

Technique

Sailing with a whisker pole

Poling out the genoa should be in every cruiser's bag of tricks

Despite the lack of heel and generally better motion, downwind sailing can be frustrating. Some sailors choose to just motor downwind and others try to fly a spinnaker, but many low-stress passagemakers turn to a headsail poled out with a whisker pole. A whisker pole is a great tool to have in your cruising arsenal. It provides good performance without some of the hassle that can come with flying spinnakers and gennakers.

Spinnakers are the traditional answer to downwind sailing. They work pretty well, but are a lot of work to put up and take down, even asymmetrical chutes are tricky and they are difficult to fly dead downwind. A properly used whisker pole will allow the headsail to add considerable power and speed to downwind sailing. The key to a whisker pole's success is that it allows the headsail to be projected out to weather, out of the mainsail's shadow. It also stabilizes the clew of the headsail in choppy weather. And the whole system is easy to manage for just two people.

The pole setup is fairly simple and identical to the setup for a standard spinnaker pole. You'll need a topping lift to raise the outboard end of the pole to the correct height, and a downhaul, or foreguy, to pull the pole down and forward. The foreguy runs from the outer end of the pole through a block near the bow and back to a winch or cleat in the cockpit or, alternatively, directly to a bow cleat. Along with the jib sheet, these two control lines stabilize the pole so it won't move after its set. I also like to set up an afterguy, a line from the end of the pole to the cockpit, to pull the pole back and hold it steady independent of the sail and sheets. You'll need some hardware to attach the inboard end of the whisker pole to the mast. If you already have a spinnaker pole, the same track can be used. The best setup is a pole car on a track mounted to the front of the mast. The adjustable car height allows you to keep the pole level regardless of the sail that you are flying.



Poling out the genoa is a great option for downwind passagemaking.

A whisker pole needs to be sized to fit your boat. The pole needs to be long enough to support your sail and strong enough not to collapse under load. Most whisker poles are telescopically adjustable, and the length of the pole should match the length of the sail it is supporting. The maximum length of your

pole needs to match your largest headsail. The pole needs to be strong enough for the job; the pole sees a lot of compression force when deployed. The diameter of the pole tubing and wall thickness are critical in developing pole strength. For instance a 2-1/2-inch tube is 70% stronger than a 2-inch tube. Your



1. After furling the genoa, attach the pole to the mast track. 2. Level the pole with the height of the clew using the topping lift and attach the foreguy. 3. Put the jib sheet in the jaws. 4. Unfurl the genoa. 5. With the pole set to its desired position, the clew will dead end at the pole.

best source of sizing information is your pole manufacturer. Most manufacturers maintain databases of empirical data showing what has worked over the years.

The process of deploying the pole is fairly simple. The first step is to furl the jib to get it out of the way. You can't set up a pole safely when a sail is set. With the headsail out of the way, attach the topping lift to the outboard end of the pole. Whisker poles are flown with their jaws opening downward, allowing the topping lift to attach to the top of the jaw and for the sheet to fall out of the jaw if the trigger is opened.

Simultaneously lower the pole car and walk the pole forward to the windward side of the headstay, supporting the weight of the pole with the topping lift. The beauty of on-mast storage is that you never need to actually lift the pole by hand. Then slip the jib sheet into the jaw fitting at the end of the pole, and attach the foreguy and afterguy to the pole end.

Place the pole in its outboard position, level it with the expected position of the clew and extend it to the desired length, securing it in place with the foreguy, after guy

Set sail with a Weatherhawk® Wind Meter



Weatherhawk's WM-200 hand held wind meter is the perfect package for sailing. It accurately measures wind speed and air temperature, has a fluxgate compass for wind direction, and calculates crosswind & head/tail wind readings.

Don't leave port without one.

WeatherHawk Wind Meters are available from YOUR fine boating equipment supplier



www.weatherhawk.com

 WeatherHawk

The Winch EVO®lution

Introducing the latest evolution of Lewmar winch - the EVO®

- Simple installation
- Tool-free servicing
- Choice of three finishes
- Easy conversion to electric
- 7-year warranty



LEWMAR

Anchor | Hatch & Portlight | NAVTEC® Rigging
Sail Control | Steering | Thruster | Winch | Windlass

www.lewmar.com



Sailing wing-and-wing is much easier and more efficient with a whisker pole.

and topping lift. You want the pole as level as possible to project your sail area out as far as possible and use the pole's strength to your advantage. You'll need to play the lengths of the topping lift and guys as you extend the pole out.

With the pole stable and secure, unfurl the jib and trim it. The sail should now be flying and supported by the pole. If you need

to shorten the jib, just furl it, adjust the pole and unfurl it to the new size. Never try to adjust a pole under load.

When it comes time to jibe, you need to furl the jib, then reset the pole on the other tack using the same process. When you are finished sailing or need to come up closer to the wind, just roll up the jib and reverse the procedure to take down the pole. If you are in a tight spot you

can furl and leave the pole setup until you have time and space to take it down.

A whisker pole will need to be stored somewhere on deck. Traditionally the poles have been placed on deck in chocks, but the new trend is to store them on the front of the mast. I prefer mast storage because, aside from being out of the way, the pole is easier to control because it is always attached to the mast. You need to be sure that your mast hardware is designed for on-mast storage, otherwise you risk damaging the car.

Whisker poles need a little maintenance, especially in saltwater environments. The telescoping mechanism and pole ends can get seriously jammed up with salt residue. A freshwater rinse after each sail helps and a bath in white vinegar can help remove build-up. Be careful when deploying and retrieving your pole. Make sure to avoid allowing it to swing into anything or anyone. Aside from the damage it can inflict, an impact with a shroud or headstay can seriously weaken the walls of the tubing.

A whisker pole just might be the answer to your downwind sailing. It is low-stress, uses a sail you already own, and is easy to manage if the wind pipes up.

X-Yachts INTRODUCES: NEW FROM **X-Yachts** - Xp 44



Xp 44

In the spring of 2011, X-Yachts of Denmark launched the next generation of cruiser-racer with the new Xp 44, a boat designed to set new standards of sailing experience.

The Xp 44 will be a pleasure to handle under sail and a joy to helm. Her fine entry hull has powerful aft sections, which together with masthead sails and performance keel and carbon rig options will provide exhilarating yet accessible performance.

Xp 38 and Xp 44

R.B. Rodgers Yacht Sales - PO Box 9204 • Noank, CT 06340
(860) 536-7776 • www.rodgersyachtsales.com

