

Cracking Tacking in Heavy Weather

An important fact to bear in mind when you are **beating** in heavy weather is that you will not be pointing as close to the wind as normal, and will have the traveller at least a foot off the centre-line. Indeed in very heavy weather (say 25 knots+), you might even have the traveller almost fully out, but as well as *spilling the excess wind*, it is still important to keep the leach as vertical as possible in order to maintain drive, so you still need to have the main 'block-to-block'. This means that your angle to the wind will be no better than 60-65° (45° being the best you can manage before entering the no-go zone). Therefore when you tack, you must change direction by **130°** in order to continue at the same angle on the opposite tack. This is one main reason why you can easily stall such a tack, thinking that you still only need to turn through the normal 90°.

From the diagram in **fig.1**, you will see that if you have been sailing at 65° and tack through 90° as normal, this leaves the boat pointing well inside the no-go zone, and the boat will stop.

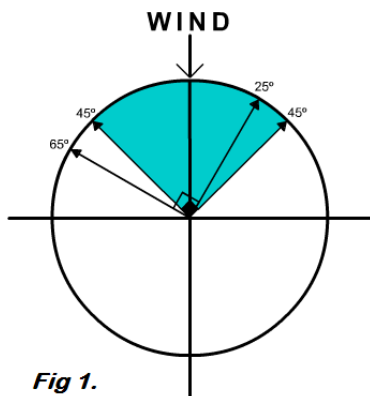


Fig 1.

At 60° with the traveller say half out, the boat should be making **good speed**, and it is essential that this be maintained during the tack, otherwise waves or the wind can easily stop the boat powering round through the eye of the wind.

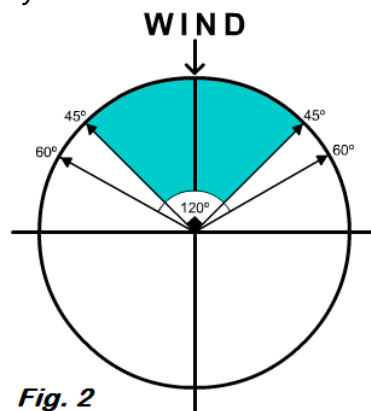


Fig. 2

Also, when tacking, it is best to **uncleat the main**, let out a couple of feet of mainsheet, and **keep it un-cleated**, (unless you are confident of your boat handling skills). This reduces the sideways force on the boat, allowing you to tack quicker through the wind. It also means that you don't go onto the new tack still fully powered up, 'block to block' (danger of capsize in the rough stuff!). So push firmly on the tiller extension (but not suddenly) and hold it there on **full lock** until the sail has tacked and the battens have reversed, remembering that you will be changing direction by a minimum of 120° (fig.2). If a gust then suddenly hits, you are **instantly** able to let out more mainsheet as necessary

to stabilize the boat. Since the boat will have slowed during the tack, the trick is to get it back up to speed again as quickly as possible, so you watch your tell-tales, feel the boat accelerate, then pull in the surplus mainsheet until you are 'block to block' again, gently pushing the tiller extension until the windward tell-tales just start to lift.

Another useful tip if the above fails and you still end up in irons is to quickly reverse the rudders, and momentarily stay on the original side. This will encourage the front of the leeward hull to come up so the wind can blow on it and assist the boat in going backwards in a 'three point turn' action. Then watch the sail until the battens reverse, nip smartly across to the new side, centre the tiller bar and pull in the mainsheet again.

A final point to aid tacking - move as far back as possible, i.e. over the skegs. This has the effect of raising the bows (the sharpest end of the boat), and allows the boat to pivot round the skegs - even better if your windward hull was just skimming the surface, as it will easily spin round on the leeward hull, making for a quick get-away .

If you can do all that in a blow, then everything else will be a piece of cake ! - well apart from heavy weather gybing - but that's another story !!