



{ Feasible Freestyle for everyone! }

FLUID PROGRESSIONS: FREESTYLE FOR EVERYONE

PART 8: THE HELICOPTER TACK

THIS MARKS THE FINAL EPISODE OF **Jim Collis'** 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. In the last 7 issues we have looked at 9 of the 10 freestyle skills: lifting/dragging a foot, kneeling/sitting/lying down whilst sailing, switch stance sailing, pirouettes, rig 180s & 360s, clew-first sailing, sailing backwards, body & rig 360s, and sailing back-winded. The series culminates this issue with the 10th and final feasible freestyle skill: the helicopter tack.

A quick recap...

"Freestyle for everyone"

This concept is not about learning the latest 'hoochy-ka-poochy' manoeuvre, it's about getting on the water, whatever the conditions and whatever our ability level, and getting better at handling a rig and moving around on a board in a fun and entertaining way... what freestyle is really all about! The end result is that, as well as having a good laugh, we will be learning and consolidating core skills so that we are getting better at our general sailing without even realising it. We will also be gaining key foundations in freestyle so that if we want to take it further, we will be set up to do so.

10 Simple Skills

Rather than heading out on the water and randomly trying 'twirly things' on a board, we have worked 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. We will find that certain skills will work as great exercises for certain moves we are trying in our general sailing, and that as we get more confident with the 10 skills we can start to link them together and create new skills and gain new and far-improved confidence with our rig and on our board without even realising it!

Kit and conditions

We should help ourselves from the start by jumping on a bigger board than perhaps we would usually go on and use a smallish rig rather than some monster. Ideally, good kit would be a board around 130-200 litres (depending on our weight) and a sail between 4.5m-6.5m (depending on what we feel comfortable with). We should also start by going out in light to marginal winds (Force 1-3) rather than throwing ourselves into it during a typhoon and wondering why nothing seems to be working!

As we become more confident at throwing a smallish rig and ourselves around in marginal conditions and on a more stable platform, so we might then 'up the ante' to improve our skill level by going down in board size a bit, going out in slightly stronger winds and maybe increasing the rig size a fraction (although we should always keep the rig at a manageable size for the sake of manoeuvrability).

For those really light wind days, or perhaps when getting onto the water is just not feasible, then there is always the option of taking your fin off and doing some of the skills on land on a fin-less board and rig. Remember...all time spent on your kit is time well spent!

Keeping it stupidly simple!

As always when learning any skill, simplicity is key. As such, each of the 10 skills have been 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 so as to make them easily achievable and understandable.

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: 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 10

Skill 10: The Helicopter Tack

The helicopter tack, often abbreviated and known as the 'heli' tack, is quite literally where you do a tack, but instead of moving to the other side of the rig mid-manoeuve as in a normal tack, you sail out of the tack on the wrong side of the sail (back-winded) and rotate the rig and yourself (hence the helicopter reference) so as to sail off normally.

The heli tack is a pinnacle manoeuvre in windsurfing that, as well as being great fun to do, also helps massively with our overall confidence on the water and pays dividends in many of the skills that we do in our general sailing. As well as this, it forms the foundations for many other skills in windsurfing, particularly in freestyle.

The name and general mythology that surround this manoeuvre give the impression that it is quite a tricky skill to achieve, but do not be fooled! With the skills that we have already covered in this Fluid Progressions:

Freestyle for Everyone series and the confidence that we have gained as a result, the heli tack is imminently achievable and will bring many hours of fun-filled time on the water. Not to mention assisting us in many areas of our general windsurfing...

- It helps us to further build confidence with our handling of a rig and moving around on a board, which pays dividends in a huge cross section of skills, from tacks and gybes, planing techniques and general control, right through to more advanced manoeuvres such as upwind 360s, spocks and flakas!
- It practices many of the freestyle skills that we have already learnt in this series which, in turn, helps to increase our general level of skill and confidence
- It gives us a great boost when able to do this pinnacle manoeuvre in windsurfing

As has been indicative of this series as a whole, we are going to keep things simple so as to make the helicopter tack as achievable as possible.

The great thing about the heli tack is that it is entirely made up of some of the freestyle skills that we have already looked at in previous episodes, namely back-winded sailing, body & rig 360s, clew-first sailing, and rig 180s & 360s. All we need to do is put them together in a certain order and hey presto, we've pulled off a heli tack!

The easiest way to do this is to look at the helicopter tack in 3 sections...the start, the middle, and the end. Depending on our confidence and/or the conditions, we can practice each section in isolation or join them all together straight away – the choice is ours! As already mentioned, we have already covered all the skills involved and so, whether we recap certain skills by doing each section separately, or go for it straight away by joining them all together first, is totally up to you as an individual. Ultimately though, our aim is to join the start, middle and end together to create the pièce de resistance – the heli tack!

The Start

As the term helicopter tack suggests, there is a tack involved at some point, and this is what we are going to do at the start. The difference between this and a normal tack is that we stay on the same side of the sail and exit the tack back-winded, thereby putting our back-winded sailing into practice...



{ Prepare for the tack }

1. Get comfortable sailing across the wind (on a beam reach), and then prepare for doing the tack:

- Wrap your front foot around the front of the mast-foot
 - Turn your head to look upwind
- N.B. Although in a normal tack we would usually move our front hand onto the mast beneath the boom or slide it up to the head of the boom in preparation, for a heli tack it is best to leave your front hand in the normal position for control and comfort when you exit the tack back-winded.*



{ Steer the board up into wind }

2. Steer the board into the wind, looking into the wind with your head and inclining the rig to the back of the board with straight arms, whilst maintaining good counterbalance with your body (rig back, body forwards)



{ Place the rig into the wind }

3. As the nose of the board goes through the eye of the wind, bring the rig forwards and across your body by extending your arms forwards and to windward, and place it into the wind so that the sail gets back-winded



{ Adjust yourself to suit being back-winded }

4. As the sail gets back-winded, turn your head to look where you want to go (NOT at the rig!), adjust your arms to suit sailing back-winded (front arm straight, back arm loose), and keep your legs/feet over the centreline of the board for a stable platform...You are now sailing out in the new direction 'front to sail' or back-winded!

The Middle

The middle part of the heli tack is purely sailing back-winded for a while so as to regain our composure and control, having finished the tack and before we start thinking about finishing off the manoeuvre, by rotating the rig and ourselves back to normal. ➤

5. Sail away from where you did the tack getting comfortable on the 'wrong side' of the sail, or back-winded

- Always keep your head looking where you are going and NOT at the sail
- Keep your front arm straight for good counterbalance and power control
- Allow your back arm to bend to let the sail 'open up'...or even take it off completely!
- Keep your feet on / around the centreline of the board for a stable platform

N.B. Please see the last article: Skill 9: Back-Winded Sailing, to fully recap this if necessary



{ Get comfortable sailing back-winded in the new direction }

The End

This final section is where we rotate ourselves and the rig from the back-winded sailing position, to a normal sailing position (the helicopter part of the manoeuvre), and then sail off having finished a heli tack!

Although this part of a heli tack is often thought to

be the trickiest part due to everything looking quite quick and 'helicopter', the essence of doing this is to slow it all down and make use of our prior expertise in some of the skills that we have already covered in this Fluid Progressions series, namely body & rig 360s, clew-first sailing, and rig 180s & 360s.

6. From your back-winded sailing position, steer slightly away from the wind and place both hands on the boom in a wide grip



{ Prepare for rotating back to normal sailing position }

7. Leading with your head, start rotating the rig around the front of the board still holding onto the boom, whilst moving your feet around the back of the board in a heel to toe fashion



{ Rotate rig and yourself around to a clew-first sailing position }

8. When you are in a clew-first sailing position, stop the rotation and settle yourself before continuing so as to retain control and composure



{ Pause at clew-first sailing position }

9. When ready, rotate the rig from clew-first back to normal, remembering to keep your head looking where you are going (NOT at the rig), arms straight/rig away, and body counterbalancing the movement of the rig



{ Rotate rig back to normal }

10. As you finish, keep your body low for stability and then sail off!



{ Sail away! }

Having tried the Heli Tack a few times, remember to try it in the other direction, and for the more adventurous amongst you, why not try adding a pirouette at the end (heli tack pirouette), or perhaps even doing a back-wind gybe (see last issue for more details) at the end so that you end up doing a full 360 (upwind 360)



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

Top Tips for The Helicopter Tack:

- Always keep your head looking where you are going and NOT at the sail
- Keep your front arm straight / rig away for good counterbalance and power control
- Move your feet on / around the centreline to keep the board flat and you stable
- Keep your body low at the end for stability

This brings us to the end of this episode on the helicopter tack and also to the end of this Fluid

Progressions: Freestyle for Everyone series.

Hopefully, over the course of the series you will have seen how each of the 10 freestyle skills built up progressively, giving us more confidence on our board and with our rig each issue, resulting in us gaining far more than just a few showy freestyle tricks, but a marked improvement in our general windsurfing and, above all, the chance to just get out on the water and have a bit of fun!

"Freestyle for Everyone" is written by Jim Collis - Pro Coach, Instructor Trainer and Technique Editor for Windsurf magazine. 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