

FLUID FOUNDATIONS

Episode 1: Getting planing

SPRING HAS ARRIVED AND WITH IT THE PROMISE, as always, of a fantastic new year of windsurfing! With this in mind, Jim Collis launches into the new windsurfing season with his Fluid Foundations - a series of articles that take us back to the first principles and concentrates on core skills and techniques in a simple, easy to follow progression.

Starting with going faster and getting planing, we will progress on to harness work, footstrap use, developing our stance, improving tacks and gybes, and ultimately looking at beach and waterstarts. The Fluid Foundations series is designed to be a tool for use by any level of sailor, whether inexperienced and looking to improve, or an advanced sailor who, although able to do many of the skills covered, will benefit from taking on board simple tips to hone and consolidate their performance on the water.

To help with this easy progression, all the skills within the Fluid Foundations series are broken down and simplified according to Jim's "K.I.S.S." methodology - Keeping It Stupidly Simple (see his KISS Series from June 2007).

K.I.S.S. consists of five themes that run throughout our windsurfing and are relevant for absolute novices through to world champions. These themes underpin the essential core aspects of the skills within windsurfing, and help us to concentrate on the root cause of why a skill works, rather than concentrating on confusing peripheral aspects that might happen as a result of doing the skill.

For example, in a tack - focusing on what our head is looking at to help control the board's direction, rather than thinking about what our little toe is doing to help steer the board.



The 5 themes of K.I.S.S. are:

- HEAD** - Looking where we want to go and being aware of everything around us.
- ARMS** - Keeping a straight front arm, thereby distancing ourselves from the rig and causing us to naturally counter balance against it; and using our back arm to 'sheet in' or draw power from the rig.
- LEGS** - Adjusting leg and foot positions to keep the board flat and us stable!
- BODY** - Changing our body position/shape according to conditions and how we feel. For example: if over-powered or threatened: move your body lower, if underpowered or inefficient: become more upright.
- BREATHE** - Remember to breathe, so that we can be relaxed, alert and responsive when sailing, which in turn helps us to flow and perform more naturally, whatever your skill level or the conditions.

K.I.S.S. is not some crazy, half-hatched idea but rather an interpretation of a widely used concept in a huge number of sports; the idea of bringing everything down to a base level: creating firm foundations from which to build a solid skill level, and allowing us to take this further, all the time retaining an understanding through simplicity.

The Fluid Foundations series is about simplifying skills and techniques essential to our windsurfing. Before we start, it is important to point out that this series does not go into equipment and kit set up: for information on this, please refer to Jim's Tech Spec Series from September 07 - March 08.

GETTING PLANING

Getting a board onto the plane (where the board 'releases' and travels quickly, skimming the top of the water) is a fundamental skill in itself, but it is also very

useful as a guide to the rest of our windsurfing. The technique that we use to actually get the board going, is in itself transferable to many other areas of windsurfing.

As you will see from the photos, the key to getting planing, whether hooked-in to the harness or not, is in how we use our body. The low body shape that we use to drive a board up onto the plane, is a shape that repeats itself in many other skills within windsurfing (as you will see throughout this series), and is testament to the fact that there are but a few fundamentals, which tie together all the skills and techniques within windsurfing. Practise the basics and you can become very good, very quickly...but beware: look for deeper, more complicated answers and prepare to become stuck on a plateau with your skill level for some time!

BEFORE THE SKILL

Before getting planing, make sure you are comfortable and relaxed, sailing on kit you are happy with and used to, and in a wind strength that is strong enough to achieve the skill, but not too strong to intimidate you (a good practise wind for this skill is Force 3-4).

A comfortable and relaxed sailing position can be easily achieved by running through the essentials of K.I.S.S. once you are on the water...

HEAD - Looking where you want to go.

ARMS - Front arm straight, back arm drawing the boom gently in, back and down for power.

LEGS - Front leg straight, back leg slightly bent and flexed with feet positioned more inboard to help keep the board flat.

BODY - In a comfortable position.

BREATHE - Take slow, easy breaths so as to feel relaxed.

N.B. As with many things in life, preparation is very important – trying to get planing when you are not comfortable and relaxed, usually leads to less than desirable results!



Sailing comfortably

DURING THE SKILL

To 'drive' the board forwards and encourage it to overtake its own bow wake and start planing on top of the water, we change one thing – what our body is doing...

BODY - Drop your hips over a very bent back leg, keeping the front leg straight. You will feel like you are hanging off the boom, in a 'tug of war' position.

- When dropped low like this, try to focus on pushing your front foot flat so as to 'drive' or push the board forwards. Your head, arms, legs and breathing should be fairly similar to what they were doing before you started...

HEAD - Looking where you want to go.

N.B. If the wind is on the light side, look slightly downwind so as to 'bear away' or steer downwind to get more power in the sail,



ARMS - Front arm straight, back arm gently drawing in, back and down (beware of the temptation to 'pull' on the boom – let your body do most of the work and use your arms more as levers).

LEGS - Front leg straight, back leg bent and flexed, (more so now, to allow you to drop low), with your feet positioned so as to keep the board flat

BREATHE - Slow breaths to stay relaxed, rather than hyperventilating and thereby tensing-up!

and help you to get planing more easily. If the wind is on the strong side, look slightly upwind to steer further towards the wind: thereby reducing the amount of power in the sail (still enough to get planing, but not so much as to over-power you). If the wind is perfect, then keep looking straight ahead, across the wind.

The board will now start to feel like it has 'released' from the water and gone up a gear – you are now planing!

Dropping low and getting planing

AFTER THE SKILL

Just as you were doing before planing, you should now return to sailing in a comfortable and relaxed fashion, according to the 5 elements of K.I.S.S.

HEAD - Look where you want to go.

ARMS - Front arm straight, back arm gently drawing in, back and down.

LEGS - Front leg straight, back leg bent and flexed, feet positioned to keep the board flat. *N.B.* Due to the board now planing and being further out of the water, you have to move further back down the board and outboard, to keep the board flat.

BODY - Return your body position to the comfortable one you had before getting planing.

BREATHE - Take some deep breaths to recover and then relax.



Planing

TOP TIPS

- Getting planing is all about dropping your body low and pushing with your feet (in particular the front one – imagine trying to push a carpet out from under you).
- Remember to settle down and relax before and after the skill.

If attempting the skill in less than ideal conditions (severely underpowered or over powered, then adjust your head and body, to have control beforehand and afterwards. For example, if the wind is a bit stronger than you feel secure with, look upwind more with your head and drop your body lower. Do the skill as normal and then, when you are planing, keep your head looking upwind and keep your body low, to settle down and retain comfort and control once more.

VARIATIONS – Getting planing in a harness

Getting planing need not be complicated by whether or not you are using a harness.

In fact, the skill itself is exactly the same: keeping your body low is the one thing that helps to drive the board up onto the plane, while equally important is remembering to return to the same relaxed sailing position that you had before you started planing.

The only difference is that you are a little closer to the boom when hooked-in and are therefore unable to get as low as when you were not hooked-in.

This can all be seen from the sequence of photos. By focusing on what the head, arms, legs, body and breathing are doing, the similarity between getting planing hooked-in and doing it out of the harness, is very clear.

N.B. There is no right or wrong here with regards to whether getting planing should be done in or out of a harness. However, there are some general trends to take note of:

- If the wind is marginal then doing the skill out of the harness will allow you to adopt a more dynamic body position to drive the board onto the plane. Being hooked-in in lighter winds and trying to drop low just doesn't give the same impetus as un-hooking and dropping super low!
- If the wind is stronger, sometimes hooking-in before getting planing can save your arms, making you feel more secure

Hopefully this episode on getting planing has given you some food for thought, whether you are an experienced sailor who planes in the slightest puff of wind, or you are learning to get planing for the first time.

The important thing to remember is to keep it simple!

Next month we will be moving onto harness work, looking at the skill of hooking in and out of a harness, sailing comfortably and in control whilst attached to the rig: whether you are planing or not...

Fluid Foundations is written by Jim Collis for more about him and his instructing please see his website www.windsurfevolution.co.uk.

