



THE TRUTH ABOUT HARNESS LINES

Harness line length is down to one's personal taste, however harness line position has a sweet spot*. I always knew there must be an easier way to find this sweet spot than the various methods you may have heard, like 'six fists back for a six metre' or 'the length from your fingertips to elbow from the mast to your front line (!)'. I guess if we all had hands, forearms and sails of uniform size these methods may have helped, but we don't.

Way back in 1998 I sussed it, a simple method which worked for me and seemed to work for the world's best sailors (judging by their pictures in the magazines). I started trying this technique with our guests in 1999 and by 2000 got the chance to really put it to the test, measuring Bjorn's, Polakow's and Nik's lines. All different sized people using different kit with different styles. But you know what? They all have the harness lines in the exact position I do, and you should do after reading this.

So where is it? **It's the place that enables you to windsurf using minimum strength in your arms, as it trims the sail in sufficiently to accelerate easily and handle the gusts comfortably.**

If you think about it, your harness lines are the epicentre of you and your windsurfing kit, the crank shaft determining your stance and control. Using this new harness line position to develop your stance will enable you to handle the biggest gusts like Bjorn, get planing with ease, virtually never spin out, crank upwind, learn how to use your harness sooner, sail for longer and faster, with either bigger or smaller rigs, the choice is yours and the world is no longer about mussel, it's your oyster.

CORRECT HARNESS LINE POSITION:

The back harness line should be about one third of the way along your sail (from front to back).

The front line should be about four to six inches in front of the back one. (Approx a fist to a hand-span)

I feel my lines into position, as does Bjorn and co, but if I ever measure them, the back one is bang on a third of the way back, with only two exceptions:

- Sails over 7.0m
- People under 5'6", or using the boom in the bottom half of the cut out.

As a rough guide, in these circumstances your lines should be up to two inches further forwards.

*The Sweet Spot

There's a strong argument to say that harness line position is also a matter of taste, the grounds usually being that this new position is uncomfortable. I'd say that these people are stuck in their old ways having developed their skills in the old days when things like 'closing the slot,' tight leeches and heavy boards were still around. If they want to carry on like this, no worries.

My argument for this harness line position being correct, is that most of the world's best windsurfers and test teams use this position, so most of your kit has been designed to be sailed like this. And you can't argue with them. So persevere and develop your technique, or stay on your plateau.

STRETCH

STRETCH MARKS:

I invented this product called 'Stretch Marks,' which for a moment I thought would make my millions, but as it's only 50p of elastic, I didn't pursue it any further, short of showing my guests it on our courses. 'Stretch Marks' shows where your lines should be.

Buy a bit of elastic, approx 150cm and attach a hook to either end (I've heard picture hooks are okay). Mark a position on it one third of the way along. As the elastic stretches to fit different sail sizes, the mark remains one third of the way along it. Like a painkiller, simple but effective. Noble Prize coming my way? Doubt it.

FINDING THE ONE THIRD POSITION



Position your rear harness line one third of that measurement (If using a tape measure, for instance on a 180cm sail width, position back harness line at 60 cm from front of mast)



Measure from the front of the rig...



...to the clew of the sail, immediately alongside the boom.

THE REASONS WHY THIS IS THE CORRECT POSITION.

The correct harness line position naturally sheets in the sail enough to:



- Improve early planing and maintain control in the gusts, without using as much strength in your arms.
- Tip the rig further forwards thereby improving early planing and increasing Downforce, increasing control and upwind ability.

If your harness lines are too far forwards:



- The sail is sheeted out, so you'd need serious muscle to pull it under control.
- The sail is raked back, losing Downforce and power.

HOW TO ADAPT YOUR STANCE.

Some of you will find this harness line position great from the moment you try it, but most of you will need to develop your skills to get more comfortable. In my experience this new position will be further back than you're used to and your initial reaction will be;

'I LIKE IT IN THE GUSTS, BUT MOST OF THE TIME THERE'S TOO MUCH PULL ON MY FRONT HAND.'

The two biggest tips to help you relieve your front hand of this extra pull are:

Tip the rig forwards (opposite of 'closing the slot') transferring more power into harness.

Let go with your back hand for as much time as possible (thus further committing to your harness) (note: it should be very awkward to let go with your front hand)

If there's still too much weight on your front hand, try moving your mast track back a bit, which will help to position the mast more upright.

Whoever you are, **your objective is always to have the power of the rig on your harness and not in your arms**, so slouch into your harness and relax your grip.

'I FEEL LIKE I'M ON THE VERGE OF A CATAPULT THE WHOLE TIME!'

Yup, right on the limit, using your kit to it's fullest potential. OK, I recognise this is a stressy feeling and takes some getting used to. Anti catapult tips are;

- more downhaul,
- face where you are going,
- don't sheet in (provided your lines are in the right place),
- have your back leg slightly more bent than your front one (unless going up wind).

'I KEEP FLYING OFF DOWNWIND!'

Lean the mast quite radically towards the eye of the wind (instead of towards the nose of the board) and dig your heels in to turn the board upwind.

WHY HAVE THE LINES SO CLOSE TOGETHER?

Using the lines closer together makes the rig more sensitive, so you get more feedback. That's why all top level windsurfers never have their lines further apart than a small handspan.

Some high level freestylers even have their lines almost touching eachother. This is because in competition they rely so much on being able to get planing early, they need as much information from the rig as possible. Plus, the very second they get planing, they need to know if there enough power for them to quickly jump. With their harness lines so close together, all this information is literally at their finger tips.

'CLOSE THE SLOT - TRUE OR FALSE?'

Closing the slot (raking the sail back to close the gap between the bottom of your sail and the board) is an expression born in the eighties. And that's where it should have stayed. Unfortunately it still lingers and wrecks loads of windsurfers' techniques! Do not ever consciously 'close the slot', it just kills the power and reduces Downforce. That's not to say never close the slot, just never consciously do it. If you're over powered on free ride or race kit, sometimes it happens naturally as you crouch down lower for control. But on freestyle or wave kit, never let it close!

PERSEVERE!

If you've been using the wrong harness line position for years, it'll be a hard habit to break. The best way to develop is to persevere with this new technique, referring to these tips after every few runs over a number of days, not minutes. However if your kit is older than 1997, badly tuned, or if your boom is in the bottom half of the cut-out, it's likely you'll need your lines about an inch further forwards anyway.



GUY CRIBB INTUITION

BASIC HAND POSITIONS.



Underpowered
(front hand back, to make rig go forwards.)



Cruising.



Overpowered
(wide grip for control.)

UNHOOKING.

With the lines further back, they're easier to hook in and out of, which is good for wave sailors, freestylers, beginners and I guess, freeriders (that covers everyone doesn't it?) Especially if you use this unhooking tip:



1 Use your existing unhooking skills (huge pelvic thrust etc) but also use your back thumb to push the lines out of the hook.



THE FUTURE

Over the next months I'm going to divulge some serious stance tips; The Missing Link (INTuition Core Skill), how to prevent spin-out, how to crank upwind, hang in there at ninety miles and hour and accelerate with helium bones (Pulling Power). So watch this space!

But if you can't wait for a life changing experience, join us on one of our week long INTuition holidays, where we'll turn you into superstar windsurfers with our 'INTensive care' program using our unique INTuition Core Skills and Muscle Memory.

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