

Powering Up



By Mark Reynolds

Based on the positive response on the article on depowering, this month I was asked to discuss powering up. Questions like “How do you keep that crew over the side as long as possible in lighter conditions?” and “When it’s light and there’s some swell or chop how do I keep the boat moving?” are good ones. We get this condition a lot off San Diego and will most likely have it at the next Worlds in Marina Del Rey. One easy way to power up is to sail light, a lot of guys here in Southern California sail light and in marginal mini hiking conditions it’s an advantage, but that isn’t always an option. Here are a few pointers:

Crew Weight -Being able to get the crew over the side is fast, particularly in choppy conditions. I will sit almost inside the cockpit to keep my crew over the side. I think that the reduced windage and lower center of gravity are fast. Also if the crew is already out when a puff hits I can quickly lean out and take advantage of the extra power more effectively.

Steering – You want to keep the boat moving so you must really concentrate on keeping both tell tails streaming aft on both sides, and not pinch. In light air it’s more important than ever to have the crew doing the looking around so the helmsman can concentrate on precise steering. If you are going fast you are developing more power and you will end up pointing higher than the other boats.

Sails - You need to keep those sails powered up. Use your fuller main if you have one. Often a slightly older main will be better in conditions where you need more power. The draft will be further aft giving you a bit more helm and power.

Rig – it’s important to have just a slight leeward sag in the middle of the mast or at least straight. You don’t want the mast up in the middle with the tip falling off in light wind. When the rig is set up properly you will automatically have the right bend in all conditions. If your mast is up in the middle in 8 knots you need to loosen the intermediates and the lowers. There should also be a little bit of looseness at the mast partner to keep the mast in column.

Outhaul – As soon as you are no longer full hiking you should ease the outhaul a bit. You can’t ease it too much particularly in very light wind but ease it enough to get a bit of shape in the lower section of the sail. Use the lowest seam in the main, it should be pulled straight when over powered but can drop away at the middle of the boom as much as an inch when you need some power.

Cunningham - The cunningham should be eased to keep the draft as far back as possible. Leave plenty of wrinkles in. If the wind has dropped uncleat the cunningham and ease the mainsheet real quick to get the mainsail to move up the mast track. Spraying a little McLube on the mast track and on the main luff rope will also help.

Backstays –It's very important to have no tension on the upper backstay. This will give the jib maximum sag and fullness. The lower backstay is a little trickier. You don't want to pull it on too soon, if the crew is not hiking you probably can't use the extra fullness but as soon as your crew drops over the side you can make the main fuller to develop more lift. This will help to keep them over the side and result in more height as well. The helm will increase but in this condition this is a good thing. You just have to experiment to see how much you can pull on. Watch the boats around you.

Jib trim – Make sure you have just enough tension on the jib downhaul to pull out the wrinkles but no more. You might want to keep a few wrinkles in to make sure you are not too tight. Jib lead stays the same but the crew will need to trim the sheet a little more often as the wind changes keeping the leech on the mark on the spreader.

Mainsheet trim– more trim will give you more power, just make sure you don't over do it and put on the brakes. You just have to look at the boats around you and experiment with more or less mainsheet tension to see what's right for the conditions.