

Light Wind Sailing

Sailing in light wind is a real test of patience with the Soling. Here in Stowe we see it over 5 mph only about 1 in 5 club racing days and we get a drifter about 1 day out of the other 4, so we get pretty good at it.

I've learned a few things that may be of help. You can throw out all of your usual senses about how nice you want the sails to look - UGLY IS GOOD. You want everything loose, loose, loose.

INCREASE DRAFT - In a moderate (5-10 mph) breeze the draft of the sails likes to be about the usual 2 fingers. When the wind gets lighter I begin to increase that somewhat. I don't go above about 2 -1/2 fingers though. In practice I think the sail tends to find its own best shape in really light air and rarely ever pulls out to the full draft. The loose outhaul helps to keep it from collapsing when there's little wind and lets it find that best shape. This is really sloppy, but it seems to work for me.

REDUCE TWIST - You always want the leach of the main halfway up the sail pointing between straight back and parallel with the boom when the sails are close hauled. Adjust your vang for that setting when the wind is at the lightest you expect to see it. I use a soft vang made with fly line backing and a bowsie instead of the hard vang supplied with the kit. With the soft vang I can sheet in to reduce the main sail twist if needed. In light and puffy conditions it seems to help.

When there's not much wind you'll often notice a breeze on your face, but the pond doesn't show a ripple. I think this is because there is a relatively large wind speed gradient within a few feet of the water. The wind might not be blowing at all on the water, but 2 feet up it will probably be moving some. If your sail twists off too much you won't be able to point at all. Using your sheet as a vang will let you find the optimum setting at the height where there is wind.

OPEN THE SLOT - In moderate air I usually set the jib boom to point just inside the sidestays when the main is set to point at a corner of the transom. In light air I've started letting the jib out beyond that, even pointing outside the sidestays. The boat seems to accelerate faster that way. I like mine so that the jib flutters just slightly when a little puff comes along. Sometimes those puffs don't even ripple the pond, but, when the jib starts to flutter, I know it's time to start to pulling in the sails a bit and beginning to head up into the wind a little as my speed builds..

Loosening up the backstay will open up the slot too and loosen the headstay so it sags and increases the draft of the jib. In really light air my backstay is hanging so loose it almost touches the leach of the main.

DON'T TRY TO POINT - The boat will sail highest with the sails out, past the point where the boom is pointing at the rear corner of the transom. After a tack ease the sails a bit to build your speed. Then head up and bring in the sails some as your speed builds and the apparent wind comes around.

ADD TELLTALES - I've added 1/8" strips of the lightest red nylon I could find to the leach of the main with 3/8" dots made from sail tape. I use 3 of them at the 1/4 points. They're only about 2" long, but they are good for telling me how the wind is flowing off the sail. I've tried them just behind the luff of the jib too, but those are hard to see and, since we can't trim the jib relative to the main, the wind coming off the main gives me all I really need to know.

All of this is only a place to start. Every boat is different and every sailor will tune the same boat a little bit differently to suit their style. Don't be afraid to experiment. Use your performance against other boats as a guide to determine what effect your changes have had.

Good Luck!

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