

# Drascombe Sailing Tips

One of the most discussed topics when members get together is how to make the boat go faster and/or point higher. Here are some hints based on those discussions and many years of trying to keep up with everyone else or, occasionally, work out why I'm in front!

## *Get the sail right up*

Our emblem is a poor guide to sail trim. The standard gunter mainsail is cut with a straight luff. **The gaff should be vertical**, like a top mast, not sloping. To achieve this the halyard must be fixed to the gaff at the right height. There should be no intervening shackles so the gaff can be pulled hard up to the mast. Simply tie the halyard round the gaff with an anchor hitch; simple, effective and cheap. When **reefing** the halyard needs to be moved up the gaff so it can still pull it tight to the mast. A **second pair of wedges will mark the place** and stop it slipping. Alternatively you can fit a slider or a wire bridle which enable you to reef without lowering the sail, but all these systems need a second halyard.

## *Let the sails out...*

The most common mistake is to pull the sails in to try to improve speed. With the boat on a constant heading they should be let out until just before they lose power. One rough guide is that the sail should bisect the angle between the centreline of the boat and the burgee. You can feel for the right point by letting the sail out till the luff starts to flutter, then pull it in just enough to stop it. Adjust the foresail first, as if it is too tight it will backwind the main. Don't forget the mizzen! It may only be small but if it is sheeted hard in on a broad reach it will create heavy weather helm (see below).

## *...Or get them in really tight*

The above holds true for all points except hard on the wind. Then get the sails right in and adjust the course to head as high as possible. This requires constant testing to feel for the best heading and to adjust to wind shifts. "Pinch, pinch and pinch again" the old racing advice, needs balancing with "Keep her sailing". But don't overdo it in light airs. The sails should not be flat or creased. Ease them out till you get a nice smooth curve.

## *Adjust the sheeting angle*

The leech and foot of loose footed sails should have the same tension. If the foot is tight and the leech fluttering the sail needs to go up further (or the fairlead needs to be moved forward if it is adjustable). Conversely, if the leech is tight or the foot floppy, move the sail down or the fairlead aft. Get someone else to sail the boat hard on the wind so you can sit down to leeward and observe the set of the foresail. (Every skipper should sit there from time to time to understand why the crew/wife/kids don't like it!)

## *Balance the boat*

With lanyards on all three stays, a Drascombe mast can be raked several degrees forward or aft. This can be a trap. If the centre of effort of the sails is too far aft of the centre of resistance of the hull, she will want to round up. A little weather helm is an important safety feature, the boat naturally luffs up in a gust, but constantly correcting too

much is hard work and slows the boat. It can become difficult or impossible to bear away in an emergency

The reverse is even worse. With the mast raked forward she will want to bear away, making it impossible to luff into a gust

With all the sails trimmed correctly the boat should run straight with only a light hand on the tiller. When you let the tiller go it should round up gently into the wind. Once the right position is found it may be worth marking the lanyards or replacing two of them with fixed length links

You can also reduce weather helm by partially raising the plate. The first foot or so of travel moves it aft without reducing the area much.

### *Keep a tight luff*

Many people would put this first but it is only really important when close hauled. But then it really is really important! It is generally more effective to put the main up, cleat the halyard, then pull the tack down with a 2 or 3 part tackle. Keeping the foresail luff tight on a roller spar is very difficult. One of the surprising things about sailing a [Gig](#) is that it appears to point higher than most Drascombes. I am convinced the reason is that a lugsail looks awful if the luff is not really tight, so I take the trouble to get it right.

Beware of overdoing it though. Drascombe hulls are not built to be set up like racing machines and you don't want it looking like a banana.

### *Watch the trim*

Those big aft lockers are very tempting but are not really suitable for anything much heavier than fenders! Store anchors, inflatable dinghies etc. as far forward as possible. Have the lightest engine compatible with your needs. In open boats, have the crew sit up by the mast. Anything to lift the stem out of the water and reduce the drag from an immersed transom.