

TECH SPEC SERIES

Part 2: Footstraps

Setting our kit up properly before going out on the water is one of those areas of windsurfing full of urban myths, mumbled truths and general chaos as we rush frantically to get everything done so we can get out there before the wind dies! Along with the fact that there are so many bits of advice on how to set kit up (much of which contradict themselves) and the fact that no-one wants to spend hours on the shore tweaking and tuning, all of our good intentions go out the window as we bundle everything together and hope for the best.

Jim Collis, over the next few issues, is going to navigate us through this quagmire of myth, legend and general confusion, and give us some simple advice on setting our kit up quickly, easily and efficiently.

Last month Jim started the 'Tech Spec' series looking at Fins and gave us the what, why and how of choosing and using the right fin. This month Jim moves on to looking at Footstraps and the what's, where's and how's of setting them up quickly and easily so that we get out on the water without delay and have that great session!

This series is NOT going to be a massively detailed guide covering all specifics, but rather a simple guide to help answer questions and make our lives easier regards some of those misunderstood and confused issues surrounding kit set up. For more detail or specifics please feel free to contact Jim on jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk and he will be more than happy to spend more time going through things in more detail.

THE WHAT AND WHY OF FOOTSTRAPS...

It is all too easy sometimes, especially if we have bought a board second hand or even rented it, to assume that the footstraps will be fine in the positions we find them in. We rush out onto the water and have a terrible session because we never feel totally comfortable or secure when in the straps...

So, before delving into the where's and how's it is important to quickly consider what footstraps are actually for on a board and this in turn will help to dispel one of the biggest urban myths of them all...the 'Placebo' footstrap setting!

Without stating the blindingly obvious, footstraps are designed to attach us to the board so that when we are going faster and especially over bumpier water we don't get flung off! Strap design has developed hugely over the last 10 years, and the majority of board manufacturers now produce comfortable yet durable straps. For those of us who are very particular with strap design and fit there are also more specialist ergonomically designed footstraps available on the market.

A SELECTION OF FOOTSTRAPS



FOOTSTRAP PLUGS



Look at any board designed to be used with footstraps and you will notice that the footstrap 'plugs', or holes where the straps can be screwed into, are all placed towards the back of the board and towards the edge.

This is because as we go faster on our board, so as to keep our board flat and happy on the water, we have to move back and outboard (Please see Jim's recent KISS series - episode 4 on "Legs" - for more details on the specifics of this).

The important thing to remember here is that we move our feet on a board so as to keep it flat and going quickly rather than leaping back to where the footstraps are just because they are there. As we move back and outboards to keep our board flat and happy, we end up standing in and around where the footstraps are and so we might as well put our feet in them!

Sometimes you might see a board where the footstraps are placed very far forwards on a board, for instance right up by the mast track. Although this could be a useful confidence builder for someone learning to put their feet in and out of footstraps, the problem with this slightly 'placebo' style of footstrap placement is that as we start to get the board going faster and thereby need the security of footstraps to keep us attached to the board, they actually become more of a hazard than a help. Because the board needs us to move back and outboards as it accelerates, so as to 'free' it from the water and to keep it flat and stable, if we are stuck quite far forwards and inboard due to the straps being placed there, it is a bit like leaving the handbrake on in a moving car; we will slow the board down and possibly cause ourselves to catapult.

This does not mean, however, that learning to get into the footstraps should be a traumatic 'all or nothing' experience. Manufacturers now provide footstrap placements that are slightly back and slightly outboard, more commonly known as the 'Training Straps', but which aren't as far back and outboard as the normal 'Blasting' strap positions. This is so that we can learn to move back and outboard progressively thereby keeping our confidence but also keeping the board happy as well!



WHERE SHOULD FOOTSTRAPS GO?

With what has just been mentioned above, we know that straps need to generally be back and outboards on a board, albeit to varying degrees according to our ability level.

Moving away from 'Placebo' and 'Training' strap positions, we are going to look at how we can adjust where our straps are, once in the normal 'blasting' position, so as to change the board's performance and make it feel comfortable for us.

Inboard or Outboard?

As a general rule – Inboard straps for manoeuvrability, Outboard straps for speed! Probably the easiest way of seeing this is looking at the difference between a wave board and a slalom board – one built for manoeuvres and one built for speed. The straps on the wave board are very much more inboard than those of the slalom board which are right on the back and edge. To add to this, there is only one back strap on the wave board so as to increase the sailor's ability to manoeuvre the board easily from side to side, whereas the slalom board has two back straps right out on the edge of the board so the sailor can lock the board down flat and drive hard off the fin to go fast in a straight line!

SLALOM FOOTSTRAP SET UP



WAVE FOOTSTRAP SET UP



FREESTYLE FOOTSTRAP SET UP

Strap positions can further be tweaked on these boards to maximise manoeuvrability or speed by moving their respective straps fractionally further inboards or outboards in the holes or 'plugs' provided.

N.B. Freestyle is another example of manoeuvre-oriented sailing. The strap positions tend to be very much like that of a wave board set up - inboard with one back strap.

For more general freeride purposes we can combine the two extremes from above and get the best of both worlds where we set our straps relatively outboard for speed but also slightly inboard so that we also have some manoeuvrability.

We can set up the board with one back strap as well. However, it is advisable to still have two back straps on boards of over 120 - 130 litres for freeride purposes as the tail starts to become too wide for us to be able to maintain a flat and controlled board at speed with just one back strap.



158 LITRE FREERIDE SET UP



90 LITRE FREERIDE SET UP

Obviously, if we decide that we want to focus more on manoeuvres on our freeride board then we can always move our straps slightly further inboards before heading out on the water, and slightly further out if speed takes our fancy!



141 LITRE FREERIDE SET UP:
MORE FOR MANOEUVRES



141 LITRE FREERIDE SET UP:
MORE FOR SPEED



90 LITRE FREERIDE SET UP:
MORE FOR MANOEUVRES



90 LITRE FREERIDE SET UP:
MORE FOR SPEED

POSITION RELATIVE TO FIN?

When setting our footstrap positions, as well as whether they are inboard or outboard, the position of the back strap/straps relative to the fin plays an important role as well. In general terms, placing the back strap over the fin gives manoeuvrability and placing it in line with the leading edge of the fin allows for speed and 'drive'. Going back to the example of the contrast between a wave and slalom board, other than their straps being placed inboard and outboard respectively, it is also noticeable that the back strap on the wave board is positioned much more over the fin to provide for manoeuvrability, whereas the back straps on the slalom board are much more in line with the leading edge allowing the sailor to 'drive' off the fin for speed in a straight line.



SLALOM/SPEED SET UP RELATIVE TO FIN



WAVE SET UP RELATIVE TO FIN

For Freeride purposes and getting that compromise between speed and manoeuvrability, our back strap would be best placed just over the leading edge of the fin so as to allow the sailor to drive effectively off the fin for speed but also allowing for some manoeuvrability.



FREERIDE SET UP RELATIVE TO FIN

N.B. As was mentioned last month with regard to fins, certain manoeuvre oriented boards such as wave boards will have a fin that is move-able in its slot as opposed to fixed (i.e. A US or Classic fin box). This allows the fin and back footstrap to be more precisely aligned for a more specific style of sailing.



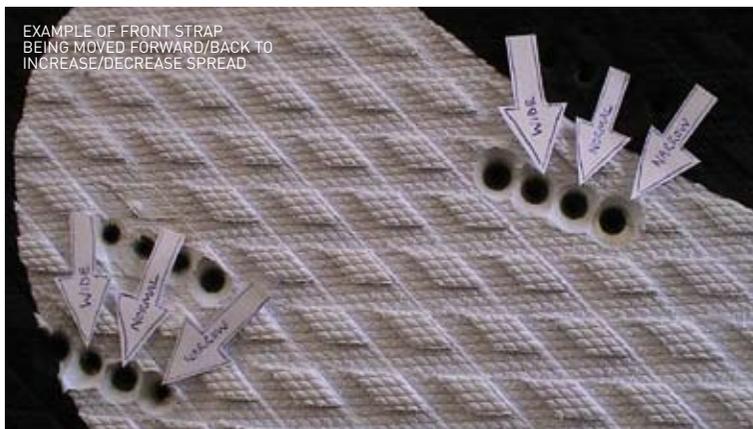
FIN IN US/CLASSIC BOX MOVED FORWARDS UNDER BACK STRAP FOR MANOEUVRABILITY



FIN IN US/CLASSIC BOX MOVED BACK MORE IN LINE WITH BACK STRAP FOR MORE SPEED

STRAP SPREAD?

Although we might have positioned our straps perfectly for the type of sailing we are going to be doing, we might get out on the water and find that we still feel a little uncomfortable because the strap 'spread' (or distance between the front and back strap) is too big or small for us. Board manufacturers position the footstrap 'plugs' according to an average 'stance' or leg spread for an average person. If we are slighter taller/smaller or just feel we need a larger/shorter distance between our front and back strap then we can move our front strap slightly forwards or backwards to increase or decrease the 'spread'.



EXAMPLE OF FRONT STRAP BEING MOVED FORWARD/BACK TO INCREASE/DECREASE SPREAD

N.B. The front strap is moved so that the back strap stays in the position relative to the fin that we originally set – over the fin for manoeuvrability or more in line with the leading edge for speed and 'drive'.

How should we actually fit our straps? Having set our straps up right to suit our style of sailing, all that remains is to make sure that they are the right size.

There are 2 factors at work here – Height and Width.

Height – This is the normal adjustment of the strap so that our foot fits into the strap but doesn't get swallowed up! For general freeride use we aim to have the strap adjusted so that we can see or touch our little toe as it pokes out on the other side.

This size should be adjusted as we move into slightly more specific disciplines and, as a rule of thumb, the more manoeuvre oriented the sailor and their style of sailing so the strap should become bigger. For example, a wave sailor or freestyler will have quite a large adjusted strap so that they can fit their foot right into the strap and thereby be able to manoeuvre the board easily, whereas a slalom or speed sailor will have a relatively tight strap so that they feel very 'attached' to the board and locked in place.



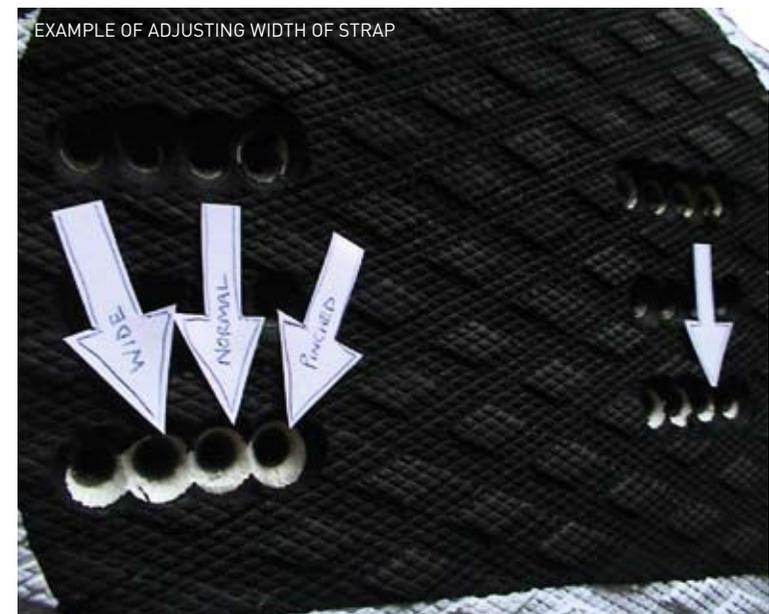
WAVE FIT



SLALOM FIT

Width – Board manufacturers tend to place the 'plugs' or holes for both attachments for a strap an average distance apart (just as they do with the 'spread' between front and back straps). This is generally fine for most sailors but if you have narrow feet or very wide feet (or perhaps wear booties when sailing) you may find it necessary to 'pinch' / narrow or widen the straps accordingly by selecting a different 'plug' or hole for one end of each of the straps.

Although adjusting the width of the strap will not be something everyone feels the need to do, it is worth checking that when you are in your straps, you are not in any discomfort from the strap being too restrictive on the sides of your feet or that your feet do not have movement from side to side even though the straps are fitted perfectly for the height of your feet.



EXAMPLE OF ADJUSTING WIDTH OF STRAP

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Having looked at the what's, where's and how's of setting up our footstraps, here are some classic examples in action so that we can tie everything together...



TYPICAL SLALOM SET UP



TYPICAL FREESTYLE SET UP



TYPICAL WAVE SET UP



TYPICAL SMALL FREERIDE SET UP



TYPICAL LARGE FREERIDE SET UP

This brings us to the end of this episode on understanding how to set up our footstraps more effectively so that when we next go out for a sail we feel comfortable and confident on our board having attached ourselves well!

Next month we continue with the Tech Spec series and move onto un-fogging the unnecessarily mysterious world of mast foot positioning and boom height! In the meantime, enjoy!



The 'Tech Spec' Series is written by Jim Collis - Pro Coach, Instructor Trainer and Tester 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



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