



Easy does it

Iain Simpson advocates an easygoing downwind rig using two headsails and the mainsail. How does it work and what are the advantages?

As exciting as it is to fly coloured sails at sea, most cruising yachtsmen are wary of flying a spinnaker when it comes to downwind passage-making in open seas, particularly at night. So, what's the best way to run dead downwind? My answer is what I have named the Simbo rig – or simple bow rig.

For this you keep the mainsail set and use twin headsails as well. What is required are two identical working jibs with a high-cut clew, set in twin forestay grooves and hoisted on a single halyard. Each sail has its own set of jib sheets. The twin jibs fly well together without any noticeable additional wear compared with flying a solo jib.

When bearing away on a run, you furl the twin jibs and raise twin whisker poles, each with its own uphaul, foreguy and afterguy. It is easier still if you have pre-measured marks around the fore and midship cleats to keep the whisker poles at right angles to the yacht and level with the horizon.

Once these are set, the wind flows into the mainsail, around the mast and into the weather jib, where it is deflected into the leeward jib that would otherwise have been blanketed by the mainsail. When gybing all that is required is to haul in the mainsheet; the separated twin jibs and their accompanying whisker poles, guys and boom lifts remain unaltered.

Unlike with coloured sails, in a rising wind the twin jibs can be reefed from either side on the furler or taken down. One person can control this from the cockpit, night or day.

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The only time you need to leave the cockpit is to raise or lower the whisker poles.

When coming up on a reach, you let the backed weather jib fly to leeward and the previously lazy is sheeted on. The whisker poles can remain set until the apparent wind is 60° off the bow. Conversely, on returning to a run, you merely bear away, release the sheet and pull the sail to weather with what was the lazy sheet – a one-person job in either direction.

Of course, sailors have used the 'barn door' system of flying twin headsails downwind since time immemorial. However, you need to drop the mainsail, which can become a problem if you need or want to use it again, especially if it requires crew to go on the deck. Furthermore, with only two headsails set on opposing spinnaker poles rather than whisker poles the yacht will roll considerably downwind.

No pressure is exerted by the leeward whisker pole on the mast, so there is a lot less rolling downwind – the whisker poles measure only half the length of the jib foot.

So, the 'Simbo' rig – a set of sails suitable for fewer crew and without the stress and expense of a spinnaker. What's not to like?

About the author: *Iain Simpson has sailed the north-west coasts of Europe extensively over the last 60 years, initially on his father's C&N bermudan cutter Patna. Since then he has owned a succession of ocean sailing yachts. During the last decade he has made six transatlantic crossings and is currently transiting the Med.*



▲ Above: The Simbo rig in action with whiskerpoles and twin headsails set.

Q&A

Q. What equipment is needed?

A. Two identical working jibs and two sets of jib sheets plus, ideally, two sets of genoa cars and fairleads so that the rig works from a close haul through to a broad reach and run.

Q. Don't the double set of jib sheets complicate procedures?

A. No. Not if they are colour coded with the outer running sheets a different colour or fleck to the inner reaching sheets.

Q. How can one person handle tacking four jib sheets?

A. By first releasing the upwind jib sheet to rest the sail on the downwind jib and then release the downwind sheet on tacking. Coming through the wind, you take up on the new downwind sheet which captures the upwind jib then make up the non-loaded upwind sheet at ease.



▲ Above: Author Iain Simpson. Sailing for 60 years.