionally, a fixed percentage band, *b*, can be applied to the channel as a filter.

E. On-Balance Volume Averages

Technical analysts often rely on volume of transactions data to assist in their market-timing efforts. Although volume is generally used as a secondary tool, we will include a volume-based indicator trading rule in our universe of rules. The on-balance volume (OBV) indicator, popularized in Granville (1963), is calculated by keeping a running total of the indicator each day and adding the entire amount of daily volume when the closing price increases, and subtracting the daily volume when the closing price decreases. We then apply a moving average of *n* days to the OBV indicator, as suggested in Gartley (1935). The OBV trading rules employed are the same as for the moving average trading rules, except in this case the value of interest is the OBV indicator rather than price.

F. Benchmark

Following BLL, our benchmark trading rule is the "null" system, which is always out of the market. Consequently, S_0 is always zero. Thus, both for the mean return and Sharpe ratio performance measures the benchmark performance is zero. An alternative

[13] Hamilton (1922) and Rhea (1932) explain the Dow line in detail.

interpretation, also emphasized by BLL (page 1741), is to regard a long position in the DJIA as the benchmark and superimpose the trading signals on this market index. According to this second interpretation a buy signal translates into borrowing money at the risk-free interest rate and doubling the investment in the stock index, a "neutral" signal translates into simply holding the stock index, while a sell signal translates into a zero position in the stock index (*i.e.*, out of the market).

IV. Empirical Results

The trading results from the Dow Jones Industrial Average are reported for the 90 years and four sub-periods used by BLL, as well as for the entire 100-year full sample and the 10 years since the BLL study.[14] The S&P 500 Futures results are reported for the entire available sample. The sample periods are:

<u>In-Sample</u>

Sub-Period 1:	January 1897 – December 1914
Sub-Period 2:	January 1915 – December 1938
Sub-Period 3:	January 1939 – June 1962
Sub-Period 4:	July 1962 – December 1986

<u>Out-of-Sample</u>

Sub-Period 5:	January 1987 – December 1996
S&P 500 Futures:	January 1984 – December 1996

For each sample period, Table I reports the historically best-performing trading rule, chosen according to the mean return criterion. Two trading rule universes were used: the BLL universe with 26 rules and our full universe with 7,846 rules. Table II reports results when the best-performing trading rule is chosen according to the Sharpe ratio criterion.

[14] We refer to BLL, Table 1, for a description of the basic statistical properties of the data set.

[Insert Table I]

[Insert Table II]

Table III and Table IV present the performance results of the best technical trading rule in each of the sample periods. These tables report the performance measure (mean return or Sharpe ratio) along with White's Reality Check *P*-value and the nominal *P*-value. The nominal *P*-value is that which results from applying the bootstrap methodology to the best trading rule *only*, thereby ignoring the effects of the data-snooping. Hence, the difference between the two *P*-values will represent the magnitude of the data-snooping bias on the performance measure.

One would expect that the best-performing trading rule in the full universe would be different from the best performer in the much smaller and more restricted BLL universe. But it is interesting to notice the very different types of trading rules that are identified as optimal performers in the full universe. The BLL study identified trading rules based on long moving averages – 50-, 150-, and 200-day averages, respectively – as the best performers, while in the full universe of trading rules, the best-performing trading rules use much shorter windows of data typically based on 2 through 5 day averages. Hence the best trading rules from the full universe are more likely to trade on very short term price movements.

A. Results for the Mean Return Criterion

Turning next to the actual performance of the selected trading rules, first consider the results for the universe of 26 trading rules used by BLL. Both in the full sample and in the first four sub-periods, we find that the apparent superior performance of the best trading rule stands up to a closer inspection for data-snooping effects. This finding is not surprising since BLL found that, in fact, every single one of their trading rules outperformed the benchmark, and hence a consideration of dependencies between trading rules is unlikely to overturn their original finding.

[Insert Table III]

[Insert Table IV]

Over the 100-year period from 1897 to 1996 the best technical trading rule from the BLL universe was a 50-day variable moving average rule with a 0.01 band, yielding an annualized return of 9.4 percent.[15] For comparison, the mean annualized return on the buy-and-hold strategy was 4.3 percent during this same period. In our full universe, the best trading rule chosen by the mean return criterion is a standard 5-day moving average rule. The average annual return resulting from this rule is 17.2 percent. The Reality Check *P*-value is effectively zero (*i.e.*, less than $1/B = 0.002$) strongly indicating that trading with the 5-day moving average is superior to being out of the market. In all four sub-periods we find again that the best trading rule outperforms the benchmark strategy generating data-snooping adjusted *P*-values less than 0.002. Furthermore, the mean return of the best trading rule in the full universe tends to be much higher than the mean return of the best trading rule considered by BLL.

Considering next the full universe of trading rules from which, over time, the BLL rules are more likely to have originated, notice that two possible outcomes can occur when an additional trading rule is inspected. If the marginal trading rule does not lead to an improvement over the previously best performing trading rule, then the *P*-value for the null hypothesis that the best model does not outperform will increase, effectively accounting for the fact that the best trading rule has been selected from a larger set of rules. On the other hand, if the additional trading rule improves on the maximum performance statistic, then this can often reduce the *P*-value since better performance increases the probability that the optimal model genuinely contains valuable economic information.[16]

[15] Annualized mean returns are calculated as the mean daily return over the duration of the sample, multiplied by 252. The mean daily return is simply the total return divided by the number of days in the sample.

[16] Notice, however, that if the improvement is sufficiently small, then it is possible that the data-snooping

Figure 1 provides a fascinating picture of these effects operating sequentially across the full universe of trading rules. For the first sub-period, 1897–1914, the figure plots the number identifying each trading rule against its mean return.[17] We have also drawn a line tracking the highest annualized mean return (measured on the *y*-axis to the left of the figure) up to and including a given number of trading rules (indicated on the *x*-axis), and the Reality Check *P*-value for the maximum mean return performance statistic (measured on the *y*-axis to the right of the figure). The maximum mean return performance starts out around 11 percent and quickly increases to 15 percent, yielding a *P*-value of 0.002 after the first 200 trading rules have been considered. Adding another 300 trading rules does not improve on the best-performing trading rule and, as a result, the likelihood of no superior performance, as measured by the *P*-value, while still very small, doubles between rules 200 and 500. After approximately 550 trading rules have been considered, the best performance is improved to around 17 percent and the *P*-value is again reduced to a level around 0.002. After this, only a very small additional improvement in the performance statistic occurs around trading rule number 2,700. Hence the bootstrap *P*-value increases very slowly after this point. Note that this evolution illustrates how the *P*-values adjust as our particular exercise proceeds. Ultimately, the only numbers that matter are those at the extreme right of the graph, as the order of experiments is arbitrary. Still, this evolution is informative as it suggests how the effects of data-snooping may propagate in the real world.

An even sharper picture of the operation of data-snooping effects emerges from the corresponding graph (Figure 2) for the second sub-period, 1915–1938. For this period, the best performing model is selected early on and remains in effect across the first 500 models. As a result, its *P*-value increases from 0.01 to 0.08 as more models are considered. After this, the addition of a model which improves the mean performance to

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effect of searching for an improved model from a larger universe will dominate the improved performance and hence will lead to a net increase in the *P*-value.

[17] What appear to be vertical clusters of mean return points simply reflect the performance of neighbor trading rules in a similar class as the parameters of the trading rules are varied.

20 percent causes the *P*-value to drop to less than 0.002. Only towards the end of the universe of models does the *P*-value begin to increase again as no more improvements occur.

Our experiment also suggests why the alternative procedure of using a simple Bonferroni bound to assess the significance of the best performing trading rule would give misleading results. Since the performance of the best trading rule drawn from the full universe is not known when considering only a subset of trading rules, the Bonferroni bound on the *P*-value cannot possibly be used to account for data-snooping. A researcher might believe that, say, the BLL trading rules were the result of traders considering an original set of 8,000 rules, in which case the Bonferroni bound on the *P*-value would be obtained as 8,000 times the smallest nominal *P*-value. But this leads to meaningless results: In sub-period 4, the Bonferroni bound simply states that the *P*-value is less than 1, while in fact the bootstrap *P*-value for the best trading rule selected from the full universe is less than 0.002.

A further issue at stake is how a trader could have possibly determined the best technical trading rule prior to committing money to a given rule. Although it may be the case that we are able to find the historically best-performing rule in our universe, there is no indication that it is possible to find *ex-ante* the trading rule that will perform best in the future. To address this issue we consider a new trading strategy whereby on each day of the experiment we first determine the best-performing trading rule to date. That is, we find the rule with the greatest cumulative wealth for each day in the 100-year sample, and then follow the signal of that rule on the following day. At each point in time only historically available information is exploited so this trading rule could have been implemented by an investor.

[Insert Table V]

The results of this experiment are provided in Table V, along with summary statistics for the best-performing technical trading rule chosen with respect to the mean return criterion, the 5-day simple moving average. Table V shows that the recursive cumulative wealth trading rule described above out-performs the benchmark with a 14.9 percent annualized average return, but lags behind the 5-day moving average by over 2 percentage points, reflecting the fact that investors could not have known *ex-ante* the identity of the *ex-post* best- performing trading rule. It is interesting to see that the number of short and long trades is roughly balanced out and that the winning percentage is much higher for the long than for the short trades. Long trades are also associated with average profits that are more than twice as large as those on the short trades.

B. Results for the Sharpe Ratio Criterion

It is clear from Table II that the trading rules selected from the full universe by the Sharpe ratio criterion again tend to be based on a relatively short sample using 2-20 days of price information. Table IV shows that, as in the case of the best model chosen by the mean return criterion, the best model according to the Sharpe ratio criterion generates a *P*-value well below 0.01 in all samples. Also, the performance of the best rule in the full universe increases substantially relative to the best rule considered by BLL. Over the full 100-year sample on the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the Sharpe ratio for the buy-and-hold strategy was 0.26, while the best-performing trading rule in the BLL and full universe produced Sharpe ratios of 0.59 and 1.04, respectively.

For the first two sub-periods, Figure 3 and Figure 4 plot the sequence of Sharpe ratios based on the full set of models in contention alongside the *P*-value for the null that the highest Sharpe ratio equals zero. The most interesting graph appears for the second sub-period (Figure 4). The maximum Sharpe ratio is initially a little above 0.5. As the first 500 models get inspected, the *P*-value increases from 0.01 to above 0.10, only to fall well below 0.01 after a superior trading rule is introduced around model number 550. Towards the end of the universe of trading rules, the *P*-value increases from close to zero to a level around 0.006, thus displaying the effects of data-snooping.

V. Out-of-Sample Results

The data used in the study by BLL finished in 1986. This leaves us with a 10-year post-sample period in which a genuine out-of-sample performance experiment can be conducted. We do so using the Dow Jones portfolio originally studied by BLL, and we also use prices on the S&P 500 futures contract that has traded since 1984 and hence covers a commensurate period. Lo and MacKinlay (1990) recommend just such a 10-year out-of-sample experiment as a way of purging the effects of data-snooping biases from the analysis.

There is a distinct advantage associated with using the futures data set: the experiment on the DJIA data ignores dividends (which are not available on a daily basis for the full 100-year period), while these are not a concern for the futures contract. Furthermore, while the assumption that investors could have taken short positions in the DJIA contract throughout the entire period 1897–1996 may not be realistic, it would have been very easy for an investor to have gone short in the S&P 500 futures contract. Finally, it is possible that while the technical trading rules considered by BLL generated profits before transaction costs, accounting for such costs and data-snooping effects could change their findings.[18] In the full universe and over the 100-year period 1897–1996, the best-performing trading rule for the Dow Jones Industrial Average earned a mean annualized return of 17.17 percent resulting from 6,310 trades (63.1 per year), giving a break-even transaction cost level of 0.27 percent per trade. We do not have historical series on transaction costs, and these would also seem to depend on the size of the trade; so it seems difficult to assess this number. Transaction costs are likely to have been higher than 0.27 percent at the beginning of the sample, but potentially less by the end of the sample. Ultimately, the transaction cost argument is best evaluated using a trading strategy in a futures contract, such as the S&P 500, where transactions costs are quite modest.

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[18] In the conclusion to their paper, BLL call for careful consideration of transaction costs and explicitly recommend using futures data as a way of dealing with this issue.

The S&P 500 futures data were provided by Pinnacle Data Corporation. The prices from the nearest futures contract are employed with a rollover date of the 9th of the delivery month for the contract. That is, any position maintained in the current contract is closed out, and a new position is opened, according to the trading rule, on the 9th of March, June, September, and December. A series of returns is created from each of the contracts which is linked together at the rollover dates. Starting with the price of the S&P 500 futures contract at the beginning of the series, a new price series is generated from the returns.

A quick first way of testing the merits of technical trading rules is by considering the performance of the best trading rule, selected by the end of 1986, in the subsequent 10-year trading period. The 5-day moving average rule selected from the full universe produced a mean return of 2.8 percent with a nominal *P*-value of 0.321 for the period 1987 to 1996, indicating that the best trading rule, as of the end of 1986, did not continue to generate valuable economic signals in the subsequent 10-year period.

Figure 5 presents graphs for the evolution in the maximum performance statistic and the Reality Check *P*-value across the 26 trading rules considered by BLL applied to the out-of-sample period. The third and fourth trading rules improve substantially on the maximum mean return statistic and the addition of these rules leads to decreases in the *P*-value. By the end of the sample, the maximum mean return statistic is around 9 percent per year. The *P*-value starts out around 0.3, decreases to a level below 0.1, but then slowly increases to 0.12. Such increases in the *P*-value, in the absence of improvements over the best performing trading rule, vividly illustrate the importance of jointly considering all the trading rules when drawing conclusions about the performance of the best performing trading rule. The *P*-value for the best performing trading rule, considered in isolation, was 0.04. The evidence that the best trading rule can produce superior performance is even weaker when the Sharpe ratio criterion is used to measure performance. For this criterion, the *P*-value of the best model chosen from the BLL universe terminates at 0.25 when data-snooping is accounted for (see Figure 6) and it is 0.025 when the trading rule is naively considered in isolation.

Consider next the full universe of 7,846 trading rules for the S&P 500 futures data over the period 1984–1996. Figure 7, for models selected by the mean return criterion, demonstrates perhaps more clearly than any other graph the importance of controlling for data-snooping. After the first few trading rules are considered, the *P*-value lies around 0.5, but it gradually increases to around 0.6 as no improvement over the best-performing trading rule occurs until after approximately 400 trading rules. Then the *P*-value drops back below 0.4 only to increase to a level around 0.9 by the point the final trading rule has been evaluated. As is clear from Figure 8, a very similar picture emerges for the Sharpe ratio criterion, where the terminal data-snooping-adjusted *P*-value is 0.94.

Notice the very strong conclusion we can draw from this finding. Even though a particular trading rule was capable of producing superior performance of almost 10 percent per year during this sample period and had a *P*-value of 0.05 when considered in isolation, the fact that this trading rule was drawn from a wide universe of rules means that its effective data-snooping adjusted *P*-value is only 0.9. An even bigger contrast occurs from using the Sharpe ratio criterion: here the snooping-adjusted and unadjusted *P*-values were 0.94 and 0.000 (below 0.002), respectively. Indeed, data-snooping effects are very important in assessing economic performance.

[Insert Table VI]

As a final exercise, we computed the out-of-sample performance of the recursive decision rule described in section IV. This rule follows the trading signal generated by the rule that has produced the highest cumulative wealth as of the previous trading day. Table VI provides summary statistics for the best-performing rule and the cumulative wealth rule, for both the out-of-sample Dow Jones Industrial Average (1987–1996) and the Standard and Poor's 500 Futures (1984–1996). These rules are chosen with respect to the mean return criterion. It is interesting to note that in both of these out-of-sample periods the cumulative wealth rule does not perform well. In fact, the cumulative wealth rule applied to the S&P 500 futures generates negative returns. Also, note that the best rule for the

Dow Jones Industrial Average results in only six trades, where each trade averages over 400 days. This is considerably greater than the average of 4.3 days per trade resulting from the best rule over the full 100-year sample.

VI. Conclusion

This paper applies a new methodology that allows researchers to control for data-snooping biases to compute the statistical significance of investment performance while accounting for the dependencies resulting from investigating several investment rules. We believe that this methodology deserves to be widely used in finance: there is an obvious focus in finance on information and decision rules that can be used to predict financial returns, but it is often forgotten that this predictability may be the result of a large number of researchers' joint search for a successful model specification with predictive power. Many researchers, such as Merton (1987), have called for a remedy to control for data-snooping biases, and the methodology in this paper provides just such a tool. It summarizes in a single statistic the significance of the best-performing model after accounting for data-snooping.

Besides being important in assessing the importance of data-snooping bias in performance measurement studies, the approach of this paper also has substantial value to investors who are searching for successful investment strategies. Suppose that, after experimenting with a large number of decision rules, an investor comes up with what appears to be a highly successful rule that outperforms the benchmark strategy. The investor is then left with the task of assessing just how much of the performance is a result of data-snooping, and how much is due to genuine superior performance. In the presence of complicated dependencies across the rules being evaluated, this is a very difficult question to answer, and only a bootstrap methodology such as the one offered in this paper would appear to be feasible. Furthermore, since the investor would know the exact identity of the universe of investment rules from which the optimal rule was drawn, the approach of this paper is eminently suited for such an assessment.

Our analysis allows us to re-assess previous results on the performance of technical trading rules. We find that the results of BLL appear to be robust to data-snooping, and, indeed, there are trading rules which performed even better than the ones considered by BLL. Hence their result that the best performing technical trading rule was capable of generating profits when adopted to the Dow Jones Industrial Average, stands up to inspection for data-snooping effects. This finding is valid in all four sub-periods considered by BLL. However, we also find that the superior performance of the best technical trading rule is not repeated in the out-of-sample experiment covering the 10-year period 1987–1996. In this sample the results are completely reversed and the best performing trading rule is not even statistically significant at standard critical levels. This result is also borne out when data on a more readily tradable futures contract on the S&P 500 index is considered: again there is no evidence that any trading rule outperformed over the sample period.

Two conclusions appear to be possible from these findings. First, the out-of-sample results may simply not be representative, possibly because of the unusually large one-day movement occurring on October 19, 1987. While this argument can never be rejected outright, we want to emphasize that the out-of-sample trading period is rather long (3,291 days) which would seem to lend support to the claim that we can evaluate the trading rules' performance reasonably precisely in the post-sample period. Also, the out-of-sample results are robust to whether or not data on 1987 is included in the sample. In a finite sample, very large movements in stock prices such as those occurring on October 19, 1987 would, if anything, actually tend to improve the performance of the best trading rule since some of the rules inevitably would have been short in the index on that date and hence would have earned returns of 22 percent in a single day.[19]

[19] Indeed, as shown in Table III, the best trading rule from the BLL universe under the mean return criterion generates a mean return of 8.6 percent in the period from January 1987 through December 1996. However, the best rule (200-day variable moving average with a 1 percent band) from the BLL universe in the period January 1988 through December 1996 generates a mean return of only 5.6 percent. Furthermore, the large universe provides a best rule during sub-period 5 that generates a mean return of 14.4 percent, where the best rule (20-day filter rule of 0.10) during the period beginning in 1988 provides a mean return of only 13.9 percent.

Second, it is possible that, historically, the best technical trading rule did indeed produce superior performance, but that, more recently, the markets have become more efficient and hence such opportunities have disappeared. This conclusion certainly would seem to match up well with the increased liquidity in the stock market which may have helped to remove possible short-term patterns in stock returns.

Appendix 1: Trading Rule Parameters

This appendix describes the parameterizations of the 7,846 trading rules used to generate the full universe of rules under consideration.

A. Filter Rules

x = change in security price ($x \times$ price) required to initiate a position

y = change in security price ($y \times$ price) required to liquidate a position

e = used for an alternative definition of extrema where a low (high) can be defined as the most recent closing price that is less (greater) than the n previous closing prices

c = number of days a position is held, ignoring all other signals during that time

x = 0.005, 0.01, 0.015, 0.02, 0.025, 0.03, 0.035, 0.04, 0.045, 0.05, 0.06, 0.07, 0.08, 0.09, 0.1, 0.12, 0.14, 0.16, 0.18, 0.2, 0.25, 0.3, 0.4, 0.5 [24 values]

y = 0.005, 0.01, 0.015, 0.02, 0.025, 0.03, 0.04, 0.05, 0.075, 0.1, 0.15, 0.2 [12 values]

e = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 15, 20 [8 values]

c = 5, 10, 25, 50 [4 values]

Noting that y must be less than x, there are 185 x-y combinations.

Number of filter rules = $x + (x * e) + (x * c) + (x\text{-}y$ combinations)

= 24 + 192 + 96 + 185 = 497

B. Moving Averages

n = number of days in a moving average

m = number of fast-slow combinations of n

b = fixed band multiplicative value

d = number of days for the time delay filter

c = number of days a position is held, ignoring all other signals during that time

n = 2, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 40, 50, 75, 100, 125, 150, 200, 250 [15 values]

$$m = \sum_{i=1}^{n-1} i = 105$$

b = 0.001, 0.005, 0.01, 0.015, 0.02, 0.03, 0.04, 0.05 [8 values]

d = 2, 3, 4, 5 [4 values]

c = 5, 10, 25, 50 [4 values]

Note that a 1 percent band filter and a 10-day holding period is applied to all combinations of moving averages with a fast MA of 1, 2, and 5 days and a slow MA of 50, 150, and 200 days. This addition of 9 rules allows our universe of trading rules to encompass all of BLL's trading rules.

Number of rules = $n + m + (b * (n + m)) + (d * (n + m)) + (c * (n + m)) + 9$

= 15 + 105 + 960 + 480 + 480 + 9 = 2,049

C. Support and Resistance

n = number of days in the support and resistance range

e = used for an alternative definition of extrema where a low (high) can be defined as the most recent closing price that is less (greater) than the n previous closing prices

b = fixed band multiplicative value

d = number of days for the time delay filter

c = number of days a position is held, ignoring all other signals during that time

n = 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 50, 100, 150, 200, 250 [10 values]

e = 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 20, 25, 50, 100, 200 [10 values]

b = 0.001, 0.005, 0.01, 0.015, 0.02, 0.03, 0.04, 0.05 [8 values]

d = 2, 3, 4, 5 [4 values]

c = 5, 10, 25, 50 [4 values]

Number of rules = $[(1 + c) * (n + e)] + [(b * (n + e)) * (1 + c)] + [d * c * (n + e)]$
= 100 + 800 + 320 = 1,220

D. Channel Break-Outs

n = number of days for the channel

x = difference between the high price and the low price ($x \times$ high price) required to form a channel

b = fixed band multiplicative value

c = number of days a position is held, ignoring all other signals during that time

n = 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 50, 100, 150, 200, 250 [10 values]

x = 0.005, 0.01, 0.02, 0.03, 0.05, 0.075, 0.10, 0.15 [8 values]

b = 0.001, 0.005, 0.01, 0.015, 0.02, 0.03, 0.04, 0.05 [8 values]

c = 5, 10, 25, 50 [4 values]

Noting that b must be less than x, there are 43 x-b combinations.
Number of rules = $(n * x * c) + [n * b * (x\text{-}b \text{ combinations})]$
= 320 + 1,720 = 2,040

E. On-Balance Volume Averages

n = number of days in a moving average

m = number of fast-slow combinations of n

b = fixed band multiplicative value

d = number of days for the time delay filter

c = number of days a position is held, ignoring all other signals during that time

n = 2, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 40, 50, 75, 100, 125, 150, 200, 250 [15 values]

$$m = \sum_{i=1}^{n-1} i = 105$$

b = 0.001, 0.005, 0.01, 0.015, 0.02, 0.03, 0.04, 0.05 [8 values]

d = 2, 3, 4, 5 [4 values]

c = 5, 10, 25, 50 [4 values]

Number of rules = $n + m + (b * (n + m)) + (d * (n + m)) + (c * (n + m))$

= 15 + 105 + 960 + 480 + 480 = 2,040

Appendix 2: Reality Check Technical Results

For the convenience of the reader, we replicate the main results of White (1997) and briefly interpret these. In what follows, the notation corresponds to that of the text unless otherwise noted.

Let P_o denote the probability measure governing the behavior of the time series $\{Z_t\}$. Also, $\Rightarrow$ denotes convergence in distribution, while $\xrightarrow{p}$ denotes convergence in probability.

Proposition 2.1: *Suppose that* $P^{1/2}(\bar{f} - E(f)) \Rightarrow N(0, \Omega)$ *for* Ω *positive definite and suppose that* $E(f_1) > E(f_k)$, *for all* $k = 2, ..., l$. *Then* $P_o[\bar{f}_1 > \bar{f}_k$ for all $k = 2, ..., l]$ $\rightarrow 1$ *as* $T \rightarrow \infty$. *If in addition* $E(f_1) > 0$, *then for any* $0 \le c < E(f_1)$, $P_o[\bar{f}_1 > c]$ $\rightarrow 1$ *as* $T \rightarrow \infty$.

The first conclusion guarantees that the best model eventually has the best estimated performance relative to the benchmark, with probability approaching certainty. The second conclusion ensures that if the best model beats the benchmark, then this is eventually revealed by a positive estimated performance relative to the benchmark. The next result provides the basis for hypothesis tests of the null of no predictive superiority over the benchmark, based on the predictive model selection criterion.

Proposition 2.2: *Suppose that* $P^{1/2}(\bar{f} - E(f)) \Rightarrow N(0, \Omega)$ *for* Ω *positive definite. Then*

$$\max_{k=1,\dots,l} P^{1/2}\{\bar{f}_k - E(f_k)\} \Rightarrow V \equiv \max_{k=1,\dots,l} \{Z_k\}$$

and

$$\min_{k=1,\dots,l} P^{1/2}\{\bar{f}_k - E(f_k)\} \Rightarrow W \equiv \min_{k=1,\dots,l} \{Z_k\},$$

where Z *is an* l x 1 *vector with components* Z_k, $k = 1, \dots, l$, *distributed as* $N(0, \Omega)$.

Corollary 2.4: *Under the conditions of Theorem 2.3 of White (1997), we have*

$$\rho\left(\boldsymbol{L}[\,\bar{V}^* \mid Z_1, \dots, Z_{T+\tau}],\ \boldsymbol{L}[\max_{k=1,\dots,l} P^{1/2}(\bar{f}_k - E(f_k))]\right) \xrightarrow{p} 0$$

and

$$\rho\left(\boldsymbol{L}[\,\bar{W}^* \mid Z_1, \dots, Z_{T+\tau}],\ \boldsymbol{L}[\min_{k=1,\dots,l} P^{1/2}(\bar{f}_k - E(f_k))]\right) \xrightarrow{p} 0,$$

where

$$\bar{W}^* \equiv \min_{k=1,\dots,l} P^{1/2}(\bar{f}_k^* - \bar{f}_k).$$

L *denotes the probability law of the indicated random variable, and* ρ *is any metric on the space of probability laws.*

Thus, by comparing $\bar{V}$ to the quantiles of a large sample of realizations of $\bar{V}^*$, we can compute a *P*-value appropriate for testing H_o: $\max_{k=1,\dots,l} E(f_k) \leq 0$, that is, that the best model has no predictive superiority relative to the benchmark. White (1997) calls this the "Reality Check *P*-value."

The level of the test can be driven to zero at the same time that the power approaches one according to the next result, as the test statistic diverges to infinity at a rate $P^{1/2}$ under the alternative.

Proposition 2.5: *Suppose that conditions A.1(a) or A.1(b) of White's (1997) Appendix hold, and suppose that* $E(f_1) > 0$ *and* $E(f_1) > E(f_k)$, *for all* $k = 2, ..., l$.
Then for any $0 < c < E(f_1)$, $P_o[\bar{V} > P^{1/2}c] \rightarrow 1$ *as* $T \rightarrow \infty$.

Corollary 5.1: *Let* $g: U \rightarrow \Re$ $(U \subset \Re^m)$ *be continuously differentiable such that the Jacobian of* g, Dg, *has full row rank* 1 *at* $E[h_k] \in U$, $k = 0, ..., l$. *Suppose that the assumptions of White (1997, Corollary 5.1) hold. If* $H = 0$ (*the Jacobian of* h) *or* (P/R) $\log\log R \rightarrow 0$ *then for* $\bar{f}^*$ *computed using P&R's stationary bootstrap*

$$\rho(\boldsymbol{L}[P^{1/2}(\bar{f}^* - \bar{f}) \mid Z_1, ..., Z_{T+\tau}], \boldsymbol{L}[P^{1/2}(\bar{f} - \mu)]) \xrightarrow{p} 0,$$

where ρ *and* $\boldsymbol{L}[\cdot]$ *are as previously defined*.

Maintaining the original definitions of $\bar{V}^*$ and $\bar{W}^*$ in terms of $\bar{f}_k$ and $\bar{f}_k^*$, we have

Corollary 5.2: *Under the conditions of Corollary 5.1, we have*

$$\rho(\boldsymbol{L}[\bar{V}^* \mid Z_1, ..., Z_{T+\tau}], \boldsymbol{L}[\max_{k=1,...,l} P^{1/2}(\bar{f}_k - \mu_k)]) \xrightarrow{p} 0$$

and

$$\rho(\boldsymbol{L}[\bar{W}^* \mid Z_1, ..., Z_{T+\tau}], \boldsymbol{L}[\min_{k=1,...,l} P^{1/2}(\bar{f}_k - \mu_k)]) \xrightarrow{p} 0 .$$

The test is performed by imposing the element of the null least favorable to the alternative, *i.e.*, $\mu_k = 0$, $k = 1, ..., l$; thus the Reality Check P-value is obtained by comparing $\bar{V}$ to the Reality Check order statistics, obtained as described in Section II. As before, the test statistic diverges to infinity at the rate $P^{1/2}$ under the alternative.

Proposition 5.3: *Suppose the conditions of Corollary 5.1 hold, and suppose that* $E(f_1) >$ 0 *and* $E(f_1) > E(f_k)$, *for all* $k = 2, ..., l$.

Then for any $0 < c < E(f_1)$, $P_o[\,\bar{V} > P^{1/2}c\,] \rightarrow 1$ *as* $T \rightarrow \infty$.

Note that it is reasonable to expect the conditions required for the above results to hold for the data we are examining. As pointed out by BLL, while stock prices do not seem to be drawn from a stationary distribution, the compounded daily returns (log-differenced prices) can plausibly be assumed to satisfy the stationarity and dependence conditions sufficient for the bootstrap to yield valid results. It is possible to imagine time series for returns with highly persistent dependencies in the higher order moments that might violate the mixing conditions of White (1997), but the standard models for stock returns do not exhibit such persistence.

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Table I

Best Technical Trading Rules under the Mean Return Criterion

This table reports the historically best-performing trading rule, chosen with respect to the mean return criterion, in each sample period for both of the trading rule universes: the BLL universe with 26 rules and our full universe with 7,846 rules.

Sample	BLL Universe of Trading Rules	Full Universe of Trading Rules
Sub-Period 1 (1897-1914)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	5-day support & resistance, 0.005 band, 5-day holding period
Sub-Period 2 (1915-1938)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	5-day moving average
Sub-Period 3 (1939-1962)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	2-day on-balance volume
Sub-Period 4 (1962-1986)	150-day variable moving average	2-day on-balance volume
90 Years (1897-1986)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	5-day moving average
100 Years (1897-1996)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	5-day moving average
	Out-of-Sample	
Sub-Period 5 (1987-1996)	200-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	filter rule, $x=0.12$, $y=0.10$
S&P 500 Futures (1984-1996)	200-day variable moving average	30 and 75-day on-balance volume

Table II

Best Technical Trading Rules under the Sharpe Ratio Criterion

This table reports the historically best-performing trading rule, chosen with respect to the Sharpe ratio criterion, in each sample period for both of the trading rule universes: the BLL universe with 26 rules and our full universe with 7,846 rules.

Sample	BLL Universe of Trading Rules	Full Universe of Trading Rules
Sub-Period 1 (1897-1914)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	20-day channel rule, 0.075 width, 5-day holding period
Sub-Period 2 (1915-1938)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	5-day moving average, 0.001 band
Sub-Period 3 (1939-1962)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	2-day moving average, 0.001 band
Sub-Period 4 (1962-1986)	2 and 200-day fixed moving average, 10-day holding period	2-day moving average, 0.001 band
90 Years (1897-1986)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	5-day moving average, 0.001 band
100 Years (1897-1996)	50-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	5-day moving average, 0.001 band
	Out-of-Sample	
Sub-Period 5 (1987-1996)	200-day variable moving average, 0.01 band	200-day channel rule, 0.150 width, 50-day holding period
S&P 500 Futures (1984-1996)	200-day fixed moving average, 0.01 band, 10-day holding period	20-day channel rule, 0.01 width, 10-day holding period

Table III

Performance of the Best Technical Trading Rules under the Mean Return Criterion

This table presents the performance results of the best technical trading rule, chosen with respect to the mean return criterion, in each of the sample periods. Results are provided for both the BLL universe of technical trading rules and our full universe of rules. The table reports the performance measure (*i.e.*, the annualized mean return) along with White's Reality Check *P*-value and the nominal *P*-value. The nominal *P*-value is that which results from applying the Reality Check methodology to the best trading rule *only*, thereby ignoring the effects of the data-snooping.

	BLL Universe of Trading Rules			Full Universe of Trading Rules		
Sample	Mean Return	White's *P*-value	Nominal *P*-value	Mean Return	White's *P*-value	Nominal *P*-value
Sub-Period 1 (1897-1914)	9.52	0.0155	0.0000	16.48	0.0006	0.0000
Sub-Period 2 (1915-1938)	13.90	0.0000	0.0000	20.12	0.0017	0.0000
Sub-Period 3 (1939-1962)	9.46	0.0010	0.0000	25.51	0.0000	0.0000
Sub-Period 4 (1962-1986)	7.87	0.0110	0.0027	23.82	0.0000	0.0000
90 Years (1897-1986)	10.11	0.0000	0.0000	18.65	0.0000	0.0000
100 Years (1897-1996)	9.39	0.0000	0.0000	17.17	0.0000	0.0000
Out-of-Sample						
Sub-Period 5 (1987-1996)	8.63	0.1188	0.0395	14.41	0.3007	0.0009
S&P 500 Futures (1984-1996)	4.25	0.4342	0.2037	9.43	0.8999	0.0561

Table IV

Performance of the Best Technical Trading Rules under the Sharpe Ratio Criterion

This table presents the performance results of the best technical trading rule, chosen with respect to the Sharpe ratio criterion, in each of the sample periods. Results are provided for both the BLL universe of technical trading rules and our full universe of rules. The table reports the performance measure (*i.e.,* the Sharpe ratio) along with White's Reality Check *P*-value and the nominal *P*-value. The nominal *P*-value is that which results from applying the Reality Check methodology to the best trading rule *only*, thereby ignoring the effects of the data-snooping.

	BLL Universe of Trading Rules			Full Universe of Trading Rules		
Sample	Sharpe Ratio	White's *P*-value	Nominal *P*-value	Sharpe Ratio	White's *P*-value	Nominal *P*-value
Sub-Period 1 (1897-1914)	0.65	0.0167	0.0000	1.30	0.0000	0.0000
Sub-Period 2 (1915-1938)	0.63	0.0034	0.0000	0.88	0.0058	0.0000
Sub-Period 3 (1939-1962)	0.87	0.0004	0.0000	2.26	0.0000	0.0000
Sub-Period 4 (1962-1986)	0.70	0.0177	0.0000	1.87	0.0000	0.0000
90 Years (1897-1986)	0.64	0.0000	0.0000	1.12	0.0000	0.0000
100 Years (1897-1996)	0.59	0.0000	0.0000	1.04	0.0000	0.0000
Out-of-Sample						
Sub-Period 5 (1987-1996)	0.52	0.2526	0.0247	1.11	0.2642	0.0000
S&P 500 Futures (1984-1996)	0.28	0.5872	0.0995	0.71	0.9399	0.0000

Table V

Technical Trading Rule Summary Statistics: 100-Year Dow Jones Industrial Average Sample (1897–1996) with the Mean Return Criterion

This table provides summary statistics for the best-performing rule (the simple 5-day moving average), chosen with respect to the mean return criterion, and the recursive cumulative wealth rule, over the full 100-year sample of the Dow Jones Industrial Average. The cumulative wealth trading rule bases today's signal on the best trading rule as of yesterday, according to total accumulated wealth.

Summary Statistics	Best Rule	Cumulative Wealth Rule
Annualized average return	17.2%	14.9%
Nominal *P*-value	0.000	0.000
White's Reality Check *P*-value	0.000	n/a*
Total number of trades	6,310	6,160
Number of winning trades	2,501	2,476
Number of losing trades	3,809	3,684
Average number of days per trade	4.3	4.2
Average return per trade	0.29%	0.26%
Number of long trades	3,155	3,103
Number of long winning trades	1,389	1,372
Number of long losing trades	1,766	1,731
Average number of days per long trade	4.7	4.2
Average return per long trade	0.39%	0.35%
Number of short trades	3,155	3,057
Number of short winning trades	1,112	1,104
Number of short losing trades	2,043	1,953
Average number of days per short trade	3.9	3.8
Average return per short trade	0.19%	0.16%

* The recursive cumulative wealth rule is not the best trading rule *ex-post*, thus the Reality Check *P*-value does not apply.

Table VI

Technical Trading Rule Summary Statistics: Out-of-Sample Dow Jones Industrial Average (1987–1996) and the Standard and Poor's 500 Futures (1984–1996) with the Mean Return Criterion

This table provides summary statistics for the best-performing rule, chosen with respect to the mean return criterion, and the recursive cumulative wealth rule, for both the out-of-sample Dow Jones Industrial Average (1987–1996) and the Standard and Poor's 500 Futures (1984–1996). The cumulative wealth trading rule bases today's signal on the best trading rule as of yesterday, according to total accumulated wealth.

	Dow Jones Industrial Avg		S&P 500 Futures	
Summary Statistics	Best Rule	Cumulative Wealth Rule	Best Rule	Cumulative Wealth Rule
Annualized average return	14.4%	2.8%	9.4%	-5.5%
Nominal *P*-value	0.001	0.271	0.056	0.867
White's Reality Check *P*-value	0.301	n/a*	0.900	n/a*
Total number of trades	6	676	43	210
Number of winning trades	4	234	22	55
Number of losing trades	2	442	21	155
Average number of days per trade	411.7	3.7	76.5	14.3
Average return per trade	34.38%	0.04%	3.00%	-0.33%
Number of long trades	4	338	22	104
Number of long winning trades	3	140	12	31
Number of long losing trades	1	198	10	73
Average number of days per long trade	598.0	4.3	98.6	17.1
Average return per long trade	48.16%	0.24%	5.76%	0.16%
Number of short trades	2	338	21	106
Number of short winning trades	1	94	10	24
Number of short losing trades	1	244	11	82
Average number of days per short trade	39.0	3.2	53.4	11.6
Average return per short trade	6.82%	-0.16%	0.12%	-0.82%

* The recursive cumulative wealth rule is not the best trading rule *ex-post*, thus the Reality Check *P*-value does not apply.

Figure 1. Economic and Statistical Performance of the Best Model Chosen from the Full Universe According to the Mean Return Criterion: Sub-Period 1 (1897–1914)

For a given trading rule, n, indexed on the x-axis, the scattered points plot the mean annualized returns experienced during the sample period. The thin line measures the best mean annualized return among the set of trading rules $i = 1,\ldots,n$, and the thick line measures the associated data-snooping adjusted P-value.

Figure 2. Economic and Statistical Performance of the Best Model Chosen from the Full Universe According to the Mean Return Criterion: Sub-Period 2 (1915–1938)

For a given trading rule, n, indexed on the x-axis, the scattered points plot the mean annualized returns experienced during the sample period. The thin line measures the best mean annualized return among the set of trading rules $i = 1,\ldots,n$, and the thick line measures the associated data-snooping adjusted P-value.

Figure 3. Economic and Statistical Performance of the Best Model Chosen from the Full Universe According to the Sharpe Ratio Criterion: Sub-Period 1 (1897–1914)

For a given trading rule, n, indexed on the x-axis, the scattered points plot the Sharpe ratio experienced during the sample period. The thin line measures the highest Sharpe ratio among the set of trading rules $i = 1,\ldots,n$, and the thick line measures the associated data-snooping adjusted P-value.

Figure 4. Economic and Statistical Performance of the Best Model Chosen from the Full Universe According to the Sharpe Ratio Criterion: Sub-Period 2 (1915–1938)

For a given trading rule, n, indexed on the x-axis, the scattered points plot the Sharpe ratio experienced during the sample period. The thin line measures the highest Sharpe ratio among the set of trading rules $i = 1,\ldots,n$, and the thick line measures the associated data-snooping adjusted P-value.

Figure 5. Economic and Statistical Performance of the Best Model Chosen from the BLL Universe According to the Mean Return Criterion: Out-of-Sample, Sub-Period 5 (1987–1996)

For a given trading rule, n, indexed on the x-axis, the scattered points plot the mean annualized returns experienced during the sample period. The thin line measures the best mean annualized return among the set of trading rules $i = 1,\ldots,n$, and the thick line measures the associated data-snooping adjusted P-value.

Figure 6. Economic and Statistical Performance of the Best Model Chosen from the BLL Universe According to the Sharpe Ratio Criterion: Out-of-Sample, Sub-Period 5 (1987–1996)

For a given trading rule, *n*, indexed on the *x*-axis, the scattered points plot the Sharpe ratio experienced during the sample period. The thin line measures the highest Sharpe ratio among the set of trading rules $i = 1,\ldots,n$, and the thick line measures the associated data-snooping adjusted *P*-value.

Figure 7. Economic and Statistical Performance of the Best Model Chosen from the Full Universe According to the Mean Return Criterion: S&P 500 Futures (1984–1996)

For a given trading rule, *n*, indexed on the *x*-axis, the scattered points plot the mean annualized returns experienced during the sample period. The thin line measures the best mean annualized return among the set of trading rules $i = 1,\ldots,n$, and the thick line measures the associated data-snooping adjusted *P*-value.

Figure 8. Economic and Statistical Performance of the Best Model Chosen from the Full Universe According to the Sharpe Ratio Criterion: S&P 500 Futures (1984–1996)

For a given trading rule, *n*, indexed on the *x*-axis, the scattered points plot the Sharpe ratio experienced during the sample period. The thin line measures the highest Sharpe ratio among the set of trading rules $i = 1,\ldots,n$, and the thick line measures the associated data-snooping adjusted *P*-value.