



{ Feasible Freestyle for everyone! }

FLUID PROGRESSIONS: FREESTYLE FOR EVERYONE

PART 5: SAILING BACKWARDS

THIS issue Jim Collis launches into the fifth part of his "Freestyle for Everyone" series, a string of articles designed to help us consolidate our general windsurfing skills, whatever our ability level, through building and developing our rig and board confidence whilst having fun out on the water.

"Freestyle for Everyone"

This concept is not about learning the latest manoeuvre, it's about getting on the water, whatever the conditions and whatever our ability level: getting better at handling a rig and moving around on a board in a fun and entertaining way... what freestyle is really all about!

10 simple skills

With this series we are working our way through a simple progression of 10 easy to achieve freestyle skills that get progressively harder and can be done in non-planing or planing conditions. These 10 skills, running from lifting/dragging a foot as the 1st skill through to a helicopter tack as the 10th, underpin the essential movements in windsurfing that help us as sailors to get better at all skills in windsurfing.

Kit and conditions

We should help ourselves from the start by jumping on a bigger board than perhaps we would usually go on and a smallish rig rather than some monster. Ideally, good kit to go out on is a board around 130-200 litres and a sail between 4.5m-6.5m. We should also start by going out in light to marginal winds (Force 1-3). As we become more confident, so we might then 'up the ante' a bit to improve our skill level by going down in board size, going out in slightly stronger winds and increasing the rig size a fraction.

Keeping it stupidly simple!

As always when learning any skill, simplicity is key. As such, each of the 10 skills will be broken down with the use of Jim's K.I.S.S. ("Keeping It Stupidly Simple") coaching methodology; 5 basic terms that help to simplify and strip skills down to their core working components, to make them easily achievable and understandable. (For more information about K.I.S.S. please refer to Jim's "KISS Series" from June 2007).

The 5 terms 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 on the board to keep it flat and us stable!

BODY - Changing our body's position/shape according to conditions and how we feel. i.e. if we feel over-powered or threatened we get lower and if we feel underpowered or inefficient we become more upright

BREATHE - Remembering 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 the skill or conditions.

FREESTYLE SKILL 7

Skill 7: Sailing Backwards

Sailing backwards, also commonly known as 'sailing on the nose' or 'sailing tail-first', is one of those skills that many of us will have tried before, perhaps as a stylish way of leaving a beach when our fin was too long to beach-start normally, or during some 'experimentation' on the water, or perhaps totally by accident! Whether we have given it a go before or not, sailing backwards is a very achievable skill that is good fun to do and, as with all these 10 feasible freestyle skills, it also has many uses and advantages that tie back into our general sailing without us even being aware.

- It promotes excellent rig and board control, especially with regards to how we use our arms when sailing
- It gives us bags of confidence with how we can handle our kit when sailing; the ability to stop, reverse and sail in and out of very shallow locations, and possibly even deal with the loss of a fin and be able to self-rescue
- It is a very useful skill to practice for progression onto more advanced skills such as willy skippers

There are several ways to get ourselves into and out of actually going backwards. To keep things simple, we are going to look at the easiest method to start with and then look at some of the variations at the end



{ Move into a neutral position }

1. Once comfortable sailing across the wind (on a beam reach), sheet-out by letting go with your back hand and move into a neutral position. Keep your head up, front arm straight/rig away, feet relatively central on the board to keep it flat, and your body relaxed. N.B. If you have a dagger-board, put it up at this point

{ Move into sailing position on nose of board }



2. Take hold of the other side of the boom, turn your head to look back where you have just come from, and move into a sailing position standing on the nose of the board. *N.B. Do not try to get the fin out of the water by standing a long way down the nose of the board...we actually want some of the fin to be in the water to help give us some directional stability!*

{ Sailing backwards }



{ Focus on head, arms, legs & body when sailing backwards }



3. Sail off backwards, or tail-first!

N.B. As you start to sail off backwards, you will notice the tail of the board trying to luff, or steer up into the wind all the time. To combat this, move the rig further forwards by moving both your front hand and your back hand down the boom towards the clew (front hand on or between the harness lines and back hand down by the clew) and you will regain control of your steering. Remember to counter balance this forward movement of the rig by dropping your body lower over a bent back leg!

4. Some key things to remember when sailing backwards:

- i. Keep your head up and looking where you want to go
- ii. Keep your arms extended/rig away with hands further down the boom for better control
- iii. Keep your feet on or around the centreline of the board and relatively close to the mast foot to help keep the board flat & stable, and to help control our direction by keeping some of the fin in the water
- iv. Keep a low body position over a bent back leg to counter balance the accentuated forward position of the rig, and keep your front leg straight so as to help drive the board in a straight line.

{ Returning to sailing normally again }



5. To return to sailing normally, sheet-out again and move back into a neutral position around the middle of the board. Once the board has slowed down, resume a normal sailing position standing on the back of the board and sail off forwards! *N.B. If you have a dagger-board, put it down again.*

{ Try the other direction... and then some variations! }



6. Try again, but this time for longer, and, as always, try in the opposite direction.

Why not try steering upwind and downwind, and for those of you with a dagger-board, try it with the dagger-board down and see if it makes a difference!

For the more adventurous amongst you, try tacking and gybing whilst going backwards, and even try some of the other freestyle skills we have already covered whilst sailing tail-first...

Having looked at the process of sailing tail-first, we are now going to have a quick look at some of the variations of how we could get ourselves into and out of actually sailing backwards.

The Tack Method:

- From sailing across the wind (on a beam reach), steer into the wind as if doing a tack
- Step up onto the nose of the board well in front of the mast foot and, keeping hold of the same side of the boom, sheet-in and sail off in the same direction as before, but tail-first
- To return to sailing normally, steer the tail of the board up into the wind, step up onto the tail and, keeping hold of the boom, sheet-in to sail off forwards again



The Beach Start Method:

- Position yourself to do a beach start, but with the board the wrong way around (tail-first) and your dagger-board (if you have one) in the up position
- Do the normal beach start technique (please see my Fluid Foundations Series – Episode 7: Beach Start & Water Start for more details), but position yourself a little closer to the mast foot as you come up onto the board so as to maintain good stability and better directional control
- Once away from the shore and in deep enough water for the fin, return to sailing normally again by using either the method outlined above, or the alternative tack method
- Once you've had a go at this, why not try sailing back into the beach tail-first as well...

N.B. This is a useful method to use when launching and landing in an area too shallow for your fin as well as a great alternative practice method for sailing backwards. Although we are not deliberately trying to get the fin out of the water when sailing backwards (so as to maintain some directional control), the fact that we are standing up on the nose rather than the tail will mean that there will be less fin in the water than if we were sailing normally, and so we will be able to sail in shallower water as a result.



Top Tips for Sailing Backwards:

- Always keep your head looking where you want to go
- Position your hands further down the boom towards the clew to get the rig further forwards for better directional control
- Keep a low body position over a bent back leg to counter-balance the forward rig position, and keep your front leg straight so as to help drive the board in a straight line
- Keep your feet on or around the centreline of the board and relatively close to the mast foot to help keep the board flat, and to help control direction with some of the fin still in the water

Next month we will be moving onto the 8th freestyle skill in this Fluid Progressions: Freestyle for Everyone series...Body & Rig 360s. In the meantime, see how you get on with some tail-first sailing...enjoy! This brings us to the end of this episode on sailing backwards. Whether looking to have a bit of a laugh on the water or serious about your freestyle, hopefully there is something for everyone; the focus, as always,

being getting out there, enjoying it, and making vast improvements to your sailing without even realising.

"Freestyle for Everyone" is written by Jim Collis. If you'd like any more information on coaching or training to be an instructor with Jim please contact him on jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk or visit www.windsurfevolution.co.uk