GUY CRIBB

WORDS BY: GUY CRIBB INTUITION | **PHOTOS:** KADRI KAGU + B2B PICS BY WILL LAW

THIS MONTH I'M GOING TO HELP YOU BLAST DOWNWIND BY COVERING TURNING DOWNWIND, GETTING OVER WAVES, CONTROLLED SAILING WHEN OVERPOWERED AND PAIN RELIEF: FURTHER PREPARING YOU FOR THIS YEARS INTUITION BOURNEMOUTH TO BRIGHTON BLAST AT THE END OF JUNE / EARLY JULY.

GOING DOWN WITH GUY CRIBB

(part 2 of the INtuition Downwinder series)

ON THE BOURNEMOUTH TO BRIGHTON BLAST LAST YEAR, WE HAD GUSTS OF 55 KNOTS IN THE SOLENT, WITH AN AVERAGE WIND SPEED OF ABOUT 40KNOTS. WE PASSED LOCAL WINDSURFERS AT VARIOUS BEACHES STACKED ON 3.7M SAILS. I WAS ON A 6.2M!

POINTS OF SAILING

90% of advanced windsurfers go back and forth on a reach, to and from the beach across the wind. Being able to blast upwind on a short board is a major achievement and a very practical skill. But being able to blast downwind at real speed, doesn't just takes good skills, but big balls too.

And by the way, if anyone is planning on breaking speed records, it's going to happen on a broad reach (sailing downwind) not sailing across the wind. A VERY broad reach- a speed sailor's optimum angle for breaking records, is about 130 to 140 degrees off the wind- that's 40- 50 degrees more than a reach, yikes.

To sail at this kind of angle you need to be seriously powered up. So powered up that you find you can only either sail very upwind, or very downwind, as across the wind you'll be too out of control!

On the Bournemouth to Brighton Blast last year, we had gusts of 55 knots in the Solent, with an average wind speed of about 40knots. We passed local windsurfers at various beaches stacked on 3.7m sails. I was on a 6.2m! In order to control it I was pointing almost straight downwind, often at angles of 170 ish degrees off the wind- (I know this because whether I was on port or starboard I was pointing at the same place on the horizon.)

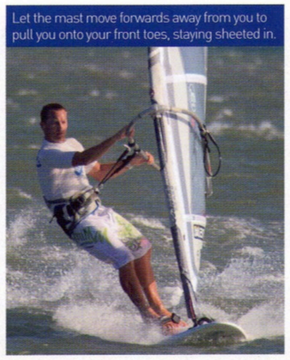
I would suggest for speed sailing you need to be on a sail around 2m larger than you are comfortable with on a reach. For the downwinder events (like B2B or downwind slalom) you need to be on a rig about .5 -1m larger than you're comfortable with on a reach, depending on your windsurfing ability.

The point here is the broader your sail, the easier it is to control, as the 'apparent wind' changes dramatically. For example: there's 20 knots of wind and you are sailing almost straight downwind at 20 knots boardspeed. You're travelling as fast as the wind and thus your board speed cancels out the wind speed and you become underpowered. Even when it gets windier, if you're sailing at 20 knots straight downwind, you've basically taken 20 knots of wind out of your sails, regardless of how windy it is, this was my lifesaver in last years B2B, and largely why top slalom sailors always seem to be on such big sails.

TURNING DOWNWIND OR 'BEARING OFF'

To turn onto a broad reach you need to bank the board over on the downwind side, by pressing hard onto your toes.To press hard enough onto your toes, pull on your backhand, which increases power in the sail. Use this power to lean the mast forwards and downwind by extending your front arm. This movement of the rig will pull you more above the board and onto your toes, enabling you to bank the board over. Try to increase weight onto your front toes especially to keep control of the board as you accelerate.


Get low and sheet in to increase sail power.


Let the mast move forwards away from you to pull you onto your front toes, staying sheeted in.

Until you become more comfortable with turning downwind, try to keep your back leg really bent to stay low down in a good defensive stance. As your confidence and technique improve, you can afford to be more upright over your front foot.

Turning downwind like this will increase your board speed, and send you ploughing into the back of waves, which might jar your speed and even cause a catapult. Or it might be so frightening you bottle it and sheet out, which is a disaster as once you've sheeted out, it's pretty much impossible to regain control of the sail, until you've turned back upwind or at least across the wind.

In last years Bournemouth to Brighton Blast turning downwind was the single most strenuous action for me as the acceleration was off the scale and the control all but vanished, but I always knew that if I could muscle it through this stage for about five or ten seconds of mayhem, then I would eventually find a sweet spot of control with the board pointing almost straight downwind. This sweet spot would last for between ten seconds and ten minutes, then something would go wrong- usually a nasty section of choppy water would suddenly reduce my board speed and as such the power would dramatically increase in my sail and I would lose control and be back to square one, stuck on a reach trying to turn downwind.

Tips

- Move your back hand back before turning downwind as this will give you better leverage over the boom and help tip the rig forwards.
- Crouch down low in your harness before turning downwind to ensure your kit is under control.
- Wedge your back foot into the back strap to give you more security should something go wrong.
- Turning downwind in flatter water or lighter winds is easier.
- Turn downwind much further than you think. I find my guests need to try and turn right downwind to actually turn even a little downwind.
- Try to use these skills to enter a carve gybe too.

GETTING OVER WAVES.

Now that you're sailing downwind, you will be sailing into and over the backs of waves in front. They will cause sudden drops in your board speed if you plough into them, resulting in massive surge of power into the rig (causing loss of control or catapult.)

You will need to learn to lighten the front of the board to lift over the waves, anticipating every one through serious concentration. But as you come over the crest you will need to get the nose going downhill again, otherwise it may get blown out of control. Both these actions are achieved with subtle rig control, sheeting in and sheeting out the sail.

To get over the back of the wave, sheet out a little. This reduces mast foot pressure, lightening the nose and allowing the board to lift over the wave rather than ploughing into it. As soon as you reach the peak, sheet in again to get the nose going downhill by increasing mast foot pressure. The lifting and lowering of the nose should be further assisted by your body weight leaning back onto the back foot and leaning forwards onto your front foot respectively.

Also, as you go down a wave face you might nose dive at the bottom, not a good look, but unless the wave is very steep this is extremely unlikely. Sheeting out a little as you drop down the face once again will lift the nose, and naturally, if you see the nose about to plough in, your body should react by dropping onto your back foot.


Gently sheeting out will reduce mast foot pressure allowing the nose to lift preventing it from ploughing into the waves

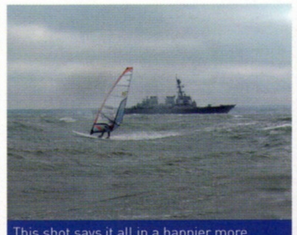
CONTROLLING THE RIG.


Oversheet the sail for more control.

To further reduce the power of the sail on a broad reach, you should sheet in more. Strange but true. Sheeting out would not only cause more power (at this angle to the wind) but also a total loss of mast foot pressure (down force) and thus control of the board.

Whereas over sheeting kills the power of the sail and allows you to stay upright over the board to control it.

This is best achieved still hooked in, with your back hand as far back as you can reach, cranking the sail right in so it's parallel with the board. This is how we made it from Bournemouth to Brighton with such big sails that infamous day a year ago.


This shot says it all in a happier more controlled moment from the B2B in better spaced waves exiting the Solent off Portsmouth- flying almost straight downwind, totally sheeted in, in a groove. You can see the angle I'm sailing by the frigate anchored in background which is pointing directly into the eye of the wind.


And here's a shot where it is all going wrong, the hell chop and 50 knot gusts in a narrower section of the Solent somewhere west of Calshot has both reduced board speed and increased power in the rig, and I've lost all control, back to square one.

CONTROL

Get low

If there's ever a single tip to get more control, whoever/ wherever you are, it's to get lower.

Getting low

Getting lower

This should increase tension into the harness lines, improving mast foot pressure (down force), lower your centre of gravity and take the power of the rig from your arms into your body weight instead. And if for some reason you're not hooked in it's still the best tip.

Unfortunately on a broad reach when you get lower your back leg has to bend more, increasing the physical strain. Try to swing your hips more parallel with your board, extending your back leg to reduce this strain.

Grip with the back foot

Gripping with the back foot (literally pretending it's a fist and clenching it/ pushing down with both the toes and heel) gives you much improved board control as it helps prevent the board rocking from side to side and vastly reduces risk of spin out. This is a surprisingly effective tip for increasing both control and board speed, and is vital if using a single back strap.

PAIN RELIEF

To ease the pain of long distance sailing, try to stand up over the board as much as possible, for as long as possible. Last month we covered all the tuning tips to help you achieve this, and this month we've looked at a number of ways to assist you, but nothing is as important as standing as upright as possible for long downwinders.

Stand above the board with your weight on your front foot

When you're in the correct position your front ankle should be pretty much at right angles, with most of your weight spread evenly over your front foot. If you're stood up now, reading this ridiculous INtuition feature, you'll note your ankle is at right angles and your weight is spread evenly over your foot (not just on heels or toes). This is what you need to aim for to relax your windsurfing and enable you to cover long distances, as for every moment you are crouched down lower, you'll be using more energy. Better to sail at 15-20 knots for 100 miles, than at 20-30 knots for a few miles.

SUMMARY

Sail as broad as possible to reduce power. If the rig goes light, this is a good sign that you are doing it right and you'll need to lean well forwards over the board to keep it flat and planing. At this stage you may realise that you need a bigger sail or less outhaul to increase power.

The rig's gone light and I'm underpowered- stretch everything forwards- especially the rig, even your head, to try to get more weight over the mast foot to keep the board flat and planing.

Use last months and this months' features to get used to sailing downwind and join me windsurfing from Bournemouth to Brighton on the first windy day after June 24th! The longest day, the longest distance!

Guy Cribb INtuition, Britain's Professional Windsurfing Coach.

At the next five courses in Morocco and Dahab there are only a total of four places left, as anyone who knows who to entrust their future windsurfing technique with has already booked up.

However, UK courses soon to be released at www.guycribb.com and two new trips for late summer early autumn are now available: Morocco at the end of August to get you ready for the Autumn jumping and carve gybing in rougher water and stronger winds, and Dahab to crack gybing, waterstarting and all round skills.

Please phone Planet Windsurf 0870 49 1949 for more info or email *guy@guycribb.com*

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