

EXPERT ON BOARD

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Fly your spinnaker with confidence

Advice from John Goode on hoisting, trimming, dropping and packing your kite

In light conditions, a spinnaker should give better downwind performance than any other sail. This is worth bearing in mind given that last summer's winds were often Force 3 or less. Being able to add even one extra knot of boat speed while on a light air passage is always welcome. A spinnaker also adds a bit of colour and excitement to our off-wind sailing!

Despite the spinnaker's much publicised advantages, many cruising sailors are wary of flying one. But with a light following wind, plenty of open water ahead, and perhaps an additional crewmember aboard to lend a hand, I'd encourage you to at least give it a go if the opportunity arises.

Although yachts of different sizes and layout will have a diversity of spinnaker handling kit, the basic principles required to hoist, trim and drop this big sail are very much the same on all of them. Only after first gaining confidence with these three sequences is it time to move on to gybing – as illustrated in the last part of this article. While the technique for gybing will differ slightly from boat to boat, it can be quite straightforward provided everything is taken slowly and one step at a time.

Please bear in mind that the old adage of 'different ships, different long-splices' applies to quite a lot of what's shown here. Things might be done differently, for example, on a more racy yacht, with an experienced kite-flying crew.



ALL PHOTOS: JOHN GOODE. DIAGRAMS: MAXINE HEATH



ABOVE: Our popular cruising chute demonstration at last year's boat show

Fly a spinnaker at the boat show

Following the success of last year's cruising chute demo at the London Boat Show, *Yachting Monthly* and Hyde Sails are again supporting this popular feature at the show from 6–15 January at ExCeL.

This time, as well as running a repeat of the cruising chute demo, the team from Southern Sailing will show how to hoist, trim, gybe and drop a spinnaker confidently in easy stages.

The realistic simulator, designed by John Goode to resemble the rig and deck of a typical cruising yacht, with huge fans generating wind to fill the sails, will also be used by Sunsail to demonstrate

more advanced spinnaker techniques for racing sailors. While the fans are off there will be clinics on packing a spinnaker, rigging a furling chute and more top racing tips from experts.

Scan this 'QR code' with your smartphone or visit www.yachtingmonthly.com/cruisingchute to see a video of the cruising chute demo



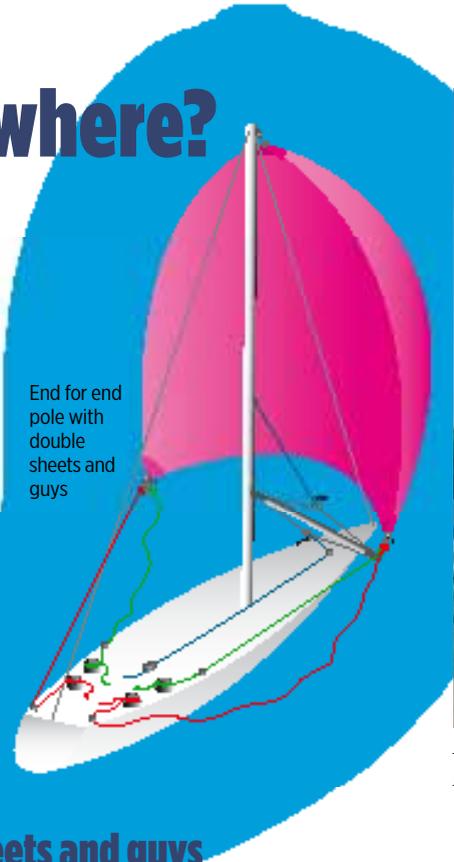
See the video
For instructions
see News, p8.

What goes where?

End for end pole

If you haven't flown a spinnaker before, you and your crew will put to sea with a lot more confidence if you work out where everything goes, and that it all works, while still tied to the dock. Choose a berth with a light wind on the quarter and take as long as required to set the rig up to the pre-hoist stage – and even better if the wind is so light that the spinnaker can be hoisted and dropped as well.

Note that although the bottom two corners of a spinnaker are labelled 'tack' and 'clew', these names change when the sail is gybed. Throughout this article, the tack is always named as the corner of the spinnaker being hauled back by the pole – and the clew the corner that's attached to the working sheet.



ABOVE: Before flying a spinnaker for the first time, I advise practising setting it up before leaving the dock

Setting up double sheets and guys

On a mid-sized yacht which requires the doubling-up of sheets and guys to enable a controlled gybe (see p41), they are led outside the stanchions and shrouds, back to the cockpit winches via sidedeck turning blocks.

The guy, which will take the most load and require a more downward pull on the pole, is led through the forward turning block to the primary winch. The sheet, which will be under less of a load when trimming, is led through the aft turning block to the secondary winch.

Before we're ready to hoist, the spinnaker's turtle is tied down on the lee foredeck with its halyard led outside of the (over-sheeted) headsail and connected to the head. The

leeward sheet and guy, leading directly from the cockpit, are connected to the clew – and the weather sheet and guy, led via the end of the pole, to its tack. When ready to hoist, the tack is hauled to the end of the pole.

To prevent twists and enable easy attachment, all lines connected to a spinnaker require an easily tripped swivel shackle and a plastic ball to prevent their ends jamming in blocks or the pole's jaw.

With a double sheet and guy set-up, the sheet is led over the pole-end and connected to the spinnaker with an easily tripped, swivelling snap shackle. The guy is led through the pole's jaw, to the sheet's snap shackle.



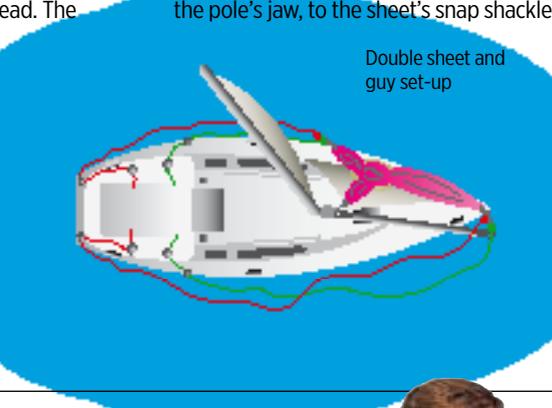
ABOVE: Tie down the bag, or turtle, on the lee foredeck.



RIGHT: The weather sheet and guy are led via the end of the pole



ABOVE: The primary winch takes the guy's heavier load



ABOVE: A swivel shackle prevents twists. A plastic ball prevents it jamming in the pole's jaw

An 'end for end' pole

As its name suggests, an 'end for end' pole has identical end fittings, with the plunger of each jaw connected by a trip line, so that they can easily be swapped between being attached to the (height adjustable) mast fitting and the spinnaker's guys.

So that the pole can be raised and swung from side to side during a gybe, the topping lift is connected to the middle of an upper bridle. The downhaul, which is led from a turning block on the foredeck, is connected to the middle of a lower bridle. The load on the downhaul can be considerable, so we'll have more control if it's led aft to a coachroof-mounted winch.



ABOVE: An 'end for end' pole has identical end fittings and jaws

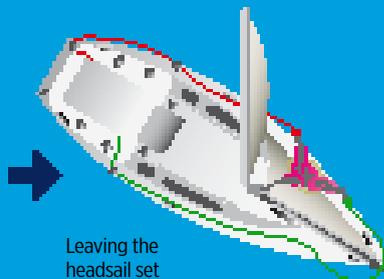


ABOVE: The topping lift is connected to an upper bridle and the downhaul connected to a lower bridle

Hoisting the spinnaker

With our boat on a broad reach, set the rig up as shown on the previous page. Take plenty of time to make sure that the spinnaker's turtle is tied down beneath the (over-sheeted) headsail and that a sheet or guy hasn't been inadvertently led over a guardrail. Check, too, that there are no stopper knots in any of the spinnaker's running rigging – which we must always be able to let run free instantly.

As well as creating a lee, the set headsail will eliminate the risk of the spinnaker wrapping around the forestay while it's being hoisted.



Leaving the headsail set should prevent a forestay-wrap

1



ABOVE: After a final check to see that everything is in the right place, and that our well-briefed crew are standing by their designated lines, the spinnaker is now ready to hoist

Hoist in the wind shadow of main and headsail

2



ABOVE: Take the slack out of the sheet, then tension the guy until the tack is pulled to the pole-end and the pole is just off the forestay

3



ABOVE: With the sheet secured and the guy around a winch ready to be hauled, hoist away on the spinnaker halyard as quickly as possible

4



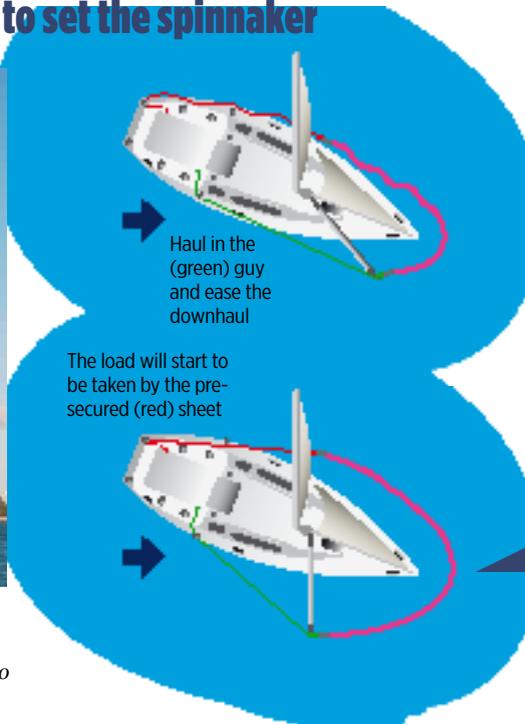
ABOVE: Keep hoisting the spinnaker quickly (there should be very little load at this stage) until it's all the way up, then secure its halyard

Haul the pole back smartly to set the spinnaker

5



ABOVE: Haul smartly on the guy and ease the downhaul as the pole is pulled back. Be ready for the increased load as the spinnaker starts to fill as it's dragged out of the wind shadow



Haul in the (green) guy and ease the downhaul

The load will start to be taken by the pre-secured (red) sheet

6



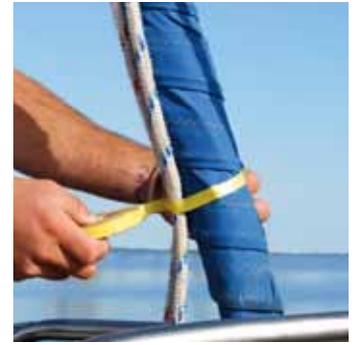
ABOVE: Keep winching away on the guy, while carefully easing the downhaul, until the load is taken up on the secured sheet and the strongly drawing spinnaker is fully set in clean air

Furl headsail and tidy up control lines

With the pole braced back and the sheet roughly trimmed to keep the spinnaker full, roll in (or drop) the headsail and then linger awhile on the initial hoisting run. Take time to ensure there aren't any lines trailing over the side (which can easily be drawn into a spinning propeller if it isn't locked off) and generally tidy up around the cockpit and deck so that all sheets, guys and halyards are tangle-free and ready for instant use. Once accustomed to being towed along by the spinnaker, we can then start to improve its shape and stability.



ABOVE: Watch for any trailing lines once the sail is hoisted



ABOVE: Lightly taping-up the headsail's sheets can keep the foredeck uncluttered

Trimming the spinnaker

Still on the hoisting point of sail, don't worry too much about fine-tuning the spinnaker beyond the rough rule-of-thumb of keeping the pole level and aligning it (and the mainsail's boom) at right angles to the wind.

Basic sail trim (like that of a headsail) is achieved by playing the sheet until the luff just starts to flutter. On a spinnaker this is indicated by its luff just starting to curl inwards. If the wind heads you, a collapse can be prevented by quickly

sheeting in hard or bearing away from the wind. Cruising yachts on passage often accept a fraction less speed by slightly over-sheeting the spinnaker so that a course can be maintained without having to constantly trim to the ever-shifting wind direction.

RGHT: Keep the spinnaker trimmed by playing its sheet so that the luff is just starting to curl inwards

Luff just curling



Adjust height of pole

Along with trimming the spinnaker's sheet and the alignment of its pole to the wind, adjusting the height of the pole – so that the tack is level with the clew – will have the sail drawing nicely.

Too high and the spinnaker will tend to swing and roll the boat to leeward in stronger winds. Too low, and it'll swing and roll to windward. At the correct height, you'll find the sail will pull evenly and help keep the boat upright in a lively seaway.

POLE TOO HIGH



ABOVE: If the pole is too high (the tack higher than the clew) the sail will tend to swing and roll the boat to leeward in a stronger wind

POLE TOO LOW



ABOVE: If the pole is too low (the tack lower than the clew), the sail will have a tendency to swing and roll the boat to windward

CORRECT HEIGHT



ABOVE: With the pole at the right height (tack and clew level) the spinnaker pulls evenly and helps keep the boat upright in a lively seaway

Trimming contd

From a run to a reach

When rounding up from a run onto a broad reach, and then a beam reach, the pole is gradually eased forward until it's solidly braced just off the forestay. As the apparent wind increases – and a larger area of spinnaker comes clear of the mainsail's lee – the combined load on pole's guy will be considerable in all but the lightest wind.

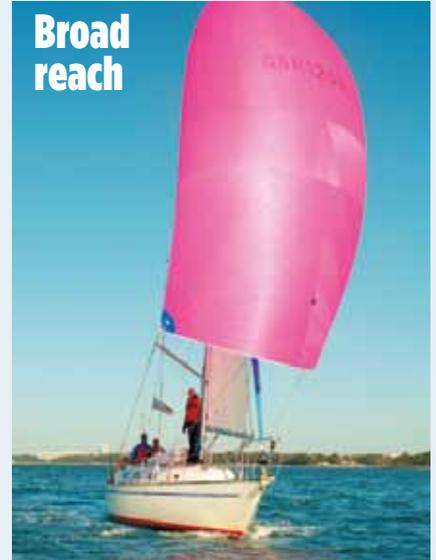
If the wind is fresh as we make the turn it's particularly important to prevent the pole from shooting skywards – potentially causing a broach – by ensuring that the guy is eased very carefully and, simultaneously, the downhaul is taken in and constantly kept under tension.

Running



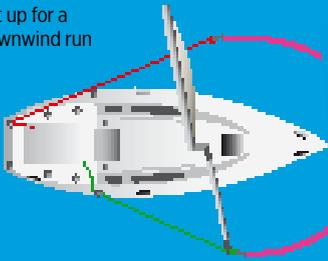
ABOVE: Before turning from a run onto a reach, be aware of the tendency for the pole to rise (and potentially induce a broach) if the guy and downhaul aren't kept under constant tension

Broad reach



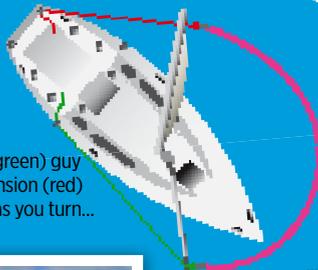
ABOVE: When brought round onto a broad reach, keep hauling in on the downhaul as the guy is eased to allow the pole to move forward

Set up for a downwind run



Ease pole forward

Ease (green) guy and tension (red) sheet as you turn...



...until the pole is held just off the forestay



Beam reach



ABOVE: Coming onto a beam reach, ease the guy and keep tensioning the downhaul until the pole is braced just off the forestay

On a beam reach, the load on the guy is at its greatest, with the lead of its fixed turning block often such that the tensioned guy can bend stanchions or put undue strain on the weather shrouds. To get a better lead on this point of sail, clip a snatch block and lanyard onto the guy – or simply use a short line and bowline – to haul the guy down to a further forward/outboard position (see right).



Beware of increase in apparent wind



UPWIND FORCE 5

ABOVE: With the sun shining and a gentle breeze blowing us along nicely, don't be taken by surprise by a rapid increase in the apparent wind strength when we round up onto a reach



DOWNWIND FORCE 3

lead forward and lower pole as apparent wind freshens'



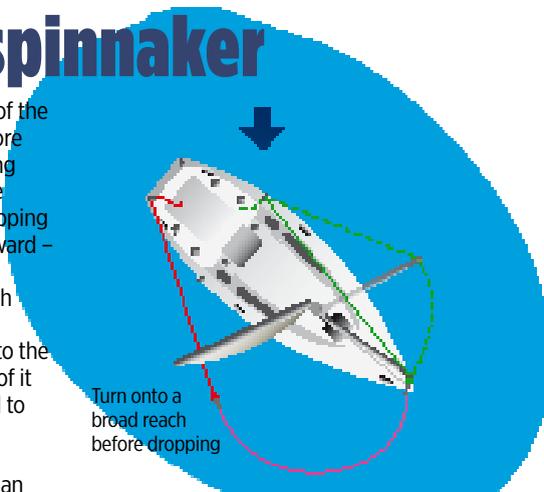
ABOVE: As the apparent (or true) wind rises, flatten the spinnaker to lower its centre of effort, reducing its tendency to roll the boat, by lowering the pole and moving the sheet-lead slightly forward

Dropping the spinnaker

Dropping a spinnaker is essentially a reverse of the sequence in which it was hoisted. By once more putting the boat onto a broad reach and taking advantage of the mainsail's wind shadow, the spinnaker can be instantly de-powered by tripping its tack – allowing it to flag harmlessly to leeward – before being gathered into a tight 'sausage' and then lowered down into the cabin through the main companionway.

Because the spinnaker is kept full right up to the instant it's tripped to leeward, there's no risk of it wrapping around the forestay, hence no need to re-set the headsail before the drop.

To ensure that the trip works smoothly, it's important that the snap shackle is fitted with an easily gripped trip-cord. And, because there's likely to be quite a load on the guy-tensioned pole, always stand on its leeward side so that it doesn't spring back and cause injury when the snap shackle is released.



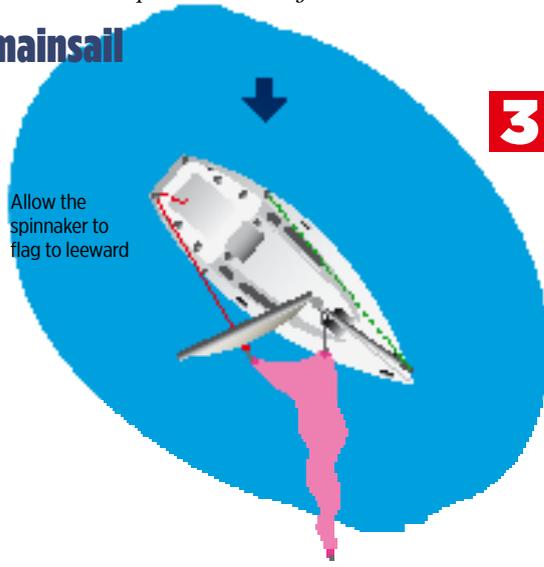
RIGHT: Put the boat on a broad reach with the pole eased forward and, if necessary, with its end lowered so that it's braced (guy and downhaul secured) just off the forestay with the tack's trip cord within easy reach



Trip tack and let flag in lee of mainsail



ABOVE AND INSET: Trip the tack with a sharp pull on the sheet's snap shackle trip-cord



ABOVE: Haul in on the sheet while the spinnaker flags downwind in the lee of the mainsail

Gather in foot and lower down below



ABOVE: Gather in the spinnaker's foot, make a 'sausage' behind the mainsail, then lower away



ABOVE: Continue lowering the spinnaker while stuffing the 'sausage' down the companionway



ABOVE: We can now re-set the headsail and repack the spinnaker in the cabin

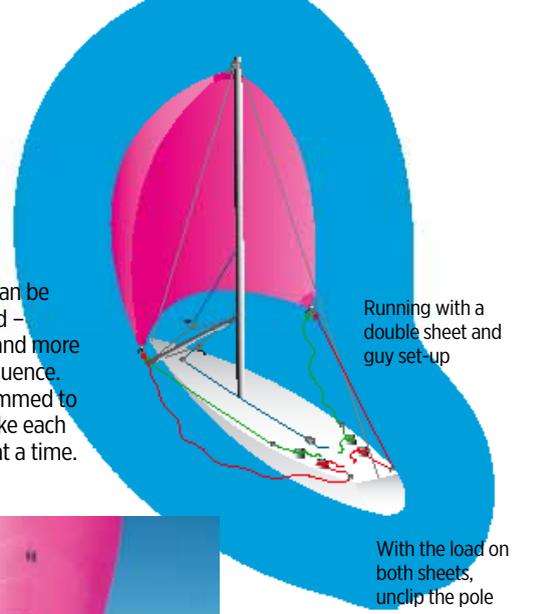
Gybing End for end – with double sheet & guy

With a practised and sufficiently numerous crew, the coordinated gybing sequence of a spinnaker – with the mainsail kept drawing until it's gybed during the last part of the manoeuvre – can be conducted without incident in a much more flowing sequence than illustrated here.

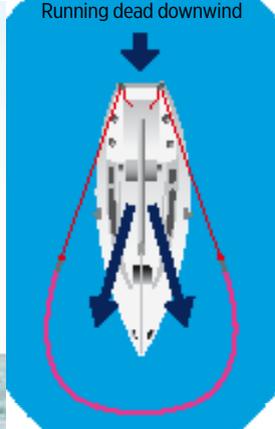
However, when gybing a spinnaker for the first

time, the risk of a collapse or forestay wrap can be greatly reduced if the mainsail is kept centred – allowing clean air to keep the spinnaker full and more easily controlled – throughout the whole sequence.

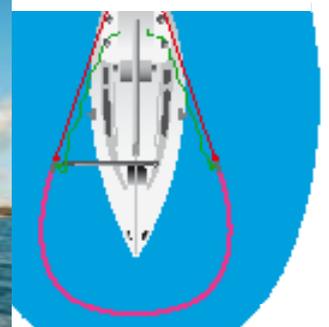
While it's important to keep the sheets trimmed to prevent a collapse, the key to success is to take each separate stage of the gybe one careful step at a time.



ABOVE: On a dead run, haul the mainsail in flat to funnel the wind evenly. Take the load of the spinnaker onto both sheets, then ease the guy, topping lift and downhaul to create some working slack for the pole



ABOVE: With the load on both sheets and as the boat tracks dead downwind, carefully unclip the pole from the mast. Leave the jaws at the outer end of the pole clipped around the old working guy



ABOVE: With the pole clipped around the old working guy and hanging from its topping lift, swing it across the boat towards the new one



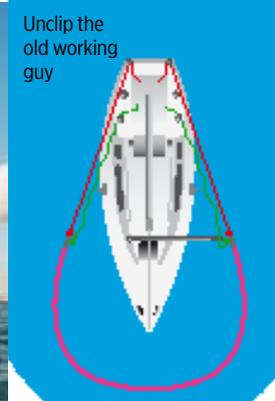
ABOVE: Swing the uphaul-supported pole carefully across the boat towards the new working guy



ABOVE: Clip the end of the pole onto the new working guy. Note that at this stage both guys are still attached to the ends of the pole



ABOVE: Swing the pole inboard again and unclip it from the old working guy. Then lead the end of the pole back towards the mast attachment. Stand by to readjust all of its control lines



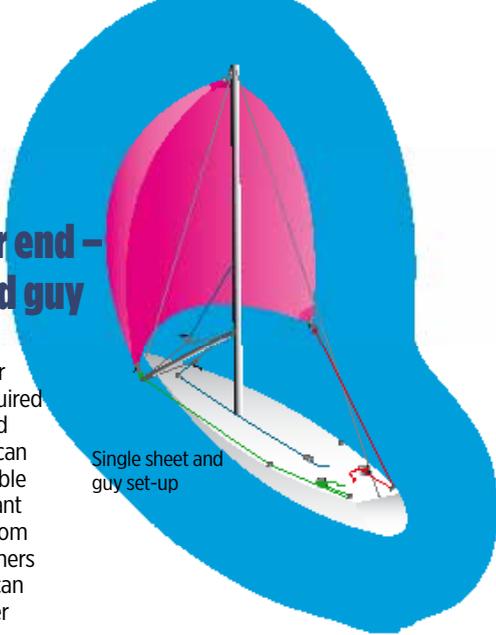
ABOVE: With the pole back on the mast and slack taken out of the topping lift and downhaul, take the load on the new working guy and sheet. Ease the mainsail to starboard, slacken the lazy sheet and complete the gybe



Gybing End for end – with single sheet and guy

On smaller, more lightly crewed boats, with correspondingly smaller spinnakers and the size of gear required to handle them, the dimensions and loads are often such that the gybe can be executed without having to double up on guys and sheets. It is important to make sure that the single lines from each of the spinnaker's bottom corners are within reach and that the pole can be transferred from one to the other without destabilising the sail.

With this set-up, a useful tip worth remembering is that a sheet can be quickly changed into a (more forward positioned) guy with the use of a snatch block and lanyard – as we have already seen on p38.

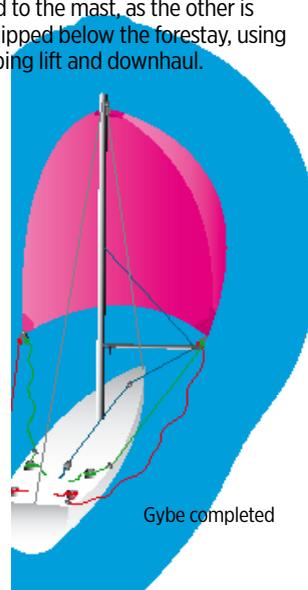
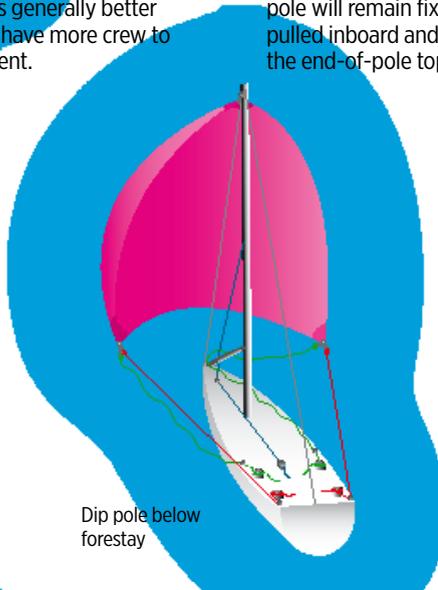
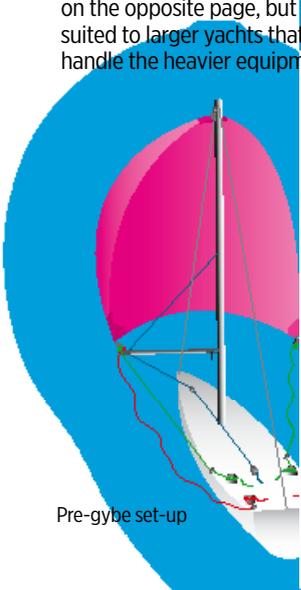


ABOVE: The sequence is the same as with double lines, but ensure you can swap the pole without problems

Gybing Dip-pole, with double sheets & guys

Dip-pole gybing with an extra sheet and guy follows the same basic sequence as that shown on the opposite page, but is generally better suited to larger yachts that have more crew to handle the heavier equipment.

While the spinnaker is kept flying on the two sheets, this time during the gybe one end of the pole will remain fixed to the mast, as the other is pulled inboard and dipped below the forestay, using the end-of-pole topping lift and downhaul.



With the pole-end hanging just above the foredeck and with the new working guy in hand, the old working guy is unclipped. Then, taking care to feed it into the pole's jaws the correct way (as shown above), the new working guy is attached before the pole is raised and pulled back until it once again takes the load on the spinnaker. Slackening the new lazy sheet and guy then completes the gybe.

Packing

To ensure a loosely packed spinnaker runs up smoothly, remove any twists or tangles and leave its three corners (marked head, tack and clew) sticking out of its bag, or turtle. Here we show it packed on deck but it's best done below, out of the wind.

Find and tie up the sail's head, or ask someone to hold it. Then 'chase' each side down to the tack and clew. Keeping these corners separated and starting at the bottom, stuff sail into the bag. Leave its three corners protruding, ready to take the halyard, sheet and guy. ▲



Tie up the head and remove any twists...



...by 'chasing' down each side of the sail



Bundle it in with the corners protruding

Thanks to

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