

Dragon Sail Trimming with Jamie Lea

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Summary. Jamie Lea, 2024 Gold Cup winner, double World Champion and North Sails expert, explains how to trim a Dragon for different conditions. In light wind and flat water he flattens both sails by easing the barber hauler and genoa halyard, tensioning the outhaul, possibly easing the ram, and keeping runners soft. In medium wind and chop he powers up with the barber hauler pulled on and in, more halyard tension (just enough to leave tiny wrinkles), maximum ram, the outhaul eased slightly and the top mainsail telltale flying about 80% of the time. He calls runner tension the single most effective adjustment, recommends an inclinometer to find the best heel angle, offers “if in doubt, ease it out” as a reset when slow, and stresses constant helm feedback to the trimmers.

Jamie Lea, 2024 Dragon Gold Cup Champion, double World Champion and sail expert at North Sails shares some essential top tips on sail trimming to make your Dragon fast.

When aiming for maximum speed in a Dragon there is not one set of fundamentals. You must consider the conditions; wind speed, sea state and what mode you’re looking for at a given time.

In light winds and flat water, you are looking at flattening the sail shape in both the genoa and mainsail, as you’re not looking for depth in the sails to help power through choppy waves. If sea state is flat, you might be able to sail a higher mode up wind with slightly tighter leeches without fear of hitting a bad set of waves and losing boat speed.

Don’t over trim the leech tension in both sails, and if you feel the speed coming off just give a little ease of the sheets, press the bow down a little and build speed again. A fuller sail set up can generate more drag in the lighter wind speed, so by easing the barber hauler to flatten the base of the genoa, easing genoa halyard tension to ensure the entry off the luff is not too deep, tensioning the outhaul on the mainsail and possibly easing the mast ram (you might need to tighten the elastic to get the ram to push bend into the mast) you can achieve a flatter sail set up. Runner tension would also be quite soft in these conditions with just enough tension to keep the headstay under control and a fair bit of headstay sag.

When sailing in medium wind with a choppy sea state you would be looking for maximum power in the sail plan.

GENOA To help achieve this, the genoa barber hauler can be pulled on and in-board to generate more depth in the base of the genoa. Increase halyard tension but just enough so you can still see tiny wrinkles, ensuring there is a more rounded entry off the luff of the genoa. The leech telltale needs to be flying all the time, but because of the steeper sheet angle careful trimming is needed so as not to let

the telltale start to stall if the wind speed drops. Be ready to give both main and genoa sheets a little ease if you encounter some big choppy waves too.

MAINSAIL Maximum ram pulled on keeps the mast straight and helps deepen the mainsail. Outhaul eased slightly gives a bit of depth to the base and traveler pulled to windward, so that the boom is on the centreline of the boat for the given mainsheet tension. The top telltale on should be flying 80% of the time with a bit of stalling every now and again but ease the mainsheet to get the telltale flying again if you encounter excessive choppy waves.

When I first started sailing Dragons, someone once gave me some great advice if we ever encountered the go slows, they said...“If in doubt ease it out”. This has helped a lot and can be adopted for virtually any class of boat. If you can’t seem to get the boat going and you feel slow and a bit bound up, give the sheets a little ease, press the bow down a couple of degrees and your speed will start building again. It’s a kind of reset button!

One of the most important things in making and keeping a Dragon going fast, is getting the right balance and feel on the helm. Good communication and feedback from the driver is key in letting the trimmers know if the helm feels too heavy (weather helm with too much drag being created by the rudder) or they feel like they need more power to put more load on the helm if the wind eases.

From this feedback, the trimmers can make alterations to the trim of the sails to achieve the desired effect. You should have a very good idea what you’d be looking to adjust automatically, if for instance the breeze increases and you’re starting to get overpowered.

Things like genoa lead eased to flatten the base of the genoa, maybe a bit of ease on the genoa sheet if the traveler has been eased down the track, so as not to choke the slot between the leech of the genoa and leeward side of the main. More runner tension which tightens the headstay and will open the leeches in both the genoa and mainsail. After these alterations from the trimmers, a quick “That’s better” from the driver or “Still a bit heavy” will help keep the dialogue moving in the right direction.

Every team will be different in how they approach this type of communication, but it’s important to have this in place, so choose a way which best suits your crew’s style of working together.

MAINSAIL When trimming the mainsail there are some small adjustments that can make a positive difference in terms of boat speed.

Adjustment of runner tension would have the greatest effect to boat speed as it has such a big influence on so many other things for such a relatively small and easy change. It can have a big impact on headstay tension which in turn can drastically alter the setup of the genoa and also affects mast bend and mainsail set up too.

It's nothing new but I think a nice thing you can have on the boat is an inclinometer which shows you the angle of heel you are sailing at. The more you use it you can get a feel for the optimum amount of heel that is best for your set up and style of sailing when it's windy. It's good for light winds too, when the crew are having to sit/hike to leeward as it can show the amount of heel you need to keep a bit of feel on the helm.

The biggest things that impact boat speed negatively is not changing gears quickly and effectively enough. We all know that there are many variables in our sport with ever-changing wind conditions, sea states etc and so being on top of all these factors and trimming the sails accordingly is a must.

A top tip for maintaining consistent boat speed throughout a race is keeping a line of concise and efficient communication between the driver, trimmers and tactician as to how the setup of the boat feels. Whether it needs to be in a fast mode or a high pointing mode to hold a tight line and trimming accordingly. Choose a way to do this that is right for your team as something that works for one team might not work well for another's dynamics and personalities.

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