

EXPERIMENTAL SAILS SOLITUDE'S SECOND REPORT (TRIALLED FOR AGAIN, WITH SECOND EXPERIMENTAL JIB, WITH SATURDAY 17 JULY 2010)

Preliminary

We had tried the experimental sails early in the season in light airs, with favourable opinion. The comments from that report remain valid. In this test we used the second experimental jib (XJ2) with a longer luff. The wind this time was a little more, F4 increasing 5 in the afternoon.

Jib rigging/sheeting

The jib has a longer luff and therefore the standard halyard is too long. Our halyard emerges from the mast above the deck and we usually take the end loop straight onto a muscle box. For the XJ2 we brought the halyard through a block attached to the top of the muscle box and back up to an eye on the mast, which took up the slack. Not perfect but it worked.

The jib sheeted to about four inches back from the front of the cockpit on our standard tracks.

Sailing

With the XJ2 Solitude was beautifully balanced and a delight to sail.

Short tacking is not our favourite pastime, but we found that Solitude was tacking smoother than usual, coming out of tacks better, presumably because the flows settled round the jib faster. With a lower clew there was much less rope flying around. Tacking the jib is easier.

The sails are fast. We won both races, although getting the wind shifts and tides (and navigation) right proved a challenge. As the wind piped up in the second race we did not find ourselves too overpowered (we were two-up – OK, 2.5-up) but found on a long starboard tack out to Calvert that we sagged below Marengo and Darter, in part because of slipping sheet jammers and no main traveller. However once we had tightened the jib halyard and sheeted in properly all went well for the final beat.

The main looks good and is easily handled. We noted last time that it was flatter than we would choose. Great visibility through the large window and easy to roll!

Remarks

We did not see the XJ2 from outside the boat, but can only think that the longer luff makes it look much more modern (as well as being more efficient). We are very happy with the extra area, but if something has to be reduced we would rather it were the foot length rather than luff length.

As commented before, we should consider a full length foot for the main, but the current version is only a little shorter. The backstay did not catch on the roach.

Overall

We like the XJ2 – if we do change we should go for the long luff. Efficient and more attractive.

I encourage as many boats as possible to give the sails a try to allow informed debate. With two jibs (XJ1 and XJ2) there should be two boats every race with some permutation.

As in our first report: "Better looking, modern materials, slightly faster, a more flexible main. What is there not to like? Solitude supports the class advancing along these lines."