

ASW

Not sure if this article ever made it to Fireball News, but thought it may be useful - sorry to those who asked me at the 2004 Nats that it took soooo long. See you at Teignmouth.

THE LONG, SHORT, FAT & THIN OF IT!

The 2004 Nationals at Porthpean not only had the highest number of entries for a few years but also had a greater number of female sailors competing (33 in total).

There was also an increase in larger helm/smaller crew combinations.

For the Fireball class, this is a great credit. It shows just how flexible the boat has become and makes it a viable option against the 'modern' boats, RS200 and the like.

It has long been my opinion that the weight at the front end of the boat is far less critical than some would suggest.

How many times during this championship did you make a bad tack, miss a shift, go through a wave or CAPSIZE!! , all of which cost far more than having an extra stone or so on the wire.

It was apparent, due to the amount of questions we were asked during the week, that Andrea & I may have some knowledge to share with lighter crews, in particular the smaller and less strong crew.

So, as promised, here are some thoughts based on our experiences.

One of the problems experienced was upwind speed.

It is important here to re-iterate the words of Adam Bowers` article in the last Fireball News.

Working on his hypothetical 20 units, it is no surprise to find that we reach 20 units far earlier than a weight endowed crew, therefore we need to de-power the rig far earlier.

For years it felt like we were giving too much away too early but the most important rule is, as Adam says, you can only deal with 20 units, any more makes the rig overpowered.

In general, as the wind increases, the heavier crews can sail freer by a few degrees and in turn the boat will sail faster the centreboard generates more lift and therefore they go fast and still point.

Lighter crews cannot achieve this, so it is vital to point as high as you can but keep the boat planing, feathering the boat into wind in the gusts but keeping it driving.

A correctly set-up boat in a good breeze feels totally alive, very responsive and it feels fast. If it feels sluggish, like when you leave the handbrake slightly on in your car when driving along, then you're probably stalling the rig by pointing too high for too long in the gusts or you still have too much power and your not sailing upright.

Correct sail selection is vital. It is a bit like buying trousers one size too large and then using a belt to make them fit – there is a lot of spare cloth to control, (I have the opposite problem!)

Several sail makers offer a flatter cut mainsail and a smaller spinnaker. These are not drastically smaller and do not make you slower but they do allow you to keep within the hypothetical 20 units.

Most sail makers now provide a comprehensive tuning sheet with their sails but they are polarised around the ideal crew weights and tweaking these settings can improve rig performance for the lighter crew.

Specifically spreader length can be reduced, as a guide we are using 395mm (minimum length on Proctor spreaders).

Also raking the mast as much as 22° 0" can be beneficial, although this can be painful for the helm's head!

All other settings should be as per the tuning guide – but remember it is a guide.

Once you have the boat set-up for your weight combination, boat handling is the next most important item.

Whatever your weight, staying upright is quick and falling over is slow.

A correctly planned and executed tack or gybe does not rely on the weight of the crew regardless of wind strength.

However, either of these poorly executed can lead to disaster without the weight to save you.

The key to consistent boat handling is communication & planning and of course lots & lots of practice. You need to establish a set of tasks for each manoeuvre and stick to them rigidly – that way, the spinnaker gybe you do in a force 2 will be the same in a force 6 – just a bit more scary!

Whilst on the subject of gybing, one of the main changes we made to our boat set-up was to lead the twinning lines back to the helm.

This not only allows the crew to concentrate their efforts into getting the pole swapped over but also allows the helm to release the windward twinner a few inches, releasing the pressure from the pole when the crew is replacing it on

the mast. The pole can be pulled off the forestay from the trapeze and the slack taken up by the helm via the twinning line.

Of course, if you can get the space at the gybe mark to make it a run to run gybe then this becomes even easier.

At this point, it is fair to admit that having a light crew makes going forward to deal with the pole or a kite drop much easier on the boat balance.

On the race course, it is all too easy to follow everyone else. When you round the windward mark and all around are hoisting spinnakers but the top guys are further down the reach flat out and spilling wind frantically THINK!

Take the boat high on a two sail reach and, if feasible, hoist the kite when you can manage it (20 units?) or play the percentage game and two sail the entire reach – it may not be so heroic but it may be much safer. In fact experience will teach you to look down the reach well before you get there and decide the tactics early on.

If all this fails and you do get caught out, trip the spinnaker halyard, get the crew to sheet in the spinnaker tight and the offending article will happily rustle away behind the mainsail until you can manage it again (20 units?) meanwhile the helm can steer the boat high and regain position on the course (commonly known as an Aussie drop)

Dropping the pole height (until nearly level) significantly de-powers the kite, opening the leach letting all that extra wind escape freely but keep the pole off the forestay at all times.

These are the main areas that we have had to work on or adopt new techniques for, I hope these thoughts help you achieve what you seek and confirm a lot of what you already know.

It is important that the class continues to develop to enable it to stand equally beside the newer style of dinghy being developed.

The fact that crews of all different size and age continue to race this fantastic boat on equal terms ensures a great future for the Fireball.

I am pleased to reply to any questions you have on light crew set-up's or any subject relating to boat repair/maintenance.

Andy & Andrea Willcocks.

GBR 14761 – Which way is up?

ASW Boatbuilding & Repairs - approved by Winder Boats- Insurance work etc...
If you want the best repairs contact :-
Andy 07966513147

Wiggyboo

Ohh this is very reassuring ... I am a smallish lightweightish crew ... and have had the Aussie drop done on me when I couldn't hold the kite and it was really tight coming down to the leeward mark... it was quite a surprise ... but i know it works. Can I ask, does Andrea leap straight out and then clip in because I have been finding that really hard being rather short! What's the best thing to do? Also does she occasionally find the pole hard to fix to the mast after the gybe regardless of the twinning wires (cos I am sure my helm has that in hand)? I may have to resort to standing on the centre board case!

Sorry if this seems mundane ... want to get better for the Nationals!

Wiggy

ASW

Hi Wiggy,

No, Andrea clips on before going on the wire, it`s safer, more consistent and she probably has not got the strength in her hands to hold on. Second reason, is that it is hard to trim a spinnaker or jib whilst trying to hook on whilst hanging from the handle.

The problem with clipping the pole on the mast is addressed by keeping the pressure off the pole, by either gybing run to run and keeping the kite flying or if that is not possible releasing the twinner a few inches whilst the crew is putting the pole on. This second technique must obviously be done by the helm, hence why our twinners are led back to beneath the thwart either side. If you are at the Nationals, we will talk you through it.

All the best,
Andy

ASW Boatbuilding & Repairs - approved by Winder Boats- Insurance work etc...
If you want the best repairs contact :-

Andy 07966513147

Ian99

Wiggyboo wrote:

[color=blue] I may have to resort to standing on the centre board case!

Nothing wrong with standing on the centreboard case - put a bit of progrip on there and you'll never fall off

If you're having problems getting the pole on, it's worth having a look at the pole downhaul elastic/rope to make sure it's not jamming somewhere or there is too much tension in it. Make sure you're using a stopper knot in the downhaul rope to prevent the pole skying rather than tight elastic. A nice way of setting up the downhaul elastic is to run it up inside the mast instead of in the boat. Put a spinnaker halliard style pulley on the front of the mast near deck level, and then run the rope/elastic up the mast to somewhere near the spreaders (you'll need to drill a hole here to secure it to).

I don't know how your twinners are set up, but mine when fully on bring the pole round as far as you'd want on a breezy run. Therefore when sailing on a reach, they're let off a bit (to a marked point on the rope). This gives a bit more slack than usual for getting the pole on as well.

Before anyone suggests I should replace the spinnaker sheets with new longer ones, I intentionally set it up this way as it means I could do away with the tower cleats which spray water in every time you heel over a bit!

A final word on twinners - if you leave the leeward one on after a gybe this also makes it very difficult to get the pole on as it effectively holds the sheet in quite tight. (Though, when it's really windy having both twinning lines on during the gybe does add to stability)

[Back to top](#)

ASW

Most people have their spin sheets set-up as Ian say`s - it more importantly allows you to lower the pole on a very windy reach to de-power the kite (it starts to look asymmetric) and keep the pole off the forestay. It also allows you to square the kite off and take the pole in whilst approaching a drop but leaving the kite flying to about 3 boat lengths out.

If you need to resort to standing on the jib bars or plate case, there is something wrong in your technique or you are less than 5' tall! It really is not safe in a big sea and wind.

Cheers,
Andy

ASW Boatbuilding & Repairs - approved by Winder Boats- Insurance work etc...

If you want the best repairs contact :-

Andy 07966513147

[Back to top](#)

Wiggyboo

Hello again ... well thanks to both of you ... a slight adjustment of the pole uphaul and downhaul fixed the problem ... i think i had been twisting it up! Helm had been successfully releasing the twinning wires ... I just needed to get the pole out quicker. Needless to say that I am very glad not to be standing on the centre-board case, especially after sailing in a very gusty wind at Paignton for the fireball open .. 5-6 with gusts of 7 and we survived with a few bruises but great fun.

Andy you're right about trying to haul yourself up pull sheets and so on all at the same time either i'm cac-handed or weak! Even worse a combination of both ... oh you might be interested to know I crew for Pete Mason so it's your old boat! I am so lookign forward to the Nationals and Worlds Pete and I were really getting things together last year and I hurt my back! I look forward to meeting you all as I think the fireballs are the most social class I have ever met! Cheers Wiggy!

ASW

What can I say Wiggy,

'UltraViolet' was totally set-up around a light crew, so everything works and is in the right place. I did not change anything when I fitted out our new boat.

Look forward to seeing you both at Teignmouth.

Persuade Pete he should buy our new boat at the Worlds' then I can do a new one!!!

Cheers,
Andy

ASW Boatbuilding & Repairs - approved by Winder Boats- Insurance work etc...

If you want the best repairs contact :-

Andy 07966513147