

MAINSAIL REEFING REVIEW - continued

..... now Matt Sharman summarises his approach

Reefing – some thoughts

Having had a couple of very windy sails from Brancaster recently that involved substantial reefs, I thought I would share my thoughts on efficient reefing systems. I know that those who already have systems have developed them to suit themselves, but I wanted to get a message out to those newcomers to cruising and day sailing about how to go about it. And let's not forget the racers out there – a reefing system can be devised without permanent boom fittings to spoil that perfect racing spar. The only modifications necessary are the ones to the sail which add the reinforcing patches and holes to take the lines. A simple and quick method of reefing is a necessary part of any cruising or day sailing boat. It is too tiring to sail all day with a rig that is overpowered, i.e. too much sail up and further more it is dangerous and un-seamanlike. Also it is a skill like any other that requires practice. At last years tidal training we organised a reefing race and demonstration. It is apparent that every boat should aim to reef in less than 2 minutes. The golden rule from my point of view is to keep it simple; the number of extra ropes should be kept to a minimum - one per reef. And for those unwilling to adulterate their booms with blocks and cleats, there is still a way you can fit a reefing system.

1. The back of the boom.

The image below shows two cheek blocks riveted to the side of my boom. I chose to run the lines inside the boom for neatness and attach the fixed end of the reef pennants to slides under the boom so the backward pull can be adjusted to some extent. Other methods are available – see previous page - to fit through-blocks on the top of the boom and run the lines inside the spar. For racers who don't want a permanent fitting an acceptable reefing system can be achieved by attaching small blocks or loops to the slides under the boom so the reefing line ties to the slide from one side goes up and through the reefing cringle on the sail, back down and through the loop and forwards to a cleat of sorts.



2. The front of the boom. (above)

I chose to screw fit two clam cleats to one side of my boom. The drawback is that it is easy to reef on starboard tack only. It is possible to duplicate the whole system, with cheek blocks and cleats on both sides and be able to reef comfortably on either tack. A third alternative is to exit the lines under the boom the same way as the outhaul. Whichever method used, the cleats must be well forward on the boom to be accessible when hove-to.

3. The luff cringle.

Various methods exist to secure the front of the sail to the boom. It is possible to use the Cunningham if fitted to pull and fix the sail down to the boom, or a second reefing line. I prefer to use a small stainless steel hook threaded onto the boom tack pin. The advantage is that the reef stays entirely on the boom, with no attachments to the mast and there are no other lines to get tangled. Again for racers this is a means of fitting a system that is not permanent.

4. Tidying up.

Traditional sailors used lines threaded through the sail at intervals called reef points to secure the redundant section of sail. I have found this to be time consuming and fiddly. I now use shock cord and a 'tiga tie' as can be seen in the following photos. An equally



efficient method is to thread shock cord through the sail from front to back with hooks secured on it so the cord can be hooked together under the boom thus securing the loose sail.
The reefing sequence:

- Heave-to with sufficient sea room to allow five minutes drifting.
- Release or detach the kicker.
- Tension the leech reef pennant 90% thus raising the boom (see above right photo).
- Lower the main halyard and fix the luff reefing cringle.
- Tension the halyard and leach reefing pennant.
- Roll the loose sail neatly and fix using whatever method you have chosen (see right).
- Re-attach the kicker.

The finished article below (note the small bag to keep the loose lines tidy)

Remember the importance of balance though – if reducing the size of the mainsail the genoa must also be reefed. This can be achieved in a number of ways. The most popular is to swap the sail for a jib. The halyard will have to be modified to accommodate the shorter luff length, but this can be done by using a length of dyneema which is very strong and low stretch. It is of course perfectly feasible to do without the foresail altogether. The resulting lack of rig balance at least errs on the side of safety as the boat will even more readily turn into the wind, but this can be counteracted to some extent by raising the centreboard to half which brings the centre of lateral resistance of the boat aft to match the rig. Before going ahead with a system, have a good nose at what others have done or ring round and discuss first. Better to get it right first time!

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