

SPINNAKERS: Flying The Chute (Another View of Spinnakers)

By Dave Permar (T-165)

I think some Tanzer skippers go a little too far in touting the virtues of the spinnaker. This talk can be misleading to inexperienced sailors. Some points which I think should be made are as follows:

1. Most sailboat races are won beating to windward. Despite the best efforts of such renowned spinnaker users as Dave Gilbert, Jim Strickland, and Jess Coburn, I have never seen a Tanzer beat to windward with a spinnaker up.
2. Spinnakers can only improve performance when the wind is between five and fifteen knots. If the wind *is* less than that, you are better off concentrating on weight distribution and sitting still in the boat. If the wind is more than that, the boat is overpowered with the spinnaker up.
3. Most of the spinnaker work is done by the crew and in order to fly the spinnaker in a race, the crew must be at least as skilled and "gung-ho" as the skipper.
4. The spinnaker makes only a marginal difference unless the use of the spinnaker makes planing possible when planing could not be accomplished without the spinnaker.
5. The marginal improvement that a spinnaker allows over a non-spinnaker boat frequently is lost during setup and take down, especially if the setup or take down is less than perfect.

I am not particularly enamored with the spinnaker, especially for racing. I consider it to be more suitable for leisurely cruising. Moreover, I think it is important for beginning Tanzer 16 racers to know that a spinnaker is not necessary to win. Curt Elmer, one of the founders of the Class Association, never owned a spinnaker and yet he was Tanzer 16 Fleet Champion with the Carolina Sailing Club on more than one occasion. I believe a new sailor should concentrate on windward performance and not start thinking about using a spinnaker until he can consistently round the windward mark with the top third of the fleet.

