

INTUITION SLALOM RACING OVERTAKING

WHETHER YOU'RE IN A RACE OR JUST OUT BLASTING, WHEN YOU LINE UP ALONGSIDE ANOTHER WINDSURFER THE WISH TO OVERTAKE THEM RUNS THROUGH YOUR HEAD RIGHT? I DON'T THINK I AM ALONE WITH THIS COMPETITIVENESS- IT IS AKIN TO WINDSURFING AND ONE OF THE 'BOY RACER' JOYS OF OUR SPORT.

During this series on slalom I'll cover various aspects that will enable you to windsurf faster- like tuning, speed and acceleration, but this month we've got a short article looking at the tactical overtaking moves deployed on the race course, that are equally as devastating if you're free sailing.

I've never seen a feature on this particular subject covered before, but it might be an enlightening tactic that makes you look faster than your mates, and for anyone who watches the PWA World Tour online or on TV, it will give you a better insight into the game.

PHOTOS: BENJAMIN THOUARD

WITH GUY CRIBB

Top Speed or Acceleration?

In a slalom race most of the ground made by the leaders is through better acceleration leaving the gybes, since there is always a bigger disparity in this area than there is in people's top speeds. For example you might be an incredibly fast windsurfer, perhaps the fastest in the fleet, let's say a whopping 3 knots faster (about 15%) and could therefore be about 150 metres ahead after two minutes/ one mile of sailing. But, if you come off the plane you'll lose that 150 metre advantage in only twelve seconds. And since the slalom race would have an average length of only a mile in total, and within that a start line and three gybes, there's a massive chance you'll be off the plane for more than 12 seconds. So acceleration is key to winning slalom races, not top end speed. Oh, and not falling off on your gybes!

Most overtaking is done exiting the gybes too, which we'll cover in great detail next month, but for now, here's how to overtake on a reach- equally as deadly in a race or for overtaking your mates.

Overtaking

If Lewis Hamilton and I swapped my VW Transporter for his Mercedes McLaren and held a drag race, I think the faster kit would win, so don't be too disheartened if a fully cammed race sail and slalom board comes clattering past you despite your best efforts.

However in windsurfing, the very fastest race kit is still only as good as the rider that uses it. A high level sailor could quite easily take a wave or freeride board out and be faster than a less accomplished windsurfer on the world's best kit. Only when the disparity between the two sailors' levels is closer does the kit begin to really make a difference, and at this stage race kit will be about 10-15% faster if the two sailors were equal.

If you're so brutally competitive you can't handle being overtaken even by this kit, then you should go out and buy some- it's a great feeling having really high-end toys and they really do take your windsurfing experiences to another level.

Know Your Strong Points

Are you faster in the gusts or in the lulls? This may be a question of what kit you have- for example if you're on a 6m sail and your opponent is on a 7m sail, you will probably have more control and daring in the gusts, whereas they will probably have more power through the lulls. In this case try to attack in the gusts whilst they have less control to defend themselves.

How to overtake

If two sailors are of very similar speeds, there's only two ways to really overtake in a straight line (unless your prey makes a mistake or gets some unlucky chop) and both need to be initiated from an upwind position for two reasons.

1. To ensure you have clean wind and no wake from your opponent.
2. So you can bear off to generate a burst of speed.

There is no such thing as 'slip streaming' in windsurfing, so do not try to sail directly behind anyone- you will be in their wake and as you get closer to them you'll sail into the turbulence leaving the leech of their sail, known as 'dirty wind.' Both the wake grabbing at your board and the dirty wind will slow you down.

Warning overtaking is dangerous- be very careful, especially sailing close behind someone, as if they were to suddenly fall, your stopping distance may be too short to react in time.

Kill Bill

With two sailors blasting neck and neck, the upwind sailor should turn onto a broad reach to increase his speed and thus overtake the other sailor still on a normal reach. They will need to have a reasonable distance upwind of their prey, an absolute minimum of about five metres, but the more the merrier to allow enough space to charge past them.

The timing of this move is critical on a racecourse. The time to put the knife in, is during a large gust and flat water, both of which are crucial for speed. The flat water will probably just be a flat trough between the chop, but if it's a longer area of flat than your prey's flat section, you instantly have a big advantage. The gust might catch them out too- they may be using it to just maintain good board speed rather than increasing it.

Even if it means getting very close to your opponent, this pressure (especially in a recreational situation) is likely to put them off a bit and force them to slow down for a second.

You only need to improve your speed by one board length to have put the nail in the coffin, since this will put your opponent in your dirty wind and wake, guaranteed to slow them down and place them in a totally unchallenging position. Once you've got this far, you can return to cruising speed and they will still find it almost impossible to pass you.



Cribby giving Pearchy his 'dirty wind' and wake, ruining any chances Pearchy had to overtake

GUY CRIBB TECHNIQUE

STANDARD OVERTAKING MOVE

Matt Pearch (PWA slalom racer) and I set these overtaking shots up in Dahab this year. As you will see I was in charge of choreographing them, as it's always me making the overtaking moves!



1. I'm directly upwind of Matt by about six metres and in a gust make my move, bearing downwind towards him



2. The increase of speed I get on a broad reach lets me pull fractionally ahead



3. I cross immediately in front of him, leaving him in my wake trying to keep control of his board and feeling the wind leave his sail briefly while mine blankets his.



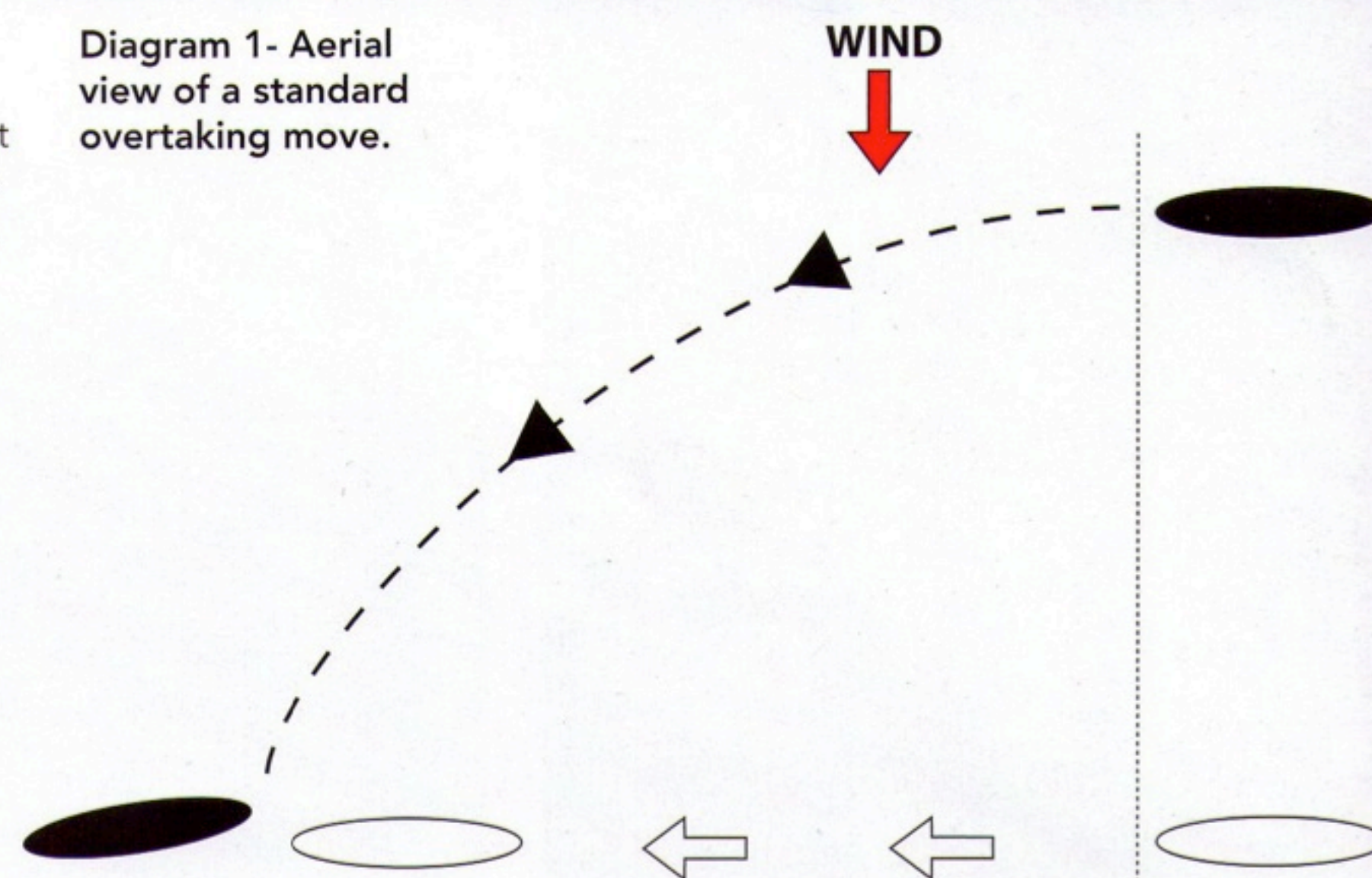
4. This was enough to complete a good clean overtaking move and stitch him up stuck in my wake. At this stage the best thing I could do is turn upwind a bit to ensure he stays in my dirty wind and wake.

IN YOUR DEFENCE

If Matt had wanted to defend he could have also beared off downwind so that my speed advantage was nullified by his equal increase in speed, however on a race course, the next buoy may prevent him from turning too far downwind, allowing me to take that scalp.

Matt could also have defended by heading upwind towards me, keeping the gap between us too small for me to find room to bear off, since the basic rules and etiquette are that you can't just sail downwind into someone, especially if you're trying to overtake them, and that the downwind sailor usually has right of way.

Diagram 1- Aerial view of a standard overtaking move.



THE SURPRISE ATTACK OVERTAKING MANOEUVRE

If you are unable to administer the move I've just explained, for instance you don't have time to pull alongside upwind before the next gybe, then you might want to try this alternative overtaking move. You still have to be upwind, but only by a few metres and you can be behind them, but only by a board length.

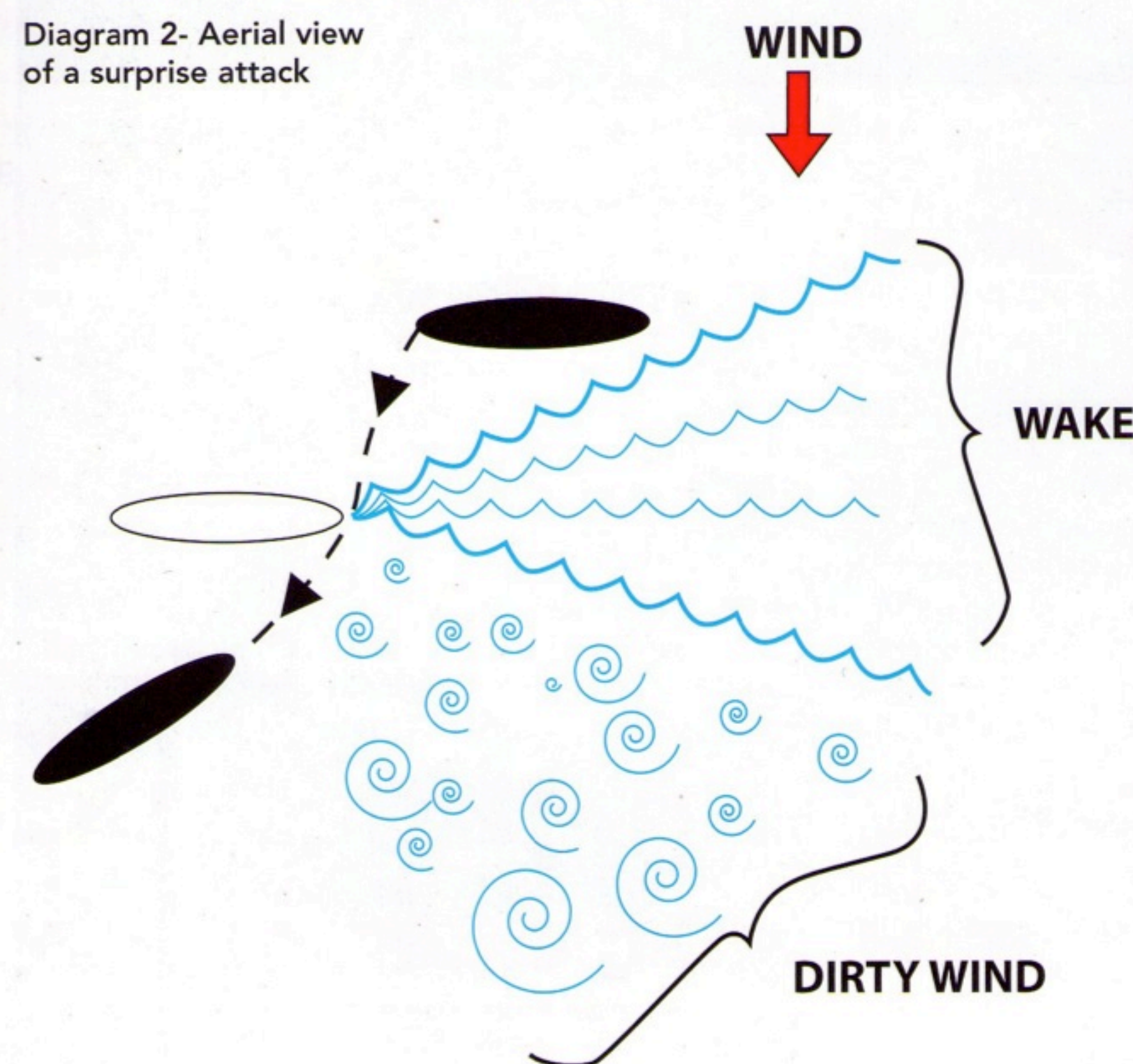


Once again bear off to increase your board speed and this time cross your prey behind them, literally inches from them- the closer the better. In fact, unless the nose of your board passes within a board length of them, it will not be possible to administer this move effectively.



It relies on you passing so close behind them with such speed that you manage to sail over their wake and through their dirty wind in a split second, across it's narrowest point, rather than getting stuck in it.

Diagram 2- Aerial view of a surprise attack



Note the triangle of dirty wind/ turbulence off the sail. Cross this at the narrowest point or get swamped! This technique requires a great level of windsurfing experience to risk sailing so close to another. Ideally it also requires a flat water burst or down hill section (down a swell)

Tactical gybing/ mark rounding.

Aim to exit the gybe as close to the gybe mark as possible, positioning yourself as upwind as possible and therefore being in a good attacking and defending position for the next reach.



Much more on gybing and mark rounding tactics and overtaking moves next month.

Guy Cribb INTuition, Britain's Professional Windsurfing Coach. Former national racing coach and multi-times British Champion shares his racing skills with this INTuition Slalom Technique Series. For coaching clinics learning to waterstart, use footstraps, gybe, improve your stance and sail in waves, join Guy for his personal coaching in the UK or overseas with his legendary INTuition courses. Next availability is Nov 16-23 in Dahab to crack the gybes and all your freeride skills radically improved, then in Sicily Dec 10-14 to learn or improve your wave sailing skills. Please email guy@guycribb.com for more info, or phone Planet Windsurf 0870 749 1959 for bookings and availability. Copyright Guy Cribb 2008 Taking the world by storm. www.guycribb.com