

Dealing with the Sea of Calms

By Linc Spaulding

Although it is certainly true that the wind can blow hard between county Point and the Hypocrites (as it did in '95), on an average day we're lucky to get 8 kts of wind. And it is also a given that on these same windless afternoons the wind will fluctuate aimlessly in both direction and velocity with the Windex spinning endlessly and driving the crew crazy. This is the time not to get mad, but to get even. It all starts well before the start, probably while you're still at the mooring. Get ready for an afternoon of total concentration. No relapses.

Set your rig up loosely.

The headstay should be able to sag off 6"- 8". The shrouds should be backed

off two full turns from their normal setting. The main oUthaul should be at its most slack setting, which should allow about an 8" shelf at the foot of the sail. Hoist the main jib without using the winch. Don't have a crew member sway on the halyards, that would be far too much tension. We want them up, bust just barely.

Jib

Because the air flow between the jib and the main is critical, it is important to optimize the slot between them. Move the jib lead aft about an inch or an inch and-a half (by this time you have made a sieve out of your jib track by drilling new holes every 1/2", right?) to open the leach of the jib and improve its laminar air flow. Use light sheets that will not weigh down the leach.

Main

Going upwind you normally have the traveler set 8" or so to windward of the centerline, with the sheet eased enough to keep the boom on the centerline of the boat. On extremely light air days, drop the traveler down about 1/2 the distance to the centerline and ease the sheet so the boom remains a foot or so to leeward. The tell tales should stream back evenly (if there is enough air to move them). Be sure the upper batten sags off slightly; unlike heavy air sailing, this important visual aid should not be parallel with the boom.

Weight

Up wind you'll want your weight (as little as you can take) slightly forward; downwind move a foot or two aft. Keep the boat heeled a few degrees on almost all points of sail.

Speed

Get the boat going and keep it going. Don't pinch whatsoever. If the boat is not moving make sure you are not strapped in too tightly. Ease everything and star! again. When you tack, bring the jib in veO' slowly. Use the winch by manually twisting the drum, do not use a handle, and do not try to pick up your highest heading until the boat speed picks up. All the way upwind you will be chasing boat speed, so as soon as the boat starts to slow down ease the jib sheet and bear off if you have to. As speed increases, take in the jib ever so slowly (click by click) and head up to the maximum you can point as indicated by the upper tell tale on the jib lifting slightly and angling upwards at about 30-45 degrees.

Think Fast

Knock off the BS in the cockpit. Once you have the boat going nobody should move a muscle. It is now a mental game. Keep your head out of the cockpit, sail to the wind lines and keep in them. Assign one crewmember to keep an eye on the fleet and the wind lines as well as the flags ashore and what's happening a mile or two away, and on the horizon. The last thing you want is to be forced into anything in a hurry...by a starboard tackler or a 180 degree change in wind direction.

Do Not Give Up

Do not give up even if you are behind. Light air days make for the perfect equalizer as the boats that are the furthest behind can often pass the fleet by not following the leader, and by avoiding the tanks that often eat them. So stay loose, keep calm, and await your turn. It will come.