

Intuition TOUCHING CLOTH WITH NIK BAKER

By: Guy Cribb



[GUY CRIBB INTUITION]

It was only this year, windsurfing in Hawaii, when I finally experienced the epic conditions that make Ho'okipa the world's best wave sailing spot, and the toughest professional world tour event to win. Looking upwind you see a heavy peak smashing over a deadly shallow reef with a former world champion and local sailor like Josh Angulo tearing it apart; just downwind you see Jason Polakow inverted, tweaked and twisted beyond contortion in a trademark sick aerial; above me I see any number of locals fifty feet high, one handed, mid-loop looking down to see whether they're going to land on me or not. Sailing Ho'okipa is a very three-dimensional hair-raising experience that takes decades to reach and fully appreciate.

In 1999 a European windsurfer did what no other surfer or windsurfer had ever done – he came to Hawaii and beat all the locals and all of the world's best, and won the biggest wave sailing competition in the world. In my book, this is one of the greatest European sporting achievements ever.

Whilst sailing at Ho'okipa myself, trying to tune into the timing of the waves and their unique set up, getting used to the strongest currents, the magnetic rocks and reefs, the gusty winds and generally trying to make sense of the absurd chaos that is wave sailing, I couldn't help thinking how the fricking heck did the young break-dancing kid from Shoreham beach, Nik Baker, manage to conquer this place, windsurfing better than everyone I see around me?

A talent and achievement that is the best 'extreme sports' and surfing success ever by a Brit.

A year later he very nearly won the Aloha Classic again, only just losing to the Terminator of windsurfing, Bjorn Dunkerbeck, who was on an unbeatable charge that spanned almost a decade, (but only winning once in Hawaii).

This is partly why our best known British windsurfer, a home loving family guy, is actually one of the world's most famous windsurfers, idolised and respected everywhere.

In fact, if we measured the success of every windsurfer of all time by the podium positions they reached in their competitive career, after Bjorn Dunkerbeck, Nik Baker is the second most successful windsurfer worldwide, finishing on the podium almost every year in the 1990's in Waves, Racing, Freestyle and Slalom. That's higher than Naish, Angulo and Polakow. In fact there were many years through the nineties as undefeated Indoor World Champion that Nik was the highest prize money earner on the professional world tour.

Nik's now one of the chief testers for North Sails and Mistral boards and their number one international rider, still competing internationally in Waves and Super-X.

There's no one more qualified to show you how to tune your kit than Nik, so here goes. I will continue to dispel the myth that there are all sorts of different windsurfing styles depending on different sized people or kit; INTuition will prove to you there is only one style of the world's best, and if you waiver from that by more than a few percent, you're holding yourself back from control and comfort, whatever level you're at.



NIK BAKER
Weight: 81kg
Height: 5'8"

GUY CRIBB
Weight: 85kg
Height: 5'11"



INtuition FRIGGING IN THE RIGGING

Intuition's Pro Technique series on sailing with the world's best, hoping their technique, talent and INfo will rub off on you, continues this month with Nik and focuses on tuning your kit right.

Regardless of how tall or heavy you are, or where you sail, there is only one technique and one kit set up that all the professional world tour sailors use. If you waiver from that by more than a few centimetres, you're doing something wrong.

Imagine being delivered your new car in nine components (board, fin, mast foot, mast extension, mast, sail, boom, harness lines, harness) and expecting to piece it together perfectly, as the manufacturer had intended it after years of R&D. Fat chance...something wouldn't work. Maybe it would drive okay, but when you got in my car for comparison, or Nik's car, you'd realise yours was crap!

Rigging your kit right has always been vital for smoother windsurfing and getting it wrong remains probably the single most common mistake windsurfers make. The introduction of my Cribb Sheets has made rigging it right much easier, ensuring more control and more time on the water. Throughout this series I make reference to the Cribb Sheets; get yours by emailing me at guy@guycribb.com

CRIBB SHEETS

I spend my life coaching windsurfing, jumping from one person's kit to another, from people learning how to use the harness for the first time to seasoned World Champions. Of all the tuning tips that make a difference, there are three things that are consistently overlooked by the public, but are consistently perfect amongst the pros:

Downhaul tension, boom height and harness line position are accurate to the millimetre on pro's kit, and are all within 20mm of each others, no matter who they are.

Downhaul tension, boom height and harness line position on the general public's kit are often as badly lobbed together as a two year old playing with its food.

I've seen downhaul tension as much as four inches out (if it's more than half an inch out you're screwed!) Ensuring catapults, spin out and not a chance in the world of doing a decent gybe.

Boom heights I often see as much as a whole foot too low! Guaranteeing regular catapults, slow to plane and almost impossible to use the footstraps (whoever you are and however tall you are, your boom should be somewhere in the top half of the cut out).

Harness line positions...oh my god, no wonder you can't gybe, and sail in constant fear of horrific wipeouts.

This article will hopefully drill it into you once and for all, there is only one way you should be setting your kit up, especially these three aspects, and dispel the confusing myth that there's different styles for different people.

(Note: windsurfers at the highest level have different 'styles' but all basically sail the same way and set their kit up almost identically. Expert local level windsurfers around the world have a variety of different styles, but often reach a dead end because their tuning is wrong. Intermediate windsurfers have all sorts of different styles that hold them back from higher levels of windsurfing, largely based on either dodgy instruction or no instruction.)

BOOM HEIGHT

"Bjorn Dunkerbeck and I use basically the same boom height. He's 6'4" and I'm 5'8"'" Nik Baker

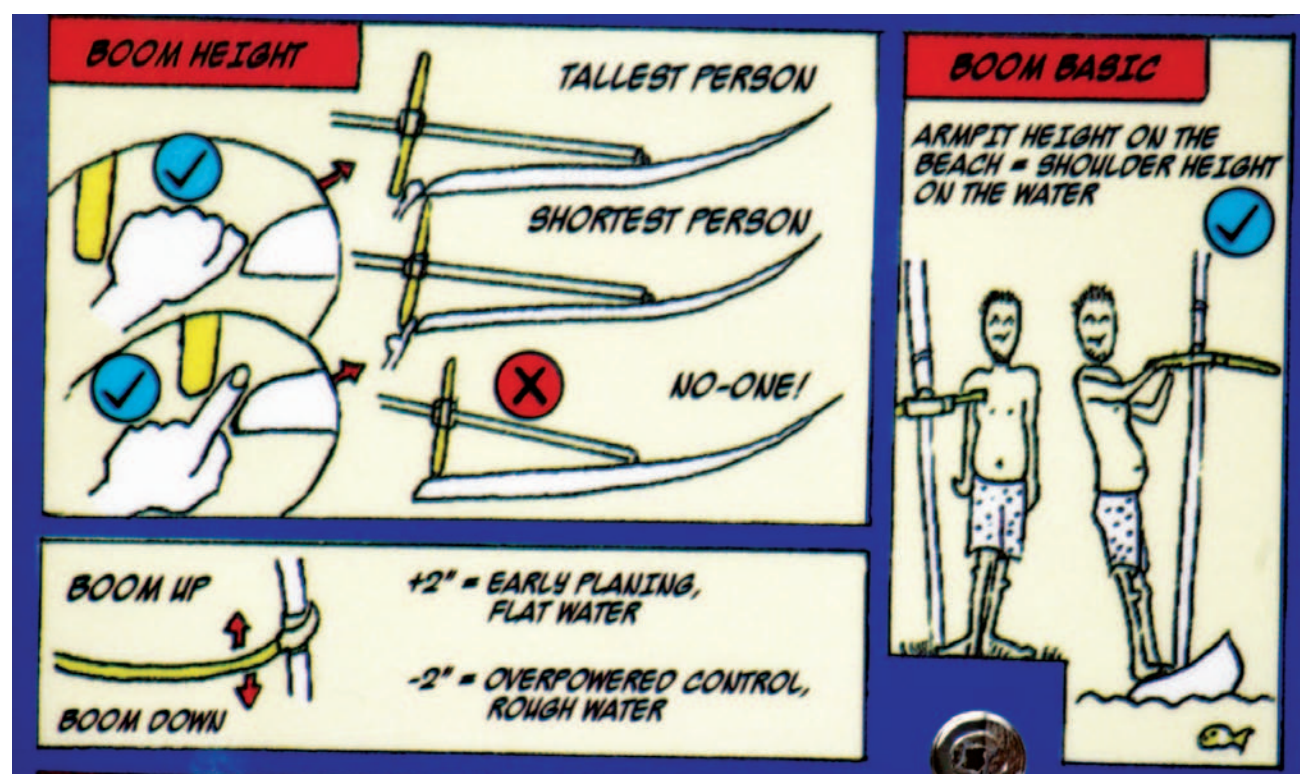
Jason Polakow (80kg/6'0" hardcore wave sailor), Robby Swift (82kg/5'8" wave, freestyle and Super-X sailor), Ricardo

Campello (74kg/5'10" world champion freestyler), Nik Baker (82kg 5'8"), Bjorn Dunkerbeck (100kg/6'4"), Dave White (110kg/6'1") and myself (85kg/5'10") all use basically the same boom height. As do all the young Venezuelan kids who are not more than 5ft tall but are already better than most of the world at windsurfing.

Basically, the same boom height means within an inch of each other's in the same conditions. If the wind drops, our booms go up to help early planing (up to two inches higher). If the water's rough or we're overpowered, our booms come down by as much as two inches for more control.

This message goes out especially to anyone still wearing seat harnesses and hooking in before they get into the footstraps. This situation is typical of lake sailors where the gusty conditions have forced them to use big rigs, which are so heavy they need to hook in asap, but because they're not planing, they've dropped their booms to reach the lines, and thus have evolved into the strange species 'lakeus lowus boomus.' Typical habitat for this breed is in UK and German inland waters, being sub aquatic, frequently catapulting, with cries of 'it's not windy enough to plane' or 'fecking lightweights,' and often wearing Speedos on holiday.

The correct boom height for windsurfing is this, demonstrated by Nik and I and found on my Cribb Sheet. (If you wear a seat harness, drop it by an inch, not a foot.)



Finding the correct 'boom height'.

Attach the board and rig together. Lean the rig over the tail of the board, lining your harness lines up with the tail. Make sure the boom is not resting on the tail. With most boards (without dagger-boards) and rigs (between 4.0m and 8.0m) I'll give you about three to four inches of play here to get you pretty close to perfection. My boom is usually about three or four fingers off the tail.

The 'boom basic' height is for beginners in light winds.

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CRIBB SHEETS: HARNESS LINES

Your harness lines' positions on the boom are crucial for comfortable and easy windsurfing. Having them in the correct place ensures both improved early planing and better high wind control. Most people have them too far forwards, which puts undue stress on your backhand, tearing the rig out of your hands in big gusts or going into gybes, and naturally sheeting out in the lulls when you need to be sheeting in to get going. Having your lines too far forwards is also the most common cause of spin-out (but I don't have time to explain that here).

Correct harness line position (which is further back than most people use), helps:

- * Tip the rig forwards / more upright (great for early planing)
- * Trims the sail in (sheets in) for earlier planing and control in the gusts

All the world's best sailors use their harness lines within millimetres of each other. Anyone not using them in the correct position simply isn't, hasn't or never will be a world tour sailor.

I've heard all sorts of junk about where they should be. Things like 'six fists back for a 6.0m' (Hang on – is Bjorn's

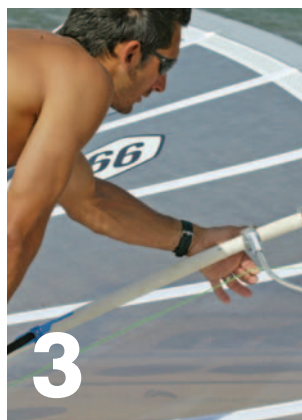
fist and your fist the same size?) or from your elbow to your fingertips, plus a finger width for each square metre (Hey, is my elbow to fingertip the same as yours?) and other uninspired garbage.

The correct position is this, as tried and tested on Baker's, Polakow's, Campello's, Dunkerbeck's, Whitey's, my kit and now applied by all of my INTuition guests who've found their windsurfing transformed by accurate INfo like this.

Use your Cribb Sheet to set them up in a flash (see below, order from guy@guycribb.com or get one on my UK Tour this June.) Or measure exactly one third of the way back from the front of your mast to the clew hole, to find the back harness line position.



1



3



2

Thread the elastic through your clew hole.

Adjust your harness lines so the back one is directly in line with the marker. The front harness line should be no more than a large fist in front of the back one.

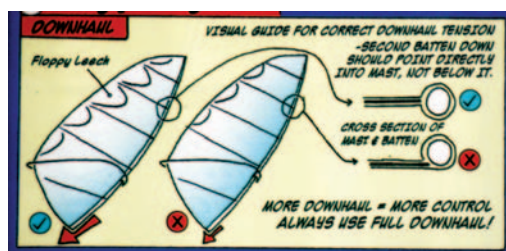
Pull the elastic to the very front of the mast. Hold it here whilst you adjust the lines (easily done on your own).

DOWNHAUL

More downhaul increases the tension into the leading edge of the sail, turning the sail cloth into a rock solid aerofoil. More downhaul also decreases the tension from the trailing edge of the sail, making the leech loose or floppy, allowing the wind to slide off or release smoothly with minimum drag. The combination of these gives you more stability and less drag, improving control and speed (if you want it). Contrary to popular belief, letting the downhaul off doesn't actually improve your early planing. At least not in the bigger scheme of things, because its increase of power comes at such a terrible loss of control and increased drag, it's just not really worth doing. Not to mention there are at least four other far more effective ways to increase power; in fact, about ten times more effective, eradicating any need to let your downhaul off:

1. Letting your outhaul off
2. Putting your boom up
3. Moving your front hand back and
4. A bit of Va Va Voom (pumping you lazy mite!)

Use these rather than letting your downhaul off to improve early planing.



Above: Cribb Sheet - Downhaul Section

How much downhaul should you use?

Most windsurfers still don't use enough. On my INTuition courses in the UK and overseas, guests at all levels of windsurfing are still surprised at how much should be used. And unless you're a very accomplished downhaul puller, or have a brilliant pulley system on your mast base, the chances are you're not getting enough.

Various brands have tried various visual indicators, and all brands print measurements on their sails. However both are often misinterpreted and many of the smaller brands actually print the wrong info in the first place!

The easiest visual guide, universal amongst all brands and all sizes is to look at the second full batten down from the head. (Not a head cap batten or half battens on the leech.) When enough downhaul has been applied, this batten should point directly into the middle of the mast, not below (or above) it. If you don't pull enough downhaul on, the batten will be pointing just past the mast, rather than into the centre of it, (see Cribb Sheet diagram above).





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BREAKING

'Breaking' is the term many of the pro R&D testers call the creases in the sail that occur as the whole rig twists. They are diagonal creases clearly seen in the photo on left. They occur when a curved shape bends onto its curved side (in this case an aerofoil bending to leeward). They also arrive because of the twist, just like when wringing a towel dry, diagonal/spiral creases appear.

When we're testing sails, breaking is a clear visual guide to whether the sail is twisting off evenly all over, rather than only in the head (typical of too stiff a mast), or only around its middle (typical of when a skinny mast is used in a sail not designed for a skinny). In this shot it's clear both sails are twisting off beautifully (the world's leading brands in action, rigged correctly on the right masts by professionals!). This ensures a smoother ride, with better acceleration, top speed and complete control. Start looking to see what yours looks like on the water.

The sail should be breaking most of the time whilst you're sailing, especially in choppy water or gusty winds, so these creases are often there. Race sails do their best to cover them up by using more battens, ironing out the creases for a smoother more efficient foil.

Make sure all the breaking is pointing diagonally by using enough downhaul and the right mast for the sail.



Checking out the twist in Nik's sail, using an easy to do wind simulation if there's a couple of you. One stands on the base whilst the other pushes the head down, checking out what the sail will look like with wind in it. Basically it should look like an over downhauled mega loose leeched crisp packet on the beach before the wind simulation, to look and feel lovely on the water.

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HARNESS LINE LENGTH

Nik and I use 28inch harness lines, as do about 80% of the pro World Tour sailors. None of them use less than 26inch lines, few over 30inch. If you're using 24inch lines, or less, chuck them in the bin, buy a new set of 28's (or 24-30 adjustable), use the Cribb Sheet to position them correctly and get used to the new length by sticking your ass out more.

And don't tell me you're not tall enough – the Moreno twins at 5'9" use 26inch lines and Kauli Seadi at 5'8" uses 32inch lines!

GET LOW

Getting lower naturally commits more weight into the harness lines, helping you get used to the new line position, length and the higher boom. Hanging low also counteracts the pull of the sail better, and increases Downforce onto the mast foot, stabilising the board. Whether you're hooked in or not, take it from us, getting low down is critical. Drop your guts and push your ass out – down and out, for improved control.

AN EXTRA INCH GOES A LONG WAY

Start tuning your kit now, either getting your hands on a Cribb Sheet to completely sort you out, or pulling some other strings – an extra inch of downhaul, your harness lines back an inch and an inch or two longer, and your boom up an inch is a pretty good start for everyone.

SUMMARY

Sailing with the pros is always inspiring, as it improves your game. You cannot miss a beat else they pounce. After some of the photo shoots Nik and I did together (including crash sequences of at least five different ways to take each other out, due to be released in future publications!), I was coming off the water with my senses as alert as when I'm wave sailing in the most chaotic of environments. Wired to the max, truly alive. The feeling we all get from windsurfing because of the immense concentration and super fast reactions needed.

By following the techniques in this article, you can reduce the level of reaction speeds needed to windsurf, as your kit will be much more forgiving on you. Giving you the ability to get your adrenalin rushes from sailing faster or progressing into higher-pressure environments, like wave sailing.

In fact, even if you grow up on a UK beach, by paying special attention to tuning your kit so it's literally breathing with you, maybe you'll be able to go as far as Nik Baker has done, winning the Aloha Classic at Ho'okipa, performing to a level 99.999% of windsurfers can only dream of in the world's most awesome environment of massive breaking surf.

More windsurfing with Nik Baker, Jason Polakow, Robby Swift and Ricardo Campello in forthcoming INTuition Pro Technique features.



GUY CRIBB INTUITION

Cribby's unique windsurfing holidays for discerning windsurfers have so far in 2005 scored 100% wind record with 14/14 full planing days in Margarita, 7/7 windy and wavey days in Morocco, 14/14 windy days in Dahab (although three days had no wind in the afternoons – a welcomed relief for many!)

- * Why anyone wastes their time searching for wind on other holidays when Cribby has a 98% wind or surf average on his courses for the past two years, only people who like sun loungers can know.
- * For the best coaching in Britain, the inspiration of all modern instruction and the magical relief to many a windsurfer, join Cribby on an INTuition course soon and get off your plateau to reach new windsurfing levels.
- * UK Tour now on! Take a sickie off work, meet Cribby at your local for some slow motion light wind on water practise, learning how to gybe, tack and freestyle correctly once and for all with an INTuition Threesome.
- * INTuition Dudes course for learning how to waterstart, use the footstraps and harness with Cribby – places still available at time of going to print, June 30, Turkey. Call Sportif 01273 844 919

Surf guycribb.com for more INFO.

Email: guy@guycribb.com for the monthly e-newsletter or for a copy of Cribb Sheets.

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All pics by: Anna Edwards
Big up and thanks to Nik Baker

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Guy Cribb is twelve times British champion, Windsurf Magazine Technique Guru, the INTuition Godfather and sponsored by JP, Neil Pryde, Ultra Sport, Animal and Adidas Eyewear.