SHEET OUT!

In the penultimate feature of the series **Simon Bornhoft** looks at a very counterintuitive action that influences waterstarting, non-planing and planing gybes, duck gybes and waveriding.

Photos: **WindWise / Karen Bornhoft**

Until we discovered the opposite to be true, we humans assumed that the sun moved around the Earth through the course of the day. We now know – somewhat counterintuitively – that it's the ground beneath our feet which does all the moving and spinning. This proposition means we sleep in the knowledge that night will indeed become day. This month's WindWise counterintuitive nuggets might not change the orientation of your world, but they will assist in directing the board where you want it to go rather than being transported into a galactic spin.

ASSUMPTIONS vs COUNTERINTUITIVE MOMENTS

I've always eulogised about the key skill of maintaining **power** by bringing that boom in, back and down to lock the rig in place to sheet the sail **in**. This is obviously an integral part of windsurfing that assists our blasting speed, control, gybing and many other aspects of the sport. But as this series has highlighted, and one reason why windsurfing can be so challenging, **sometimes** there are moments when we need to virtually reverse what we normally do. This feature thus has a very simple objective: to highlight some key moments at which it is beneficial to 'sheet out' rather than sheet in.

BEACHSTARTING & WATERSTARTING

ASSUMPTION: 'THE RIG WILL LIFT ME!'

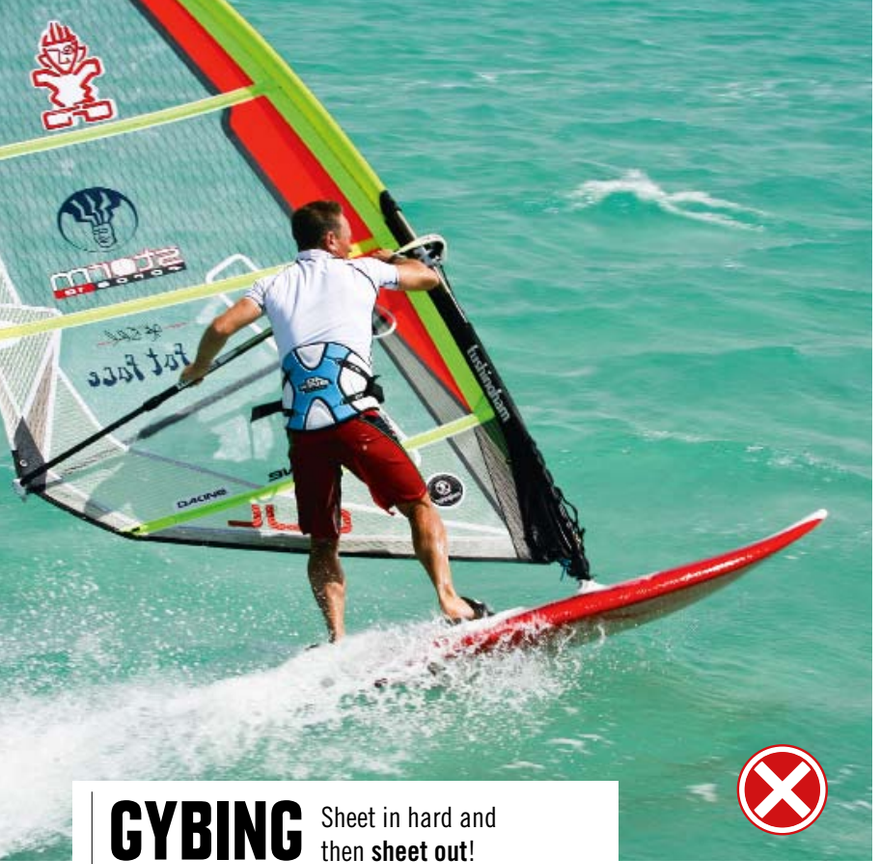
Especially when learning it's common practice to assume that the wind in the sail 'lifts you up' onto that board. This often leads to an impatient death grip on the boom, waiting in the water for the wind and rig to do all the work. Holding the rig 'still' waiting for more pull leads to the sail becoming either overloaded in strong winds, stalling in light winds, or turning the board out of position just when you're trying come up onto the damn thing.

COUNTERINTUITIVE MOMENT: 'SHEET OUT AND FAN!'

One of the secrets to controlling the position of the board at the halfway stage of the waterstart is to 'fan' the clew by sheeting in and **out** with the back hand. This fanning effect gives you far more control over the rig and makes it easier raise the rig, steer and position the board just prior to elevating yourself up onto it.

COUNTERINTUITIVE MOMENT: ELEVATING

To come up onto the board the back leg flexes heavily and the rig is twisted by pulling the back hand 'in, up and past your head'. (It feels like twisting a giant set of handlebars above your head.) However, the moment you come up onto the board and the rig becomes more upright, you then need to counterintuitively **sheet out**! Basically, all the loading is on the rig and the board isn't really moving, so staying fully sheeted in stalls the rig in light winds or sends you over the front in strong winds. So when you feel you're up, pull down on the boom hard, but ease that back hand **out** for more grace to end your beachstarts and waterstarts.



GYBING

Sheet in hard and then **sheet out**!

ASSUMPTION: 'SHEET IN'

When you go into a gybe sheeting in unquestionably helps keep the rig under control, flattening the board and making bearing away at speed a far more achievable process. But when it comes to the foot switch for a step gybe, the rig has to be **sheeted out** to roughly 90° to the board to give you enough room to change the feet. This is particularly relevant when gybing with larger rigs in marginal winds because the sail and longer, more cumbersome booms back-wind on you.

COUNTERINTUITIVE MOMENT: 'OPEN UP'

Just before you reach the halfway or 'dead downwind stage', the rig must be opened up by you (don't wait for the wind to do it) and **sheeted out** to roughly 90° to the board to create room for the foot change. Keeping your rear placed back hand near your head will greatly assist your counterbalance, foot switch (just past the downwind stage of the gybe) and control at this point.

DUCK GYBING

ASSUMPTION: 'SHEET IN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE'

Many a duck gybe fails due to the instinctive rush to **sheet in** the moment contact is made on the new side of the boom. This can be disastrous because the board is often not fully round the turn yet, which leads to either being back-winded or getting the rig ripped out of your hands.

COUNTERINTUITIVE MOMENT: 'DROP, LOOK AND SHEET OUT!'

When you get both hands on the new side of the boom, keep the rig forward, drop low over the back foot and look out of the turn. But it's equally important (and very counterintuitive) to **sheet out** with the back hand to release excess pressure on the rig and help keep your speed up by exiting on a broad reach. It looks like the sail is pulled in towards the board, but actually the board is carving and turning under the sheeted out sail!

WAVERIDING

This is a great planing skills training exercise that's fabulous for developing your steering, control, gybe setups and waveriding. I call it 'flat water waveriding', and it teaches you all about opposition and maintaining speed with a de-powering the rig to focus fully on carving the board.

ASSUMPTION: 'SHEET IN TO HEAD UPWIND'

If I asked you "How do you turn upwind?" you'd quite likely answer: "Weight the windward rail, rake the rig back and sheet in". And you'd be absolutely right if you were beam reaching in the straps and wanting to make a small change of direction. It's different when you want to make right turns!

COUNTERINTUITIVE MOMENT: 'SHEET OUT TO HEAD UPWIND'

If you're planing and you want to turn very tightly, especially on a swell or wave, you often need to **sheet out** with the back hand – otherwise there's too much power in the rig and the board just blasts straight on. This is why people can run too far in front of a wave or find it hard to turn tightly at the top of the wave. Try this sequence to discover for yourself how sheeting out can create tight 'brochure-like' turns!

3.

4.

SHEET OUT TO HEAD UPWIND

Then, to tightly turn back upwind (similar to a top turn on a wave), resist the natural temptation to rake the rig back and sheet in hard with the back hand. Instead, move your back hand up the boom and allow the rig to **sheet out!** This counterintuitive action depowers the rig and allows the sailor to sink low, back into a 'super-7' stance, and dig the heels down to carve the board much more tightly. Like the ending of a duck gybe it looks like the sail is sheeting in, but actually the board is doing the most part of the movement. To test this theory try replicating the sequence, but take the back hand off the boom when you carve upwind. You'll see how redundant the rig is (check out the opening shot for inspiration).

1.

SHEET IN TO HEAD DOWNWIND

Keep both feet in the straps, blast fast on a broad reach, unhook, look and carve hard into a gybe. This is very similar to a regular bottom turn on a wave, with the rig forward and sheeted in, and the body back to maintain that counterbalance.

2.

SIMPLE SUMMARY

These counterintuitive **sheeting out** moments all aim to exhaust or depower the rig to allow you to direct the board more easily. But it's important to state that there is still the undiminishing requirement to pull down on the boom to help lock that rig in place and improve the board's trim. As for outer space analogies, did you know that windsurfing carbon mast technology was once used on a space module? Also Mr Naish once told me that an American astronaut took a set of his footstraps on a space mission. Maybe that's why Robby jumps so high!

Missed SB's WindWise Live Interactive Show last year? Then head to Datchet Watersports on Thursday 15 July. SB coaching session during the day, early evening BBQ and WindWise Live evening show! Plus there's some Starboard kit for you to try. Contact WindWise for more details and the rest of the UK TOUR!