

TOP TIPS FROM PHIPPS

Those who attended the Sprint 15 Nationals this year will know what I am talking about. When the wind was up and the waves started pumping, experience was stretched and even the best sailors were challenged.

So how can we do it better? What tools do we need? What should we be thinking about?

Fitness??

Sailing is a dynamic sport and the more wind, waves, pitching, mainsheet load, hiking, etc. demand a response in fitness. Many of us wish we were fitter. Others do something about it! I fall into the first and, for sure, I know that with better fitness I could put in a better performance.

Boat handling??

I know I bang on about it but it is one of the most important aspects of sailing especially in demanding conditions. Boat handling, boat handling and boat handling. That's what delivers confidence. Confidence to drive the boat, tack the boat, make adjustments, plan ahead, take the opportunity.

Pre-launch set up??

No doubt about it, a sailor that is over powered for the conditions will struggle to control their boat and deliver boat speed. A list of things to consider before you launch:

All the boat's equipment works, minimum friction in mainsheet system and traveller car, jamming cleats do the job, toe-straps correct length, downhaul can be maxed out, batten tension allows the mainsail to blade off, mast rake (forestay adjustment) is correct to allow the leach to stand and flatten the mainsail when almost block to block, rudder blades are locked forward in the stock and tracking inline.

Techniques on the water

This is the bit we sailors choose to believe will give us all the answers!! But to be honest, get the bits above right and you are well on your way. Sailors come in all shapes and sizes. They also sail in different styles so what works for one may not work for another. If it works for you keep doing it. Below are some basic principles which I work on when sailing into waves as a 78kg sailor, moderately fit, sailing a boat that is well set up and everything is working.

Where do I sit?

For best speed I find sitting too far forward, and that is on the 6" hatch cover, drives the bow into the wave making it pitch out of the water. The power in the rig is then used up in this pitching motion and I look to find a way to reduce that pitching by moving my weight aft without creating transom drag. With the bow up a little the boat becomes easier to steer, the skegs and rudder blades dig in to deliver drive, the centre of effort in the sail drives through the skeg area. A little help by rolling your upper body weight fore and aft as you work through the waves helps to lift the bow but fitness comes into that and is combined with hiking.

Mainsail set.

Whatever gives the boat best drive in the conditions is critical and that means almost constant adjustment as your boat slows and accelerates over and down the back of waves. For us sailors whom are less fit we may be forced to find a happy medium that prevents our mainsail from stalling as the mast pitches forward and backwards. This normally means sailing with a little more twist so less traveller down, but it is a trade off. The fit sailors will be looking to ease the mainsail as the boat is slowed by a wave and then sheet in and re-adjust as the hull drives through or slides down the other side. The amount will vary depending on the size of the wave but between 150-300mm is common (6-12inches in old money). Leaving the traveller centred can deliver a big leach twist in the mainsail and likely to deliver poor upwind performance, loads of power, hull flying and lots of pitching. Where your traveller is best positioned on the day will have to be through experimentation.

Pwllheli's Big Swell Experts

(who finished just outside the top five)



Keith Newnham
Paul Roberts
Erling Holmberg
David Ball
Richard Philpott
Martin Ellis