

More Tips from Phipps

Single-handed boat handling techniques

"Going it alone" - Catamaran sailing for single-handers

The magic of single-handed performance catamaran sailing can be summed up as "your own speed machine at your own finger tips". The techniques required in developing single-handed skills start with launching your boat successfully and finishes with a great day's sailing.

Rigging the boat is not normally a problem but launching without a helping hand can be tricky - boat or launching trolley, launching trolley or boat!?! Hull damage is one of the plagues of single handing, so anything you can do to minimise your boat grinding on the shore is good. If you have support from a useful "trolley dolly" or even someone else launching at the same time it will help but, if not, one simple idea is to have a temporary or permanent buoy held by a weight just off the beach. This is ideal on reservoirs like Grafham or Rutland, a bit trickier on a tidal beach but not impossible. Having launched, tie your boat temporarily to the buoy so you have two hands to get your trolley onto the beach and above the tide line and the same for when you return.

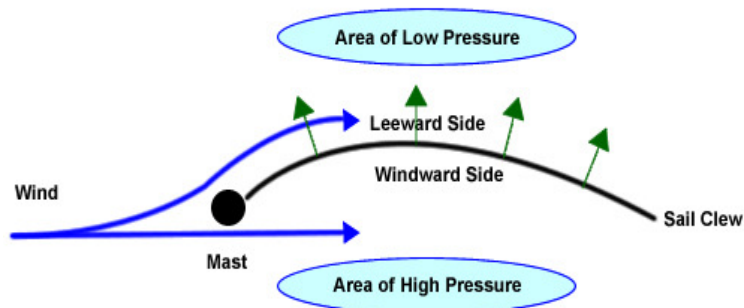
Preparing your boat on the beach before launch makes a big difference to the mechanics of sailing off in good order.

- 1) Rudder blades ready to drop
- 2) Tiller extension lying on the windward side
- 3) Mainsheet attached
- 4) Downhaul attached but not powered up.

Out on the water "systems and a consistent sequence of doing things" are the key to good single handed sailing be it tacks, gybes, mark rounding or 2 sail reaching, everything working and in the right place at the right time.

Maintaining the air flow

Without the aid of the jib slot there is nothing to force the air to flow over the lee side of the mainsail where most of the driving force for the boat is generated. Once the air flow over the leeward side has been destroyed, getting it to start flowing again over a fully battened mainsail requires generous amounts of sail twist, bearing away or both before returning to the original course and settings. With that in mind, single handed catamaran sailors need to focus on maintaining air flow over the sail, reading the various wind indicators and tell-tales plus developing a natural feel of the boat as it drives through the water. Flat sails are fast sails provided the air can stay attached and the sail does not stall. But to get there from a standing start requires the sail to have depth to generate the initial boat speed. As the boat speeds up the sail will need to be adjusted, reshaped to meet the generated airflow.



Maintaining airflow over the sail at all points of sailing is vital to maximise performance
In a capsize, make sure you stay in touch with the boat

But take care. Too quick and the sail will stall and without the support of a jib slot to instantly re-establish air flow. A semi stalled boat may point high but will be going slow.

On the wire

The transition from the hull to the trapeze wire is one simple flowing movement, where the boat continues on the same course and the mainsail is sheeted in to maintain the hull angle as you extend your body. Once out and balanced you can feel like a king but to maintain your crown you need to have your controls at your finger tips.

- 1) With the mainsheet in your front hand, hang the rest of the sheet on the thumb of the tiller hand, then down your back leg and onto the trampoline.
- 2) Adjust the height of the trapeze wire to your comfort zone. Too high and balance is limited, too low and you may struggle to keep out of the waves.
- 3) The ability to adjust the trapeze height while on the water is a great asset especially when coming in off the wire if you are less agile.
- 4) When sailing a catamaran like the Sprint 15 with mainsail and jib, check the jib sheet is laying over the edge of the deck before heading for the wire so you can make an adjustment if needed.

Tacking single handed

The art of tacking under mainsail only is one that requires full concentration to ensure air flow is attached to the new leeward side as soon as possible and the boat drives off on the new tack. To achieve that you may well have to turn the boat a little further off the wind after the tack than when sailing with two sails and ease the mainsheet to induce leach twist and prevent the mainsail driving the bow back into the wind soon after the tack before the boat can get underway and the rudders take effect.

- 1) Pick a time with good boat speed and minimum waves.
- 2) Maintain mainsheet tension until the boat enters the no go zone and then ease the mainsheet to reduce the leach tension.
- 3) As the boat slows in the tack and approaches head to wind increase rudder input slightly to maintain turning speed.
- 4) Coming out on the new tack, go that bit further off the wind than normal until such time as you have built up a good feel for your boats tacking angle.
- 5) With the leach open and the rudders straightened for the new course, sheet back in and accelerate away.
- 6) NB. If you continue to have problems tacking, ease the traveller line as well to allow the bow to turn even further off the wind, then traveller in followed by mainsheet.

Simon Rowell demonstrated a textbook capsize recovery on the Gorran Haven Cruise at the Nationals





On the reach

Without the jib, the direction of the air flow in the lower section of the main may be slightly different from what you are used to. Depending on wind strength and sail shape, the amount of leach twist will reduce as the boat speeds up and the apparent wind direction becomes the same across all of the entry luff area.

- 1) On the wire keep the traveller line in a position where you can make an adjustment.
- 2) Too much sail twist in stronger winds will make it difficult to maintain a constant hull angle, resulting in big mainsheet adjustment. Try dropping the traveller down and sheeting in more to flatten the mainsail.
- 3) Trapezing on the reach is great but only if you have the rudder and boat control to go with it. If in doubt, sit in and concentrate on keeping the boat in the groove.
- 4) When coming into a mark on the wire to bear away, there is more to be gained by coming off the wire early and preparing the boat early so the turn is smooth and the apparent wind maintained.
- 5) In light winds additional twist in the leach often produces more power due to the wind direction close to the water surface at a different angle to that at mast head height.

Down-wind sailing

Like up wind sailing, it is easy to stall the mainsail by sailing too low. At the same time, luffing up for speed can take you away from your goal. Make use of all the skills you applied for up-wind and reaching and apply them to down-wind sailing. The Sprint 15 down-wind sailing angles are critical and dictated by wind strength.

- 1) Look to maintain some degree of air flow over the mainsail in all but the lightest of winds.
- 2) Remember that if the mainsail stalls, you will need to come up closer to a reach to re-establish air flow than when carrying a jib
- 3) In strong winds, sailing in a semi stalled down wind direction may be the best way to survive, but the gybe will be powerful and violent so maintain rig control.

Gybing

Similar to tacking, the skill is to re-establish the air flow over the mainsail immediately after the gybe with out the aid of the jib.

- 1) After the gybe head up until air flow is established and then bear away on the new apparent wind.
- 2) To maintain boat speed, the key is to creating air flow on the new tack so, focus on the speed of the turn verses braking effect.

Capsize / man overboard

In the event of capsize, staying with the boat is even more important as a single hander. If you get washed or knocked off the hull, maintain a grip on the mainsheet rather than anything else. In most situations the result will be the boat either capsizing or stalling down wind.

Single handed catamaran sailing generates a great feeling of personal control but, to get there, you need to get to grips with using a sail that needs constant attention for maximum performance.

For further information on single handed catamaran sailing and catamaran advice contact Brian Phipps and the Windsport coaching team.

Brian Phipps



The superb shots of Martin Scott from Gurnard on a windy day in the Solent, show just how exhilarating single handed cat sailing can be. They also demonstrate just how much weather our little boat can take when sailed by an experienced helm
Pictures courtesy of Paul Wyeth Photography