

Light Air Sailing

By Bob Gray (not to be confused with Bob Stay), US 4654

This isn't about racing, it's about keeping any style or age DN moving in light air. The typical occasional sailor spends a lot of time pushing or standing around while the more experienced sailor sails on by. Believe it or not, having the most expensive equipment isn't as big an advantage as you might think. Setting your boat up properly and using some basic skills will make all the difference in the world.

In light airs, the plate runners that most sailors have work just great. What's key is having your runners lined up as nearly perfect as possible. Our club spent several hundred dollars for a professional set of runner aligners. They are for everyone's use. Two guys can align a boat's runners in five minutes. If you're not lined up you might as well sit on your boat and drink beer (not a bad idea). Don't worry about a flexible mast or a limber plank or a new sail, the old stuff works just fine.

The technique for light air sailing is quite simple, keep your tell tails flying. First you have to have "tell tails." You need two sets of them located on the section of the sail just above the second long batten from the bottom. The first set should be located about 10" behind the luff (leading edge) of the sail and the second set about 12" in front of the leech (trailing edge) of the sail. When the boat is up to speed all the tell tails should be flowing straight back. Starting up in light winds is where the problem begins. Typically the inexperienced sailor over sheets his sail. Here's how to do it correctly. The first thing you want to do is to get the leeward (far side of the sail) aft tell tail flowing straight back. If it's falling down, ease the sheet until it flows straight back. At this time the forward leeward tell tail should also be flowing back, however the aft tell-tail is the most important. Your speed should start building and as it does you can start sheeting in the sail. This will get the windward tell tails flowing back. If the aft leeward tell tail drops while you're sheeting in, ease the sheet. You have to keep this tell tail flowing. Eventually as your speed builds, they all will flow straight back. In normal winds whenever the boat is slow, such as when starting or at times tacking, watch that aft leeward tell tail and keep it flowing, it's the secret to slow or light air sailing.

That's all there is to basic light air sailing. Follow these few principles and your sailing will improve greatly.