

Tuning Your Tanzer for Light Air

By Jim Chastain (T-420)

During the summer, when those slow moving high pressure cells move across the country from the southwest, there is a general expectation that we can save our heavy and moderate air sailing techniques for the afternoon sea breeze or the isolated thunderstorm. The good all around sailor must change gears and shift from exultation into patience; light air sailing can be fun if you work at it, or frustrating if you don't. For the Tanzer 16 light air can be considered 6 knots down to zero.

Preparation again is the key. For light air sailing your rig must be set up to take full advantage of every small breeze that happens by, and in the lulls you must concentrate on keeping the boat aimed and moving in the proper direction. When stepping the mast position it completely out of the deck slot. This will open up the slot between the jib and mainsail and provide maximum efficiency and performance for the low velocity conditions. Don't over tighten the shrouds and forestay; run a loose rig. There is no need to use a downhaul or Cunningham, and the outhaul on the mainsail should be rigged but fairly slack. You want the main to have as much draft as possible; a few wrinkles on the luff and foot of the sail are acceptable. Maintain approximately the same position for your jib block cars as for optimum sailing conditions (moderate air), except you do not want the jib sheeted in as tightly. Remove any excess purchase from your main sheet system; the weight of the sheets can make subtle adjustments in sail trim difficult. Make sure the halyards are tight when you raise the sails. The forestay should sag and the mast lean forward a little when the jib halyard is properly secured.

The objective for successful light air sailing is threefold:

1. Find wind on the water and attain clear air. This is perhaps the single most important concept. When starting behind other boats on the favored end of the line you have dealt yourself a severe blow. Starting at the other end of the line with clear air will put you miles ahead even though it is not the ideal course. Tack to attain clear air if necessary; but don't hesitate to tack toward the next puff.
2. Maintain proper balance and attitude of the boat. Heel your boat slightly to leeward to reduce wetted surface and help provide the proper shape in the sails for a good airfoil. Gravity will help do what low wind velocity will not. Maintain proper balance for a neutral helm and minimize movements in the boat that will disturb its attitude relative to the set of the sails and wind direction.
3. Don't overtrim your sails! Ease them out a little farther than you normally would in ideal wind conditions. This usually will give better performance.

Other considerations in light air sailing include minimizing your tacks to preserve boat speed, and footing off the wind a little to attain greater boat speed. One effective method of tacking is to use the "roll tack" where a rapid and deliberate shifting of crew weight is made to keep the wind in the sails while changing direction to preserve boat speed. In light air you run the risk of stopping your boat completely with an incorrectly executed tack. Patience, concentration and observance are critical. Look ahead for the catspaws on the water; try and detect the direction and location of the next puff and be there. Do not become over anxious and pinch to windward. Concentrate on sail

trim and balance.

Sometimes, no matter how much skill and technique you use, there just isn't any way to make the boat go. There's just no wind. That's when the sails are limp as rags, and you can spit in the water and watch it float by for five minutes.

There's only one thing left to do to preserve your sanity: make the most of it! Pull out the jug of ice water, or a cold beer. Or, if you're really ready to cool off, throw a line over the side and take a dip. That will put a whole new

perspective on your situation! Just keep in mind that you're out there to have a good time. So keep cool and relax!



As in utilizing the other special techniques for heavy air and moderate air sailing, the techniques required for successful light air sailing are attained only through practice and experience. To be a good all around sailor, you must be willing to go out under all weather conditions and learn to be master of your boat, and master of yourself. Light air sailing tests your patience and persistence severely at times; but practice and time spent sailing in light air are the best teachers.