

# Keys to quick sailing in heavy airs (15+knots)

Sam Mettam

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## **Introduction**

**What's the difference between a back of the fleet club sailor and a front of the fleet National Championship sailor? When asked this question, you might answer with a whole list of skills including tactics, tuning, boat preparation, fitness, knowledge of winds, tides and currents etc. etc. These are all valid points, but they probably only make up the final 10% of overall performance.**

Businessmen often talk about taking an 80/20 approach. The theory goes that 80% of performance comes from 20% of the effort and vice versa. In this article I suggest a key point and an additional point for sailing in heavy airs. As a rough estimate, I think that 55% of the difference comes from the key and another 20% comes from the additional point.

When I coach people, I often get them to write the key point for the day on the boom to remind them of its importance. Can I suggest writing each of the key points on the boom (on both tacks!), and if you can find somewhere else in the boat, to write down the additional points to remind you to practice them in between races and on the way out to the start line etc.?

## **Key Point – Keep the boat flat!**

A flat boat is far faster than one that is heeled. When heeled a boat slips sideways and it tries to point up towards in the wind. In addition a flat boat capsizes less frequently!

When going upwind, keep the boat flat by hiking as hard as you can and letting the mainsheet out in the gusts. Remember that you can de-power the boat by pulling on your kicker, outhaul and cunningham (this is the only time that I will ever advise using your cunningham – don't even rig it until there's 15 knots of breeze!). You can also lose a bit of power by raking the mast back by one hole on the shroud plates and by raising the board a couple of inches. Some people advise pointing a little higher in the gusts. I personally don't think that the *Miracle* responds well to that, but it is an option.

When going downwind (make sure you have let out your cunningham), the main way to keep the boat flat is by moving your body weight outboard to provide more leverage, let your sails out or bear away. By bearing away, you will lose heeling force from the boat, but will also accelerate. Once you have accelerated, you can often bring the boat back up to the original course as the forces are now back in balance.

## **Additional Point – practice your boat handling**

If you keep the boat flat, the only time that there should be a danger of capsizing is when you are turning a corner (unless your rudder stalls out, but that's another story!). Therefore, when it is medium airs, go out and do loads of gybes and tacks until you feel confident. Then gradually increase the wind strength until you can do your manoeuvres with your eyes closed (maybe not literally!).

## **Some final thoughts**

Once you have mastered these points, I am sure that you will find an improvement in your sailing. If you are combining these practices by attending association run events like open meetings and training sessions then you will probably find that another 5 or 10% comes fairly easily. Once you have got to that stage, the path to the remainder of the improvement takes a little longer, but it will certainly seem like a far smaller step!