

Tuning Your Tanzer for Moderate Air

By Jim Chastain (T-420)



Truly the most pleasurable experience for any sailor is when the weather conditions are ideal for his boat, and he feels confident in handling the boat on all points of sailing. He can then devote much more attention to strategy and tactics on the race course, or just enjoy the scenery if daysailing. For the Tanzer 16 ideal conditions are moderate air, or wind velocities in the 7 to 12 knot range.

For moderate air sailing, your rig must be set up differently than for the other extremes of heavy or light air to obtain maximum sail performance and boat speed. When stepping the mast, ensure that there is about a 2-3 inch gap

between the deck and the front of the mast in the deck slot. This will open up the slot between the main and the jib, and promote uniform air flow with a minimum of turbulence for good lift from the main. Don't overtighten the shrouds and forestay; run a fairly loose rig. Rig the downhaul (or Cunningham) and boomvang, but don't overtighten them. These devices should be used only to adjust draft in the main when changing points of sailing. Place your jib block-cars such that the luff of the jib shakes evenly from the top to the bottom when you luff the boat to windward. A double purchase on the mainsheet block system should be more than adequate. Make sure the halyards are tight when you raise the sails. The forestay should sag a little when the jib halyard is properly secured. Adjust the outhaul on the mainsail to provide a smooth unwrinkled shape, and adjust the downhaul (or Cunningham) to put the maximum draft approximately two thirds of the way forward in the sail.

The objective for moderate air sailing is to keep your boat flit and balanced with full power in the sails and maintain a neutral helm except when changing course. This is accomplished mainly by continual adjustments in weight distribution within the boat, subtle adjustments in the tiller to maintain an optimum angle of attack, and playing the mainsheet to help balance the boat when the preceding adjustments fail to do so. You should seek to place the boat "in the groove" sailing to windward, where little or no adjustments in sail trim are necessary. You will feel no pressure on the tiller and sailing seems effortless. This skill is only developed by practice, and is nearly an art itself. Sailing off the wind, a neutral helm and perfect weight distribution are equally important. With spinnaker up, although you are tempted to position yourself at the back of the cockpit or on the lee rail while at the helm you should not; this could cause an imbalance in the forces on the boat that would require compensation by sail trim adjustment or excessive rudder action. You would sacrifice power and/or reduction of drag for your comfortable position in the boat. For best results, position your crew amidships or slightly off center and yourself as far forward and on the windward rail ready to shift your weight as required. Also, don't overtrim your sails, learn how to ease them to the point of luffing and trim in for full power. Be observant and take advantage of

changes in wind direction and velocity. Pull the centerboard halfway up when off the wind to reduce drag and weather helm.

One great way to improve your skill is by sailing at night when your vision is limited. This forces you to use your senses of feel, balance and sound to sail the boat, and develops your "automatic pilot", which is

vital to enable you to observe occurrences outside your boat that are important for optimum sailing. Practice and time in the boat is the real key to improvement of your sailing skills.

