

MAST DEBATING

With Christmas coming up, now's a good time to think about some new windsurfing toys that will genuinely improve your performance. One area where spending an extra £100 is worth its weight on gold, literally, is on a lighter mast. In windsurfing (and most sports) lighter kit means better acceleration and stiffer kit often helps all-round performance. A 100% carbon mast is the dream stick to improve all aspects of your windsurfing.

The difference between the world's lightest masts at just under 1kg, and the heaviest – your old epoxy or aluminium one at over 3kgs – might only be a couple of kilos (your

weight difference before and after Christmas) and therefore seem irrelevant, BUT when that becomes 'swing' weight on a 5m long mast (levering you over and swinging around rig flips), those 2kilos feel like tonnes. Even half a kilo makes a massive difference, especially to beginners uphauling, waterstarters getting the rig out of the water, carve gybers flipping and wave sailors jumping. So, whoever you are, a lighter mast is going to help tremendously. So much so, it's worthy as a technique feature!

YOU'LL POKE AN EYE OUT WITH THAT!

Swing Weight Test: Go into your local windsurfing shop and select their heaviest and lightest masts of the same length and hold them at their bases as though you were jousting. Being careful not to smash the shop up, swing them around to see for your self what a huge difference their tiny weight difference makes.

The Djeridoo Test: Hold each mast vertically and give each one a smack to get them vibrating. The higher carbon content mast should stop its large vibrations quickest. On the water, sailing in chop, your mast is going to be vibrating all the time and so the higher the carbon content, the quicker your rig is going to return to its peak performance, improving your sail's wind range dramatically.

Left: The 'swing weight' difference between masts is most noticeable in manoeuvres such as the duck gybe



YOU'LL GO BLIND!

The world's lightest masts cost £1,000 each! So only a few of the world's best sailors get to enjoy them. The Neil Pryde X9 and North Accelerators at around £500 are more popular, so if you've got £500 sitting around doing nothing in your bank account, invest it in your mast and see how your windsurfing improves! Whatever you spend, make sure you stretch it to your limit buying masts.



Left: Moments when a light mast makes all the difference, to list just a few.

From top: Uphauling, waterstarting, rig flipping and jumping.

MAST



IS SIZE EVERYTHING?

About ten years ago when carbon masts often broke, 'skinny' masts with thicker walls were developed to be more durable in waves. Since then mast technology has come a long way and it's extremely rare for any masts to snap now unless in the most extreme conditions, which 99% of readers will never find themselves in. As a general rule, I'd only recommend buying skinny masts for sails specifically designed to be used on them.

Here's a Pros and Cons guide to Skinnies versus standard shaped masts:

Skinny Pros

Fractionally more durable in extreme wave conditions.
Easier to grab, not that you should ever grab your mast.

Skinny Cons

Higher centre of gravity means a heavier swing weight.
With no taper, the mast's bend characteristics don't allow sails to twist off in the head as much as a traditional mast.
Standard booms aren't a very solid fit on the mast, causing unbalance and lack of control by a lack of down force, (mast foot pressure).
Need to purchase special mast extensions.
Skinnies hurt more if they twat you, as they're sharper.



IT'S ALL ABOUT STAYING STIFF

On my coaching courses I'm always swapping my kit for my guests to tune theirs up. Heavy masts, (i.e. 30-50% carbon content ones) feel so dead compared with my 100% luxury models. So wobbly that in a straight line it's like hanging onto a mackerel and when it comes to flipping, the rig is so heavy I usually get pulled off. Then I can't waterstart because the rig weighs a tonne, so I try to uphaul but I don't have the strength for that either. Meanwhile my guests are miraculously waterstarting and finally getting round their gybes on my light kit, having the time of their lives.

I'm not a salesman; my job is strictly to improve your windsurfing, but the mast debate has concluded that using a lighter mast makes your windsurfing so much easier...it's worth splashing out on one.



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