

It's The Little Things That Make The Difference – More Tips from Stavros

Martin 'Stavros' Payne · IDA Yearbook 2016 (2015 Review • 2016 Preview), pp. 18-19

Summary. Martin 'Stavros' Payne sets out the sequence of small rig and trim changes that keep a Dragon at speed as conditions change. When over-powered: release the mast ram to bend the mast at deck level, add runner to open both leeches and harden the forestay, trim both sails in, then drop the traveller to keep the boom on the centre-line; in chop do the reverse with runner, sheets and traveller and bear away rather than pinch. He then breaks down the perfect tack (small tiller push, genoa not un-cleated until the boom crosses the centre-line, tiller centred as the boom crosses) and a smooth gybe with the boat heeled to windward and a course change of only 5–10 degrees.

The game moves on... more tips from Stavros

There are any number of ways to improve team-work, which in turn, will not only make your racing more enjoyable, but also enhance the performance of the boat. This can lead to more confident manoeuvres which will gain you places on the racecourse.

Here are a few 'suggestions' to help club and less experienced Dragon sailors get the most out of their time spent on the water.

In last year's magazine I wrote about the 'Little Things that make the Difference', as it is seldom just one adjustment that changes 'gear' to improve boat speed, or can change the rig to ease the 'weather' helm on the tiller to help with the steering. No, it's usually a number of sequences that have to happen before the boat feels 'alive' again and is back up to speed.

Let me explain. One of the most common questions I get asked is 'Stavros, what's the best thing to do when the boat starts to be over-powered?' Good question, simple answer, Hike Harder :-). However, by just hiking, the boat will still probably heel giving the helm more pressure on the rudder as the hull slips sideways. Meanwhile the 'slick' and well drilled teams will have already made their changes to the rig and coped with the increased wind pressure as though it never happened...

So what did they do?

1. Letting the mast bend at deck level by releasing the mast ram is a quick way to flatten the lower part of the mainsail which will immediately relieve the pressure on the helm.
2. More wind is usually a signal for more runner. This will pull the top half of the mast back and open the leeches of both the main and genoa. It will also harden the forestay.

3. With the leaches now more open both sails need to be trimmed in, this will help to maintain pointing.
4. With the increased mainsheet tension the traveller can now be lowered down the track, just enough to keep the boom on the centre-line of the boat.

If the wind decreases then everything must be quickly and more importantly automatically reversed to power up the boat. So four quick but very necessary changes that teams need to make as soon as the boat becomes over-powered.

Another question often asked is ‘Stavros, We just stopped today in the choppy water, it was as though we simply ‘parked up!’ So what to do? Well choppy seas can arrive through any number of reasons, wind against tide, powerboat wash, fellow competitors’ wash or just an increase in wind strength will do it, so try these simple adjustments to maintain boat speed.

1. Ease runner tension, this will allow the genoa to become more powerful which in turn will help to drive through the chop.
2. If you ease the runner, you must automatically ease the sails because by easing just the runner the leaches will be too closed.
3. The boom will now be below the centre-line, so that needs to be pulled up on the traveller.
4. Helm should put the bow down, this will keep the boat moving, even in the most difficult wave conditions. Try to resist ‘pinching’ this will just stop the boat.

Of course there also needs to be a few other considerations. Do all crew need to be on the windward side? Should one crew go into the middle of the boat? Is the genoa leach the correct distance from the spreader? If not, then the barber needs to be adjusted. Are we still going the right way? But by getting the ‘basics’ right as soon as a change is required it makes everything so much less stressful.

The Perfect Tack

Let’s just now analyse how to improve tacking, a simple manoeuvre yet so much can be gained or lost on every tack! Let’s assume there is sufficient wind for all 3 or 4 crew to be sat on the windward side. The helm then initiates the tack by pushing the tiller away, but only slightly and never outside the coaming (unless of course avoiding another boat). Once the genoa starts to back the boat will continue to turn through the wind, but all crew should remain in position. Depending on which ‘release’ system you have for the genoa, will decide how soon the crew responsible for tacking the course sheet has to enter the boat. However, the genoa must not be un-cleated until the boom crosses the centre-line. Released too soon and the genoa will get trapped between the mast and the shrouds, released too late and the boat spins away from the wind. So the timing of the genoa release is critical and also will help with the pulling in of the new sheet. Meanwhile the helm and other crew should be crossing the boat together with all the team hitting the windward side of the boat ‘together’. If the helm also centres the

tiller when the boom crosses, this will keep the boat at the perfect angle coming out of the tack. It will also prevent any counter-steering required to bring the boat back on course. If the tiller is centred too late it will create drag and show an 'S' in the boat's wake (easy to check/view after each tack). Practiced enough times by a dedicated team, time after time, this will eventually produce the 'Perfect Tack'.

A Nice Gybe

When to gybe downwind is as important as choosing when to tack upwind, the whole reason we now sail windward/leeward courses is to keep the race 'alive' at all times. No time to sit back, open up the snack boxes and take out the sandwiches! No, you need to sail in the most pressure and best course to the next mark/gate. So gybing should be practiced as much as tacking, so let's assume we have a decent wind and we are sailing deep with the pole aft and the spinnaker flying away nicely.

Having the boat heeled slightly to windward will minimise the drag on the rudder and also help to sail even deeper, with crew weight forward, including the helm we are now ready to perfect a nice gybe. As with the tack, the helm initiates the manoeuvre only this time by pulling the helm. This need only change the course by between 5 to 10 degrees, (less wind steer bigger angle).

As the boat rolls slightly to windward either the helm or middle crew can pull the main across (making sure the runner is released). Meanwhile the spinnaker trimmer should be giving the sail more ease so that the crew changing the pole has the freedom to detach the pole without fighting against each other. If the helm keeps the boat on course it becomes very easy to maintain a full spinnaker throughout the manoeuvre. Problems only arise if the boat is over or under-steered, sometimes a little pole down-haul has to be eased to allow an easier re-setting. As soon as the pole is clipped on it should be pulled back to enable the spinnaker to fly away from the pole end. Remember, always ease the spinnaker, don't over-sheet or make sudden moves.

In closing this article I hope that some of you try one or two things next time you go afloat. Nothing can beat time on the water, practice, practice, practice. Take the time to arrive early at your different events in 2016, so that you don't simply rig the boat and go directly to the races. Have at least a day or half day to try out your manoeuvres so that they become second nature, to give everyone on board more confidence and inspire your team to achieve better results and more fun on the water.

Higher, Faster, Longer...

— Stavros

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