

CHANGING GEAR

You are going well. The boat is flying and you are up with the pack. Then, quite suddenly, horribly, and often without apparently altering anything, it all changes. To leeward boats point higher and go faster and the windward boats start to roll over. So, what has happened? Why are things going wrong and what can you do about it?

Firstly, DON'T PANIC. You were going well and can do so again, providing that you are logical. So, identify whether it's a pointing problem or a speed deficiency and then apply a check list of cures. Don't forget to alter only one thing at a time and then give it a chance to work before going on to try the next.

So, you need to POINT HIGHER.

1. Q. Is the Mainsail leech too open?
A. Try tightening it by:
 - a) increasing main sheet tension
 - b) increasing kicking strap tension
 - c) bring the boom closer to the centreline

Use the angle of the top batten to the boom as your guide, ideally it should be parallel. The top windtuft should, in fact, be streaming aft most of the time, but stalling it, up to 40% of the time should give the best pointing ability, although at the expense of speed.

2. Q. Is the Mainsail too flat?
A.
 - a) straighten mast
 - b) ease clew outhaul

If the mainsail is too flat the leech is likely to be too open and the slot between the foresail leech and the front of the main too wide. A good guide here is that if the main luff does not backwind in medium conditions from time to time, then the mast is too bent. Also the sail can have large diagonal creases which in extreme cases will flutter.

3. Q. Is the Foresail too full at the luff?
A.
 - a) increase rig tension
 - b) ease luff cunningham until luff has minute wrinkles.
 - c) move fairlead closer to the centreline.

Identify this problem by luffing up rather more than usual to see if the whole luff length collapses at the same time. As increasing the rig tension straightens out the angle of attack, it is possible to go too far and make the sail difficult to "read".

4. Q. Is the Foresail leech too open?
A.
 - a) sheet foresail harder
 - b) move fairlead forward
 - c) reduce mast rake
 - d) increase jib halliard tension

This problem shows itself when luffing up more than is usual. If the top windward windtuft collapses first, tensioning the foresail halliard reduces rake, raises the clew and so tensions the leech.

5. Q. Is the Helm too neutral and has no "feel"?
A.
 - a) increase mast rake
 - b) sit further forward
 - c) angle centreboard forward

Some "feel" is necessary to the helm in order to keep the boat on track when the helm is looking elsewhere. Up to 70% of windward concentration is spent in looking outside the boat in anticipating what changes in the environment are about to affect the boat.

So, try one adjustment at a time, waiting a while to see if it makes an improvement.

