

## **SPINNAKER HANDLING FOR THE GIRLS (age immaterial)**

Some advice on how to choose your helm.... And find out who's really to blame for a total cluster?!€"#!

Without any doubt the success of spinnaker handling by the crew rests ENTIRELY on the skill of the helm, his desire to do better, his enthusiasm in preparing the boat and his love of sanding its bottom, anti-fouling, replacing frayed sheets, and sanding its bottom.....interspersed with hosing its bottom etc. etc. His ability to provide the crew with smoked salmon sandwiches on thinly cut brown bread, thoughtfully spread with low fat cream cheese is not essential. Delightful but not essential.

### The Boat

As crew, take time to peer at the boat and the spinnaker system - does it reflect pride, care, thoughtfulness or is it more haphazard, bodged and bunged together. Remember never ever sail in a boat without colour co-ordinated sheets. It is impossible to follow the instruction 'pull the blue one' if they are all blue and further being called an idiot will not solve the problem or enhance a blossoming relationship.

It is important to remember, in order to avoid an inferiority complex, that any snagging or jamming at any point in the raising or lowering of the pole is not your fault. It has been noticed that some helms can show a remarkable reluctance to venture over the traveller with even a can of WD40, let alone entertain ideas of lightweight poles or softer spinnaker sheets.

### Gossip

You might glean some helpful information on your possible new helm from other crews, who may have already trod the boards of his boat, although unlikely. Crews rarely have the time for gossip, spending most of their day, when not actually sailing, getting ready to sail or putting the boat away. Light relief comes in the form of much scrabbling in the bottom of the boat for something elusive but vital - a split ring, the helm's Swiss Army knife or a shackle pin or similar.

### Venturing forth

Having decided to take the metaphorical (we hope) plunge, you cast off with bravado, belatedly testing the toe straps, while searching for somewhere to stash your emergency rations.

### On the reach

Rounding the windward mark you are at the ready, but never allow your helm to raise the spinnaker before you have shouted go/hurry up/ for goodness sake get on with it or some similar instructions that exonerates you from any misjudgement other than just flinging the thing out. Any time lapse or mishearing on the part of the helm is not your concern and can be blamed on failure to follow the command or encroaching deafness. This depends on the age of the helm, the more youthful and gung-ho often find it hard to do as they are told, whereas the older helm could easily need a little plastic thing in his ear.

However, in spite of all odds, the spinnaker comes into bloom and is filled. It looks pretty. If it is the right colour it can reflect a rosy glow on the face. A pity that it is probably lime green....! Nevertheless the boat is finally zipping along on the reach, passing all (not necessarily) and you are nearly killing yourself in the gusts. Often this is not the case,

except the bit about nearly killing yourself....not that anyone will notice or sympathise, as it could prove an unnecessary distraction.

And we all know that helms need to concentrate on having a lovely jostle on the reach, competing as they do to sail higher and higher, and have an even greater jostle at the jibe mark. Accompanied with much shouting of 'windward boat', 'protest', 'water for 22 boats' and 'and you can't b..... well do that - protest'. The latter having forgotten that strictly speaking the first thing you must say when protesting is actually 'protest'.

At the jibe mark

But let us return to the cockpit to consider whether the helm, in the midst of all this excitement, remembers to approach the jibe mark with due consideration for you, his crew. Does he think ahead to allow time for an early jibe and time for resetting the spinnaker on the next reach? Not necessarily as he is still immersed in the playful banter of words between boats and has forgotten one of the laws of triangle racing - the second reach is always, absolutely, without fail, tighter than the first. The law of averages does not exist in sailing and most OODs do not appear to have actually raced a boat.

It is vital that you the crew be given time to set the spinnaker before the boat hardens up. This can be overlooked or at best underestimated. Do not expect anyone other than other crews to understand why your jib and/or spinnaker is flapping prettily/noisily/worryingly depending on the wind strength. Do not expect help from the rear. It has been noticed that some helms can become paralysed when viewing a spinnaker flapping out of control. If all efforts fail and as a last or possibly even first resort, insist that the spinnaker be dropped. At this point the spinnaker halyard is quite likely to knot itself. This will not be your fault directly.....but will not cement a relationship.



***“What do you mean you can’t find it, it must be down there somewhere”***

A better understanding

Occasionally you can reach a better understanding when rounding the jibe mark. The helm can be encouraged to join in, to not only steer the boat with his rippling thigh muscles (they

do not all have these) but to take hold of the sheet/guy and guy/ sheet and actually keep the spinnaker filled. This can be done. It is not a fallacy. A figment of some crew's wildest dreams. For the crew it makes jibing a non-event and leaves strength for enjoying those rippling thighs....

However, a word of caution....avoid if you can the dyslexic helm. Even mild dyslexia can be a problem. Faced with a confusion of blue sheets AND blessed with a helm for whom the delights of port and starboard, sheet and guy or guy and port or starboard and sheet make communication almost impossible. In fact, charting one's way across the Atlantic or possibly even achieving a circumnavigation is a better bet than the dyslexic helm at the jibe mark. The only answer is to do it all yourself. This is far from satisfactory, totally exhausting, possible...just...but leaves one vulnerable to taking all the blame, which is not really the idea. Time to jump ship...

And finally running for home

As the fleet scatters literally before the wind, you could have thought sailing from B back to A would be a doddle compared to reaching and jibing. It would be up with the spinnaker and relax. It does depend on the competitive spirit of the helm. If he abhors sailing by the lee, the chances are he will zoom off on starboard....spinnny up, jibe, zoom off on port and then rush to the mark yelling 'starboard', hopefully in first position. You will have to follow shouts of 'jibe ho' as best you can, adjusting the pole and spinnaker to the wind and possibly waves, and relinquishing your promised scenic leg for pandemonium. It is advisable to ignore any shouts of 'pump the b..... boat out' as there is only so much you can do. You lower the spinnaker for the final time and your main task is over....phew!

Back in the bar

At last time to breathe and assess the afternoon....will you be going out with him again or do you accept a large gin and tonic and eye all your options for next week....cheers!

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