

Tips for newcomers into 420's from the Mirror.

I found sailing in a 420 initially quite difficult and it took a while to realise that I couldn't just use the same techniques, and needed to adapt. I've tried to dig out some memories of that time which should be read alongside Jo Brigg's article on boat handling, and the national 420 site articles on boat set up. (www.420sailing.org.uk, go to "Technical")

Sailing Tips

- Practice using the centre cleat until it is totally natural - it's new to a Mirror sailor and if you can't play the main constantly and with confidence you will tend to undersheet the main and sail way off the wind. In strong winds, **the mainsheet should never be still!**

- Similarly **practice tacking facing forwards!** Make sure someone has shown you how to swop over your hands behind you and you don't just try to work it out first on the water.....

- **The crew musn't try to trapeze too low** until you are both in full control. Instead, the crew should concentrate on firstly keeping his front leg straight and then gradually bringing the legs together as confidence increases.

- Once the wind is up so that the crew is trapezing and the helm is starting to play the main, **you need to use much more kicker than seems natural in a Mirror** (don't worry, the boom is far less likely to break!)

- One bit of good news - unlike in the Mirror, **the outhaul is irrelevant**. Just pull it on as hard as you can on land and then forget it in all conditions and all points of sailing.

- **Sit forward**; the 420 has a pointy bow! Upwind I sit with at least one leg in front of the bar until I'm playing the main with Tom on the wire, and after that, I sit immediately behind it. The crew should stand just in front of you, so that your weight is both forward and together.

- **Watch the telltales all the time upwind**. The 420 also hates to pinch but, unlike a Mirror, you can let the windward telltale fold up most of the time .

- **Sail the boat flat** and upwind get the crew to tell the helm when the gusts are coming - so that he/she can react.

- **Downwind on a reach, bear off fast and a long way when the gusts hit**. Don't just let them tip you over. I learnt this lesson the hard way at my first event - twice!

- Once the wind gets up so the helm is letting the main out and the crew is flat wiring, **pull up the centreboard upwind**. I raise the board about one quarter in a force 4-5 (earlier if you're light) and perhaps up to a third in a force 6 and above. It makes it a lot easier to sail

- If you normally capsize in heavy weather gybes, **make sure you are going into the gybe fast** - you need the speed to reduce the pressure in the sails.

Setup

- The setup matters far more on a 420 and makes the boat much easier and fun to sail. The base setup is shown on the 420 website (www.420sailing.org.uk) but you must

a) check the spreaders are parallel and the same length (website!)

b) check the mainsheet strop is an equal length on each side (put the top block onto the centreboard - it should be central when there is pressure on both sides) on both light weather and heavy weather settings

c) know how many chocks you need in front of the mast in light conditions to fill the gap - that's your neutral setting. Matt Burge has a good piece on the 420 website on how then to use the chocks.

d) have a mast rake of 19ft 11inches in light weather with rig tension (on a Loos gauge) of around 35. You should then mark on the mast where the jib halyard comes to on these settings.

e) Then put the shrouds down half a notch on either side, reset the rig tension to the same measurement (35?) and put another mark on the mast - that's your medium setting. Repeat one more time and you have your heavy weather setting.

- Whenever you need to let out the boom beyond the boat, it is time to move to the next setting. Don't ignore this as I used to - do it as it makes a real difference on a 420.

- Remember to go to the shorter mainsheet strop length when you move to the medium and heavy weather rig settings.

- Check the centreboard slot gasket (on the underside of the boat) is in perfect condition - its the best known boat brake!

I hope all this helps - any questions, drop me an email on r_struckett@wincoll.ac.uk

Rob