

Swallow XP sails 11.07.10

Darter feedback

Preface

I had previously booked the sails for the weekend but following the (sensible, but not sufficiently far-reaching) diktat that they should not now be used for the likes of the Ponder Cup on 10 July, I only used them on the Sunday morning, an ordinary club race with 8 competitors.

I was interested to know what would happen if I just used the XP mainsail and therefore used a current design jib.

The race (NKLNOF)

Darter (2up) started in clear air but the fleet soon divided on the way to Dunes and I (together with Dart) had made the wrong decision to stay on the Itchenor side. The initial comparison was therefore on the beat with just one other boat – we managed to stay ahead but there was no obvious benefit and at one point Dart closed quite significantly for no apparent reason in the 8-10 knot breeze

The leaders on the Thorney side further benefitted from a 20° southerly shift as they passed Pilsey so Darter also overstood Copyhold. We eventually rounded Dunes 7/8. We ultimately finished 4/8 just passing Merlin on the line.

Conclusions

- There was no apparent advantage to windward in the 8-10 knot breeze using just the XP mainsail
- There might have been a barely perceptible benefit downwind
- The current jib and XP main appeared to work satisfactorily together

Specific observations

- It might seem on the basis of this trial that the extra power/speed and improved pointing ability is generated by the new jib only, and the performance of the current and new mainsails is comparable.

General observations

- This is my second, single race, experience with the sail(s). Lacking other experience with similar material I still find it very difficult to 'read' the efficiency of the (flatter) mainsail.
- Some minor creases are now appearing from the clew.
- The larger clear mainsail panel is undoubtedly helpful.
- As others have remarked, rolling the sail is very much easier
- I understand that techniques for spinnaker drops will need to change with the new jib, probably beneficially - but subject to any (new) jib sheeting adaptations.
- It would seem that a majority of boats will need to make some changes to their current jib sheeting arrangements – either to move the lead block forward and/or (on a discretionary basis) to adopt jib barber haulers/transverse tracks.

The communication and decision process

- We do not yet have any comparative published pictures of the No 1 and (recently arrived) No 2 XP jibs

- The (3) XP sails do not appear to have been measured and the information published
- The cloth type (type/weight/finish etc.) and method of construction have not been disclosed
- We do not yet have precise (pre-20% VAT!) cost estimates
- We have unexplored access through Mimie Currey to expert independent advice to corroborate the suitability of the sailcloth development direction.
- Very few boats have thus far tried the sails variously suggesting opposition or indifference to the evaluation project, or possibly more prosaically, a concern that an improved race result is automatically expected, but might not be delivered.
- It is my view that another sailmaker should now be invited to consider the options without constraints and should not be bound by the design principles and parameters which have been adopted/developed thus far but which would clearly need to remain sensitive to the obvious anxieties about helm balance, heeling moment, rig loads and crew strength/weight.
- I believe that the decision to allow AYC Swallows to proceed with an order for the existing XP sails to be an unfortunate aberration.

Tony Glover.

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