

# Don't dismiss in-boom reefing

*We're hove to but you can see the lovely sail setting beautifully with a tuck in*



**Tom Cunliffe loathed in-boom reefing systems until he encountered a good one...**

One of the lessons time has taught me is to take heed of Bob Dylan's sign-out from *A hard rain's gonna fall*. 'I'll know my song well before I start singing.' It's sound advice.

Years back, I sailed a yacht with in-boom reefing. It was a disaster. Later that season, another came my way and she wasn't impressive either. The concept made obvious sense, but the execution didn't seem to work, so I concluded that the whole idea was for the birds. I believe I even said so in print. A bad mistake on the basis of just a couple of experiences.

My latest yacht came with a retro-fit Leisure Furl in-boom reefing system. I'd wanted a stack pack and assumed that 'job number one' would be binning the boom. However, there was evidence that the unknown American sailor who'd installed it was pretty switched-on, so I decided to give it whirl. After a few glitches hanging over from some recent user's failure to

understand it, I was astonished by how well it performed and by the lovely set of the fully battened mainsail. Three years and several thousand miles on, I wouldn't change it for the world. Here's how it works:

The sail rolls around a meaty mandril inside a handsome boom, open-topped so the sail can't jam. The sail coat is integral and rolls away into the aft end of the boom as I pull on a couple of lines forward. A ten-second job. To hoist, I clip on the spectra halyard, then set the kicker and topping lift to keep the boom at the optimum angle with the mast, using

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marks I've taped onto the lines. I load up the electric halyard winch in the cockpit, take a spectra downhaul around a cleat and ease the sheet. The boat is steered to keep the wind far enough forward to let the sail feather and away we go. As it rises up, I maintain tension on the downhaul to ensure that it winds tightly around its neat, enclosed drum on the mast. Once the sail is as far up as I want it, I jam off the halyard, transfer the downhaul to the winch and apply some luff tension. Then I

ease the topping lift and set the kicker. Reefing and stowing are equally easy.

It's a one-man job and because of the powerful kicker, the control of luff tension and an excellent mainsheet traveller, my full-roach sail looks like a Spitfire's wing in the sunshine and cuts the gale cleanly in a blow. Unlike an in-mast system, all the weight of the in-boom sail and its gear are at deck level when stowed or reefed – a big plus for stability. If anything should go wrong, I have only to unjam the halyard and drop the sail like a normal one, but the mechanics are well built.

They are also simple. Mine, which is far from new, has behaved impeccably for three seasons now.

The downsides of in-boom are cheap systems that get it a bad name, some horrible retro-fit mast tracks and the dreaded fixed kicker that guarantees the critical angle when hoisting or stowing. These kickers wreck the set of the average sail and patronise able owners by assuming an inability to mark the controls found on every boat which do exactly the same thing. My advice is toss the thing in the skip and rig a proper one.

In-boom, at its best, works seamlessly. Its full-roach sail sets as well as a slab-reefed, hands-on equivalent and, for my money, scores heavily against any in-mast mainsail reefing arrangement. ▲

PHOTO: TOM CUNLIFFE