

Better Boat Handling – I am a big believer that the quickest way to improve your race results is to have better boat handling. If your boat handling is top class, race tactics all of a sudden become a lot easier as you will find yourself in positions on the race course with a lot more confidence than if your boat handling wasn't as good. In this article I share my process for gybing.

COMMON MISTAKES

- **Boat speed.** It is extremely important when it is breezy to aim to gybe when you are at maximum speed. The majority of capsizes happen because the boat is travelling too slow into the gybe which means the rig becomes loaded with power and becomes difficult to gybe.
- **Centreboard.** Having the centreboard set correctly can make the difference between a decent gybe and a really bad one. Too little board in light airs will mean the boat struggles to find grip in the exit of the gybe, whereas too much board in heavy airs increases the risk of a broach in the exit of your gybe.
- **Heal.** Heal is very important throughout the whole gybe process. If you don't heal the boat correctly at the right times you will end up using too much rudder to counteract what the boat is naturally trying to do and therefore create drag which will increase the capsize risk.
- **Sheet transition.** The most common mistake I see in relation to the kite flying throughout a gybe is when the crew pulls the kite round to follow the wind direction. I am not saying pulling the kite round is wrong. However, if you pull the kite round directly from the pole you create an arm full of slack between the old guy and block. This is the main reason why a kite starts to flap mid gybe as the helm has to first remove this slack to stop the kite from flapping.
- **Gybe exit.** Most people's initial thought on the gybe exit is to flatten the boat as quick as possible with as much force as possible. In lighter breezes this is the wrong thing to do as you will create a lot of disturbance over your sail plan and increase the risk of the kite collapsing.

MY PROCESS

1. Gybe prep :

- a. Board. As a general rule I never have much less than half board for a gybe. In really light airs I gybe with nearly full board.
- b. New twinning line on.
- c. Prep genoa – Un-cleat old sheet. The helm can do this if sitting to leeward and also pull all the slack out of the fairlead until the sheet hits the knot.
- d. Old twinning line off.



2. Sheet transition:

- a. Crew flies kite directly from **BOTH** blocks
- b. pulls the two sheets together to remove the slack and pass to the helm so he/she can fly both sheets with one hand



3. Boat heal, pole snap and gybe boom:

- a. Helm initiates heal aggressively by moving weight to windward and releasing the main to trim as the boat moves towards a dead run.
- b. Helm steers as the boat wants to. You should be able to just loosely hold the tiller throughout most of the gybe

- c. When the heel reaches its maximum (roughly when the side deck gets wet), the crew facing forwards pulls the boom over using the kicker (or the helm pulls it over using a gybing handle).
- d. At the same time the crew with their spare hand if possible and there is gap between the genoa and mast can release the pole attached to the mast. This will save you one job when setting the pole on the new gybe. If the pole doesn't snap off immediately abandon trying to do it, otherwise you will get trapped between the boom and the shroud! It won't cause the kite to flap if you don't manage it.
- e. Cleat main if possible - If the new gybe is a reach, when the main is transitioning to the new side, if possible the helm should pull the main back in to near where you would want it set and pop it in the cleat, whilst also flying the kite and looking where to go. Achieving this effectively will mean you exit the gybe with maximum power.



4. Pole set with heal:

- a. When it is lighter it is important to not flatten the gybe too early otherwise you risk distorting the air in the kite. The best method I find is to keep the initial heal on and change the pole while both helm and crew have their weight to leeward (old windward).
- b. Once the pole is set and the genoa trimmed, the crew can then **very** smoothly flatten the boat. If the breeze is very light it helps **not** to flatten the boat all the way and leave a small amount of leeward heal.



The above describes my process for running or reaching gybes when you have plenty of room. Sometimes, during a pile-up for example, your positioning is much more important and this scenario (which I call a handbrake turn) you would probably find yourself removing steps 2, 4 and 5. Don't worry about the kite flapping in this situation. Your position, hopefully as inside boat is much more important.

I hope the above useful. Unfortunately, just reading the above will not instantly make you better at gybing. Practice is extremely important. For the above to work it needs to be a habit (ie muscle memory). The best way to improve your boat handling is to put some serious hours in on the water outside of racing where you can figure out what you need to do in your own time with no pressure.

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