

# *Couta Conversations*

SETTING YOUR  
COUTA BOAT  
UP FOR RACING

SKINS & MOOSE 12.11.16







*The top sailors have all but won any regatta before it starts because they've prepared themselves and their boats so well.* PAUL ELVSTROM

## INTRODUCTION

Much of what is listed following may seem obvious, or even too minor to worry about, but preparing your boat well could help you gain valuable seconds in each race and even help you avoid gear failure.

Moose calls them the 1 percenters, on their own each one might not seem much but add them up and they make your racing easier.





## THE BOAT

- Try to get your ballast stacked in the exact middle of the boat. Do not spread it out too much along the keel. It acts more efficiently in ballasting the boat if it is midships and as low as possible. It is an underrated science and if not loaded correctly will affect the trim of the boat dramatically.

We learnt this the hard way on the *Rip*, when Tim correctly loaded the ballast for us the boat sailed much easier, hence faster.







## THE BOAT

- **Don't simply grab everything you had on the boat last year, and stow it up foreward.**

Try to think about what you had on the boat last year and never used or never looked like using (obviously pay attention to having on board everything that the RRS and the SSCBC/CBA Rules say you must carry).

Carrying lots of picnic gear or 6 tie up lines is just extra weight at the end of the boat where it is not efficient. If you do want extra items aboard store them down low in the middle of the boat, not forward of the mast. Similarly, ask your crew not to pack for the night (unless you are planning on being out there all night). It amazes me to see the size of some of the crew bags!

- Setting the prop – ensure there is a mark on your prop shaft – correctly identifying aligning your prop in the vertical position. **Allowing your prop to spin whilst racing IS NOT FAST** and it should be locked off in reverse gear and centred.
- Whilst it is not much of a fun job, the reality is that the boat's bottom will attract slime and eventually weed. It needs to be gently cleaned with a sponge or a very light scourer. Try not to rub too much antifoul off. If possible at the same time, lower the plate and clean it too. **Keeping the bottom clean will be a dramatic help to your performance**, particularly in light airs.





## RIGGING

- Ask your contractor to check during the winter lay-up that there is **no wear and tear** at the thimbles, shackles mast cap and fittings on the mast and that there are no kinks, burrs or broken strands on any of the shrouds, including whisker stays and bob stay. Ensure all shackles have been tightened with a spanner. It is recommended the shrouds be replaced every 5 years.
- Take a careful **look at the lashings for the shrouds**. If they are slightly worn, it is useful in showing you where you had them tied last year, but if they are too worn, replace them - it's just a few dollars for peace of mind.
- When you step the mast and fasten the shrouds, **try to get them the same as last year - particularly if you felt the boat was balanced last year!** If the boat was not balanced last year, perhaps invite one of the “top of the fleet” guys, or sailmakers or boat contractors to take a quick look at the mast rake/pre-bend in the mast. Ideally, once you have sweated the jib up on a sailing day, the mast should be in column, not leaning forward, and maybe a fraction of aft rake if you feel that works best for your balance.



## RIGGING

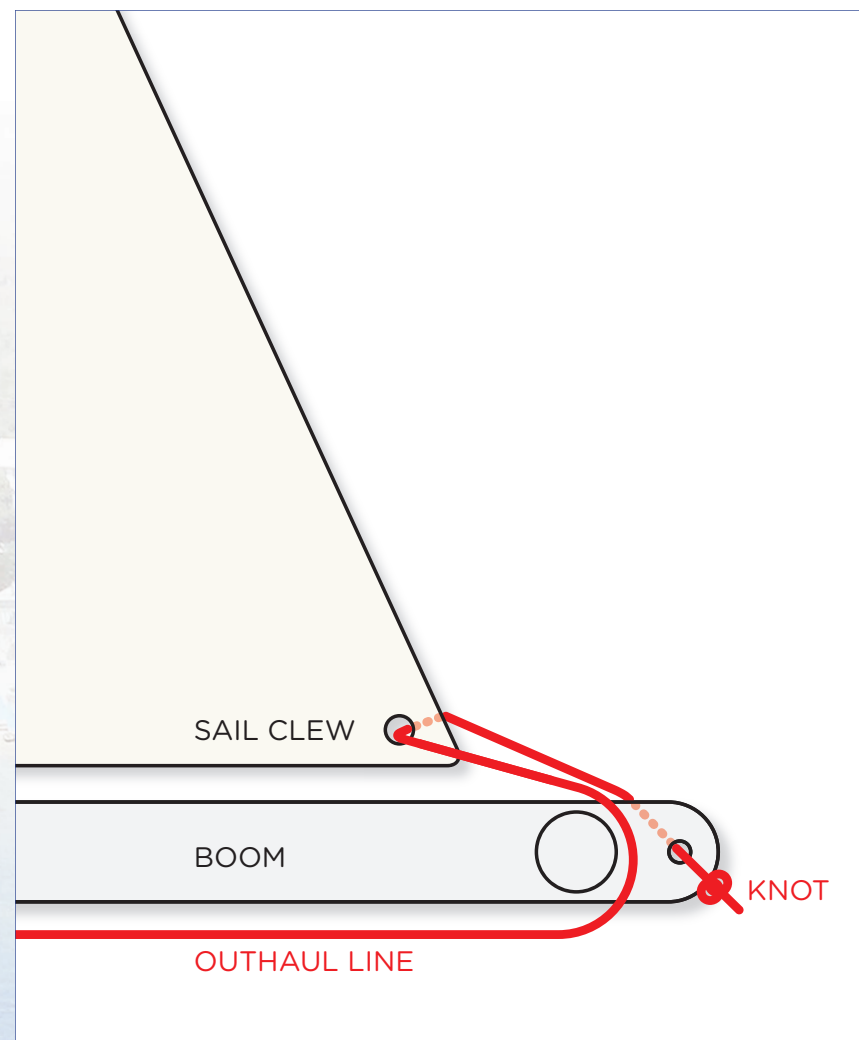
- When you are fastening the whisker stays, have someone stand on the bob stay halfway out the jibboom but make sure the forestay is attached, that **will allow you to properly tighten the whiskers**. Make sure when finished that the front of the jibboom, is exactly in line with the centerline of the boat. By using a string line or something similar.
- **Check the centerboard lifting strop and tackle** for wear and tear and if any doubt, replace it. Burrs are particularly dangerous on this strop.





## SPARS

- **Whisker pole** - check that the beak is running freely - use CRC or similar. Keep a can on the boat as this often develops salt build-up.
- **Gaff** - check that the gaff span is in good order and that there are no burrs on the span.
- Check that **the jaws on the gaff** allow the gaff to sit properly on the mast. If it looks funny, or gets jammed whilst tacking, consult your boat contractor.
- When you **set up your mainsail**, there's a simple opportunity to effectively **double your purchase on the outhaul** for nothing!  
Note - illustration for how to do it!





## SHEETS, HALYARDS AND BLOCKS AND CLEATS

- **Ensure all lines are suitably sized for their purpose and the blocks they run through.**  
Where allowed, use dyneema cored ropes, as they are significantly stronger for their weight, have approx 1/4 the stretch of double-braid rope, and don't absorb as much water. Highly recommended on highly loaded lines such as jib halyard, jibboom outhaul line and main outhaul.
- Make sure they are **not salt hardened and UV damaged**. It just makes life harder if they don't run out easily.
- For a worthwhile investment, you should **ensure you have auto ratchet blocks** for the main jib turning blocks on the deck, and also for the mainsheet at the swivel cleat. This is for both safety and ease of use/release.
- With the cleat for the mainsheet, ensure that **the angle of the tail after the last ratchet block** is such that it is both easy to cleat and uncleat the mainsheet.
- Make sure you have **checked that all cam cleats and fittings are operating correctly** and running freely, if not repair or replace. The manufacturers recommend fresh water only, not oils or sprays. At the end of the racing day, perhaps pour your half empty drink water bottles over the fittings.



## SHEETS, HALYARDS AND BLOCKS AND CLEATS

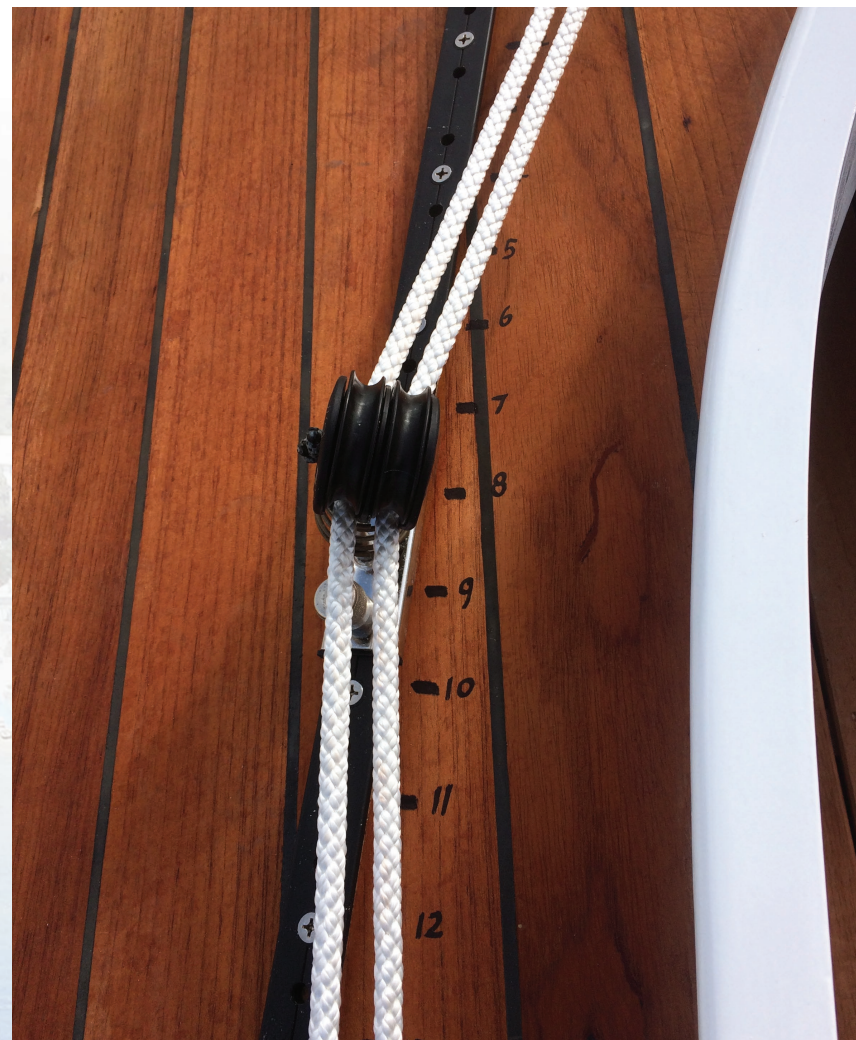
- If you have found that cleats and other equipment on your boat are positioned in awkward spots, then **consider relocating them, rather than putting up with it.** We suggest you look at other boats for set-up ideas if you are concerned, or talk to other competitors who for the most part, will be glad to help you.
- Make sure you take a couple of permanent markers on the boat for the tune-up sailing. **Place a ring of electrical tape around the mast at a convenient height** – we think approx 7' above deck (above truckies hitches) and mark the halyards for at least the mean condition and maybe even for heavy/light too. We always, in all conditions put truckies hitches in all 3 halyards for easy adjustment.





## SHEETS, HALYARDS AND BLOCKS AND CLEATS

- Similarly **mark or numbers on the deck or track** itself, the ideal position for jib cars in each of the conditions, and place a mark on your mainsheet when close-hauled so you know where the mark is in each of the conditions. Ensure the jib cars can easily be moved along the tracks preferably without the use of a spanner or pliers.
- Make sure you **carry suitable tools and spares**. We recommend as a minimum a Leatherman, a screwdriver, sharp knife and pliers/shackle key along with spare shackles, a couple of long lengths of different size line - ideally dyneema - and check that all shackles are tightly fastened.







## SAILS

- Make sure you **notify the Club Captain and Handicapper if you have any new sails** this season as it will affect your boat's handicap.
- Try to look after the sails. The yarn is susceptible to damage if poorly folded. **They are your engine** and as such are very valuable so treat them carefully.
- **Don't carry 5 or 6 sails on your boat.** The rules allow you one only No. 1 headsail on the boat during racing and spitfire (a No. 2 on the boat is also useful).
- When rigging and unrigging the boat, **try not to have the sails flogging for any length of time.** We always set and retrieve the headsail whilst sailing dead downwind as the sail can be pulled up and retrieved in the lee of the mainsail. Too often we see crews pulling up the headsail in a breeze with the boat head to wind - not good!
- **Make sure your battens are installed correctly** with the tapered end pushed in first, and the batten pocket secured.





## SOME OTHER THINGS...

- Make sure you have a **protest flag aboard** the boat.
- Make sure you have **completed the Safety Declaration** and submitted it to SSCBC office.
- Make sure you **have a set of current courses on the boat** and that a regular crew member and the skipper have both **studied the Club specific rules and sailing instructions** and have an understanding **what the tide is doing** during the race.

Finally, if there is anything we have not covered, or would like us to recap, please let's have a discussion now.

We are not sponsored by any contractor or sailmaker.

Next week, you'll hear from Rimmo, a very experienced sailmaker in the Couta Boats and a great tactician/sailor in Pete Gale. We recommend you take the time to attend next week's *Couta Conversation* too as this will cover sail trimming, setting your sails to suit your spars and more!

*Thanks,  
Skins and Moose*