

On Deck

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Simbo Sailing

A true twin-headsail rig can prove handy both upwind and down
BY IAIN SIMPSON

Originally developed for shorthanded ocean sailing, the so-called “Simbo,” or Simple Bow Rig, can also be useful for coastal sailors who’d like to sail efficiently downwind without having to deal with a spinnaker. You’ll need a twin-grooved headsail furling foil on which two identical traditional working jibs can be hoisted on a single halyard. These sails should each have their own set of sheets led in the usual way through a pair of genoa cars to a set of cockpit winches. If each genoa track has a separate car for each sheet, so much the better. This avoids the problem of running two sheets through a single car and perhaps having one jib’s lazy sheet trapped under the other jib’s working sheet when it is under a heavy load.

When sailing on the wind, the two jibs

fly side-by-side, one lying on top of the other. The windward jib is trimmed to the wind in the usual manner and the leeward lazy, or blanketed, jib is tightened up against it. Again, it is convenient to have four cockpit sheet winches, one for each sheet, but it is not essential, as the working sheet for the leeward lazy jib carries no load and can easily be made up by hand.

An added advantage of having two jibs set like this is that you can easily re-run the sheets to achieve more efficient sheeting angles. For example, to shift a sheet lead from outside to inside a cap shroud when hardening up on the wind, you merely release the working sheet on the windward jib and allow the sail to rest on the leeward jib while you re-route the sheet. After you harden up and retrim the windward jib’s

sheet at its new and improved angle, you can re-route the sheet for the blanketed leeward jib if desired. The sheets, of course, can be shifted just as easily when easing off onto a reach.

WING-AND-WING DOWNWIND

Where the Simbo rig really comes into its own is when you bear away onto a run with the wind 35 degrees or less off the stern. Here you hoist two whisker poles on separate topping lifts against fore and aft guys made off around two sets of cleats forward and amidships. If the two sets of guys are made up to measured marks, you can simply hoist the whisker poles until they are pulled tight. When set, the poles should be at right angles to the mast and parallel with the horizon (assuming a level hull).

With the poles set, run both sets of sheets through the jaws at the end of the whisker poles and then reeve them through the genoa cars and on to the cockpit winches—the same as when you were sailing on the wind. To avoid having to deal with flogging jib sheets, I like to furl the two sails away before running the sheets



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SEAMANSHIP

under the retaining bolts on the pole jaws. Once the sheets are set, I pull the sails out to their respective whisker poles.

When coming on to a run from a broad reach, if the sheets have already been reeved through the pole jaws you need only pull the windward jib across the boat while leaving the lazy sheets alone to split the jibs in a wing-and-wing configuration. During this maneuver, it is best to let the following wind fill the sail when halfway across so that it clears the mast. On my boat, for example, I've found the sail's leech will hook under the radome on my mast if I drag the sail across with the winch.

Once set, wind captured in the weather jib is redirected into the leeward jib, keeping it fully powered up when it otherwise would be blanketed by the mainsail. The mainsail boom likewise should be eased to no more than 45 degrees off the boat's centerline so that wind from the mainsail flows into the weather jib and thus into the leeward jib.

Another reason for restricting the angle of the main boom is to keep it from directly opposing the right-angle compression load placed on the mast by the windward whisker pole. The leeward pole puts no load on the mast and is only there to take over as the new windward pole when the boat is gybed. To do this, you need only handle the mainsheet, as the whisker poles, the pole guys and the jib sheets can all be left untouched.

STOWING THE RIG

When reverting to a reach again, you simply allow the weather jib to fly across to leeward, where it once again blankets and lays on top of the leeward sail. The sheets can continue to run through the pole jaws



until you harden up on the wind. You can then release the sheets from the jaws and stow the poles on the side of the mast or on deck.

If your boat has swept-back spreaders and thus does not require forward lower shrouds, it is better to affix the two whisker poles to a forward-mounted mast track on separate cars. This allows you to set the twin poles like wings and later conveniently stow them vertically on the mast. However, this may not be possible on boats with forward lowers. In this case, you may need a second attachment so you can fly the whisker poles between the cap shrouds and forward lowers. On my boat, I fix the inboard ends of my whisker poles to the mast with standard spinnaker pole fittings.

Apart from setting and striking the whisker poles, no foredeck work is required when sailing under a Simbo rig, as the sails are handled from the cockpit. To strike the sails when running wing-and-wing, you first bring the boat on to a broad reach and let the weather jib to fly to leeward. You can

then furl both sails together with the furling line in the normal way. There is no noticeable wear on the twin sails when they are flown together on top of each other. I would advise, though, that you install a stronger jib halyard shackle, as the load on the twin jibs when running could cause a weaker shackle to fail.

The great joy of the Simbo rig is that it allows an ordinary cruiser to sail efficiently at all angles with just one suit of sails and minimal foredeck work. The twin jibs provide a downwind sail area equal to about two-thirds that of an asymmetric spinnaker. If the boat is also equipped with an in-mast furling mainsail, everything can be handled by one person from the cockpit.

I've found that my Simbo rig provides good performance in winds from 12 knots up to a full gale with complete ease of handling. Needless to say, with such control my Simbo rig remains in place night or day, fair weather or foul. It is the rig I have used on my Najad 460, my Najad 511 and now on my new Najad 570.

One final word on the Simbo rig: make sure that all loads are carried within close proximity of the boat. The length of the whisker poles should not exceed 50 percent of either jib's J measurement. As previously mentioned, the main boom should never be more than 45 degrees off the centerline. When set up properly, a Simbo rig is a compact, powerful, easily controllable rig that gives great peace of mind in all conditions. *AS*

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Iain Simpson has sailed on all varieties of cruising yachts and racing dinghies. He currently sails a Najad 570 in the Caribbean and intends to sail to Turkey in 2012.