

BOAT CARE – The Sail

The sail is the engine of any sailboat. Proper care and maintenance of your sail will result in season after season of enjoyment. The mileage you get out of your sail will depend on several factors:

- 1 How you treat it on and off the boat;
- 2 How many hours the sail is used in a strong wind;
- 3 The care exercised in storing the sail.

The Laser sail is made from dacron sailcloth. Any porosity (the property of the cloth to 'leak' air) of the tight weave is prevented by impregnating a resin into the cloth rendering it, for all intents and purposes, air tight.

The enemies of long sail life are basically those that 'break down' the strength, stability and resilience of the cloth. When these properties are lost, the designed shape of the sail is lost. If you are not concerned about racing, your sail will last you for years, even if the optimum shape is gone. The cloth itself will go on and on as long as it is not actually torn. The symptoms of dacron sailcloth 'breakdown' are:

- 1 The draft (the belly) of the sail gradually shifts to the middle of the sail; and
- 2 the 'stretchiness' of the cloth is gone, and the shape is more difficult to control with the downhaul and outhaul adjustments.

For the racer, a 'tired' sail is of little competitive value. Some believe that a well broken in sail is best for light wind racing. For the pleasure sailor, it only means his sail looks tired and his sailing is a trifle slower.

Even a well cared for sail will wear out eventually. Most experienced sailors are familiar with the rules that prolong the life of a sail. We have listed ones that come to mind for the benefit of the novice sailors.

DON'T

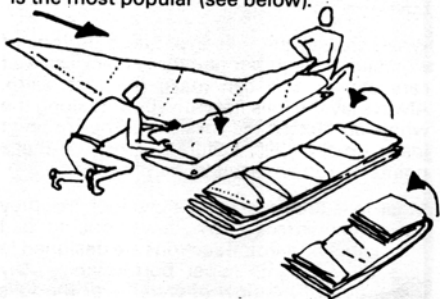
- Don't wad the sail into a tight bundle. This speeds up the breakdown of the cloth. Stuffing the sail into its small bag, hand over fist, does the same thing.
- Don't try to fix a sail which you think is wrinkled (due to stuffing and wadding) by ironing it. This not only could scorch the cloth, but rearranges the resin impregnation, resulting in a ruined sail shape. Actually, the sail could look smooth, if ironed, but is not recommended.
- Don't let the sail luff (flutter in the wind) at

the dock or on the beach for hours on end. This weakens the stitching as well as breaking down the cloth. This also promotes battens bursting out of the batten pockets.

- Don't allow chemicals, or foreign substances to come in contact with the sail cloth.
- Don't wash the sail in hot water or machine wash.
- Don't put on sail numbers with non-waterproof marking pens.

DO

- Do fold the sail after use. Some sailors say it is a mistake to fold the sail on exactly the same crease every time. Try to vary the folding points a little every time. The accordion fold, drawing the sail down to folds parallel with the foot (the bottom edge) is the most popular (see below).



- Do rinse the sail off with fresh water from time to time, especially if sailing on salt water. If you capsize a lot on a clean, freshwater lake, do not worry about this step.
- Do wash a sail only with cold water and sail soap or a mild detergent. A one to two hour tub soak, aided by a soft bristle scrub brush is all the cleaning that should be attempted.
- Do keep a watchful eye for potential hazards that could damage your sail. Nails on docks and piers are among the worst villains. Tar and creosote on docks, or even sandy beaches, also rank high on the sail's enemy list. A sailmaker told me once, that there is no known cure for a tar stained sail.

- Do avoid creasing and scratching the mylar window in the bottom panel. Windows which have become scratched or clouded can be restored to an extent by using a soft damp cloth and plexiglass cleaner, such as that used for convertible rear windows in cars.

Be kind to your sail and it will serve you well.