

EPISODE 3: FOOTSTRAP SETTINGS IN, OUT, SHAKE IT ALL ABOUT!

IN HIS THIRD INSTALMENT, JIM DISSECTS THE INS AND OUTS OF FOOTSTAP POSITIONS FOR THE INTERMEDIATE SAILOR, CALLING ON HIS KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF THE LATEST RYA FASTFWD COACHING METHODS

We've all been there – you get hold of your first board, whether new, second, third or fifteenth hand; you take it down to your local sailing spot for its virgin voyage, you're rushing around full of excitement when you realise the footstraps aren't fitted on the board yet. Where in blazes do they go? Do you just throw them on the board willy-nilly so as to get out on the water, or do you risk the wind dropping by spending a bit more time setting them up. But there are so many holes to choose from...

STANDARD SETTINGS ACROSS THE BOARD

Essentially, for going in a straight line and getting the buzz of speed, with the odd turn chucked in so as to get a similar dose of adrenaline on the way back, there are two footstrap set-up configurations: 'Training' straps and 'Blasting' straps. Training straps are inboard and further up the board for learning to use the footstraps for the first time, or for gaining confidence in them; whereas Blasting straps are outboard and further back down the board for more experienced users of footstraps looking to push the board and themselves toward higher speeds. (Fig One) The setting up of footstraps to fit your foot and suit your 'spread' (the comfortable distance between your front and back foot when standing on the board) is standard for both configurations. (N.B. It is a good idea to take the fin out of your board and place it on a soft surface like grass or sand for this process so that you can actually stand on the board without damaging it!) The size of your footstraps should be

adjusted wide enough so that you can see (or feel if you're wearing windsurfing booties) your little toe on the other side of the strap. Basically, they should fit over the widest part of your foot. The 'spread' of the straps should suit the individual. Beware of jumping on the board of someone who is 6'8" if you're only 4'10", as you might find it a bit of a leg stretcher! Generally, most board manufacturers have good average spreads between straps and if you place your front strap screws in the front holes/plugs and your back ones in the corresponding front plugs, the spread will suit most users. However, sometimes this is not the case so be prepared to adjust the spread to suit you as an individual. (Fig Two)

Training Strap Positions: Placebo or Practical?

For an experienced 'footstrapper' using freeride kit, the process of knowing where to place your footstraps for optimum performance is relatively straightforward. Starting with the back strap, place it in the outboard holes/plugs and align it so that with your foot in the strap the back edge of your foot is in line with the leading edge of the fin beneath. Then fit your front strap according to a comfortable spread for you, again placing the strap in the more outboard holes/plugs.

For a first-time 'footstrapper' or someone improving their technique, there seems to be a lot more confusion due to the only guidelines being that we should place our straps more up the board and inboard...but there are so many holes/plugs to choose from! The idea of having our straps

placed more inboard and further up the board for first time usage and improving footstrap technique is designed to assist us getting into them without upsetting the 'trim' of the board substantially, both nose to tail and side to side. Our overall aim is to keep the board as flat as possible at all times for stability and to improve the speed and performance of the board itself. However, we should beware of putting straps too far up the board in 'placebo' positions right by the mast-foot, as this will not really help us learn how to use footstraps when we are planing (essentially our principal aim here) and, if anything, will make the transition to using the 'Blasting' strap positions a far larger and harder step to make. We would, if truth be known, be better off sewing our footstraps onto our windsurfing booties, as then we could stand anywhere on the board and still be 'in the straps'!

The skill of footstrapping doesn't really lie in the actual process of sliding your foot into a cushioned strap, but more in the sailor's ability to understand that to keep the board flat as the board accelerates up onto the plane, we must move back down the board and outboard. As a result, we find ourselves standing on or right beside the straps ready for us to slip our feet into them. By having the 'Training' straps slightly up the board and inboard of the 'Blasting' strap positions instead of right up by the mast-foot, we can keep the board flat as it starts to plane and, just as importantly, still have room to manoeuvre our feet, and thereby build confidence getting into the straps. When we have got comfortable with this process, we can then move the straps back into the 'Blasting' positions, and the step won't be such a huge one to achieve getting into these.

In these pictures is an example of one board having very good, practical strap positioning for both 'Training' straps and 'Blasting' straps, whereas the other has slightly less practical positioning, the 'Training' positions being too far inboard and up the board, and the 'Blasting' ones being excessively on the edge of the board, making it a huge task to make the transition from using the 'Training' straps to the 'Blasting' ones. (Fig Three & Four)

Some of you may well be reading this, shaking your heads and thinking:

"No, no, training straps should be well forwards as then they are achievable, and more importantly safe!"

Unfortunately, I wish this were the case, but in fact not only are 'placebo' straps fairly pointless for developing footstrapping skills, but they are also a little hazardous! When a board starts to plane, as we have already discussed, we need to be thinking of moving back down the board and outboard so as to keep our board trimmed flat, both nose to tail and side to side. This is because two things start to happen when we start planing: Firstly, the water-line length of the board decreases, so we should be thinking of moving back down the board so as to help keep the nose to tail trim of the board flat and happy. It

BOARDS AND TRAINING STRAP POSITIONS



FIG ONE



FIG THREE



FIG FOUR

REALISTICALLY, THE BOARDS THAT WE SHOULD BE USING TO LEARN AND IMPROVE FOOTSTRAP WORK ARE THE STABLE WIDESTYLE EARLY PLANING PLATFORMS WITH VOLUME AROUND 130-180 LITRES. ALL OF THESE BOARDS HAVE GREAT WIDTH IN THEIR TAILS AND THIS IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE REGARDING THE USE OF A SINGLE OR DOUBLE BACK STRAP SET UP.

you move back too fast – as we've all found to our peril at some point – the tail sinks and we stall the board (usually up into wind!), but equally if you stay too far forwards – say in the 'placebo' strap positions – then you are actually holding the nose of the board down in the water and slowing it down, which in turn causes us to get overpowered by the rig and ultimately catapulted! Secondly, as we accelerate, the fin creates more resistance to the board going sideways (more commonly known as 'lift'), which with the sail and us pushing against it, translates into drive forwards (imagine squeezing a bar of soap between your two hands – the soap fires out forwards as the pressure increases from both sides). This 'lift' from the fin causes the windward side of the board (the side closest to the wind) to lift up slightly. By moving outboard as well as back we can hold the windward rail of the board down and keep the board flat in its side-to-side axis. If we stay over the middle of the board – say in the 'placebo' strap positions – we will be unable to hold down the lifting side of the board and it not only feels exceptionally un-nerving but can also cause the board to carve off downwind...not an ideal scenario for building confidence!

DOUBLE OR SINGLE BACK STRAP?

Having considered that we are better off using the 'Training' strap positions just inboard and up from the 'Blasting' strap positions, the only other contentious issue is whether to use a single or double back strap.

Realistically, the boards that we should be using to learn and improve footstrap work are the stable widestyle early

planing platforms with volume around 130-180litres. All of these boards have great width in their tails and this is of great importance regarding the use of a single or double back strap set up. As we mentioned earlier, the windward side of a board lifts as a board planes and as such we need to move outboard as well as back to help keep the board flat, stable and happy! This is impossible to do on a wide 130-180litre board if your back foot is stuck in a strap over the centre-line (middle) of the board. Stability is lost, directional control becomes very sketchy and more often than not we end up bearing away uncontrollably on a broad reach from hell! As such, there is no question – double up! (Fig Five)

This can also be an issue for some more experienced freeride blasters using wider, higher volume boards for more marginal conditions. Once again the use of a single back strap means that the windward rail cannot be held down effectively to keep the board flat side-to-side and so performance is lost. By having two back straps on the wider boards we can get our heel right over the windward rail of the board, so when we really start to motor – say in a gust – we can lock that windward rail down with good heel pressure and leave everyone else around us for dust!

Jimbo's Holy Trinity for Footstrap Setting for First Time Users or for Improving Technique

1. Training strap position inboard and forwards of Blasting strap positions – NOT up by mast-foot

2. Double back strap
3. Fit strap to see/feel little toe on other side and make sure spread comfortable for you between front and back strap

Jimbo's Gems 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



FIG FIVE



FIG TWO