

BOATSPEED BY GEORGE SZABO

Move Your Leads the Other Way

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YOU'VE UNDOUBTEDLY HEARD THAT IF THE top of your jib luffs first you should move your lead forward, and if the bottom luffs first you need to Move the lead aft. It's good advice as a basic rule, but it doesn't go far enough when you're looking to optimize your jib-lead setting. I'm always experimenting with my jib leads, and I've learned some ways to go fast that you may find surprising.

Have you ever wondered why you're pointing low, but going really fast, or thought about why you're pointing high, but going really slow? Without fail, whenever I examine other boats on the racecourse at a championship event, I see a surprising number with their jib leads in the wrong position. What I've found is that light-air specialists always seem to position their leads too far aft and have their jib trimmed too tight, which leaves them pointing high but going slow. Others who normally sail in windier and choppier locations often have their leads too far forward, which allows them to foot and sail fast, but denies them any pointing ability. Your jiblead adjustment is one setting that is tempting to set once and leave, but as the windspeed and the wave heights change, you need to readjust, or be left behind.

It doesn't matter what boat I'm sailing; Stars, Thistles, Flying Juniors, or Snipes, in light air I move my jib leads aft, and in the breeze I move my leads forward and sheet the jib out farther. When I tell people this I usually get a puzzled look and I often hear, "I guess we've been doing it wrong for years now." It's not that they've been doing it wrong, it's just another technique.

When I move my leads aft and sheet the jib tighter in light air, it opens the leech of the jib and allows me to point better. As the breeze increases I like to move my leads forward and sheet the jib out, which opens the slot and allows me to foot more and keep my speed through chop and waves. This technique also keeps the jib from overtwisting, and helps balance the helm. Throughout this whole trim range the middle section of the jib leech is kept parallel to the centerline of the boat. This may be contrary to popular methods, but results prove that it works very well.

You'll need a few necessary reference tools to help you keep track of how your jib is trimmed, and help you duplicate settings each time you go sailing.

1. A number scale on the splash rail (or deck) to judge where the foot of the jib is. On the Snipe we put marks on the splashrail, a Thistle uses distance away from the side of the boat. On bigger boats, we use distance away from the shrouds.
2. Leech teiltales.
3. A spreader window in the mainsail, which allows us to see how far outboard the jib leech is from the spreaders or diamonds, and through which we can watch the angle of the leech.
4. A draft stripe (or reference marks) on the last foot of the middle seam on the leech of your jib. (This part of the sail is almost always set parallel to the centerline of the boat.)
5. Reference marks on the spreaders.

The fundamental thing to remember is to make sure that your jib works for you in all conditions. Here's my order of business for adjusting the jib leads on my Snipe.

0 to 5 knots-position leads aft

Goal: induce twist in sail and keep boat moving

In this kind of breeze, set your jib leads in the aft-most setting so that the foot of the jib is sheeted out 18 inches from the splash rail. Keep in mind here that the apparent wind is farther forward down low than it is at the masthead (to see this, place telltales on your shrouds, spaced two feet apart). In light air, the wind at the mast-head is significantly stronger than the wind at deck level, too. To accommodate for these anomalies in the wind, you'll need to twist the jib as much as possible. Because the boat is moving slowly, sheet the jib well outboard.

5 to 10 knots and flat water-move leads one hole forward

Goal: keep air flowing and point higher

As the wind increases, there's little difference in wind strength and apparent angle from the top of the mast to the water. If we kept the previous lead setting, the jib would twist too much, so we move the jib car one hole forward and sheet tighter, usually 15.5 inches off centerline. With this setting it's important to keep a close eye on your jib-lead telltale and make sure that it doesn't stall. If it's stalling, you either need to sheet farther out or move your lead back where it was.

5 to 10 knots and chop-move leads two holes forward and ease sheets

Goal: keep the boat powered in order to move through the waves

Once the waves start stacking up you need to sail wider angles to maintain boatspeed. If you keep the same light-air trim as the waves get bigger, the boat will be harder to steer and keep in the groove, and you won't be able to power through the waves. The solution is to give the jib a rounder shape by moving the lead forward, and sheeting out slightly to maintain your speed while keeping the leech from hooking. Sheet the foot of the jib to about 16.5 to 17 inches out at the splash rail. By sailing faster, you generate more flow over your foils and point higher than if you were sheeted tight, pointing high but going slow.

10 to 20 knots and waves-three holes forward

Goal: keep the boat moving, and depower the main

Once the wind peaks at 20 knots we move the lead forward another hole and sheet out to about 18 inches on the splash rail. We also tighten our shrouds at this point to tighten the forestay and help flatten the jib. If you have barberhaulers or outboard leads you will want to go to these now to help straighten the lower leech of the jib.

20 to 25 knots and beyond-leads aft to lighter-air setting *Goal: to keep leech twisted*

Once the breeze reaches this range, our headstay is usually starting to sag too far to leeward. When the headstay sags too much, the luff of the jib falls to leeward, the jib gets flatter, and the leech no longer stays twisted in puffs and begins to hook too much to weather, which slows the boat down. To prevent this, we move our leads aft, which helps twist open the jib leech to an angle similar to our light-air setting. We also ease sheets so that the foot of the jib is as much as 20 inches off centerline and the boat is reaching upwind to keep it from stopping in the waves. When you view the jib-leech angle through the spreader window, it should be hooked or parallel with the hull. No matter what boat you're sailing, or how you ultimately configure your jib leads, remember to keep the jib-leech telltale flowing. Keep the same leech angle as viewed through the spreader window, and always keep the last 12 inches of the middle seam of the jib parallel to the centerline of the boat.

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