

# FLUID FOUNDATIONS

## Episode 1: Harnessing



With the arrival of Spring and the promise of a fantastic windsurfing season stretching ahead of us, Jim Collis launched us into it last month with the start of his Fluid Foundations - a series of articles that take us back to first principles and concentrates on the core skills and techniques within windsurfing, in a simple, easy to follow progression.

Last month's issue looked at going faster on our boards and getting planing, and continues this month by looking at harness work. Future episodes will look at footstrap use, developing stance, improving tacks and gybes, and ultimately beach starts and waterstarts.

The Fluid Foundations series is designed as a tool to be used by any level of windsurfer. Whether an entry level sailor looking to improve their skill level or an advanced sailor who might benefit from taking on board simple tips that will help to hone and consolidate their performance on the water: this series works for one and all!

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 Jim's KISS Series from June 2007).

K.I.S.S. consists of 5 themes that run through our windsurfing, whether an absolute novice or a world champion. These themes underpin the essential core aspects of the skills within windsurfing, helping you to concentrate on the root cause of why a skill works, and thereby giving you solid foundations in your skill level, rather than confusing you by concentrating on peripheral aspects that might happen as a result of doing the skill. For example, in a tack - focusing on what your head is looking at to help control your direction, rather than thinking about what your little toe is doing to help steer the board!

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

**HEAD** - Looking where you want to go and being aware of everything around you.

**ARMS** - Keeping a straight front arm, thereby distancing yourself from the rig and causing you to naturally counter balance against it, and using your 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 you stable.

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

**BREATHE** - Remembering to breathe so that you can be relaxed, alert and responsive when sailing, which in turn helps you to flow and perform more naturally, whatever the skill or 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 and creating firm foundations from which to build a solid skill level and above all, a complete understanding through simplicity.

In essence, this Fluid Foundations series is about simplifying skills and techniques essential to our windsurfing. This episode concerns harnessing and looking at the skill of hooking in and out, and sailing comfortably and in control whilst attached to the rig, whether planing or not.

Before continuing, 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 2007.

It is also worth mentioning that, in addition to the articles in this series over the next few issues, Jim has recently released a DVD called Fluid Foundations that runs through all of these core skills in windsurfing on film. For more information on obtaining a copy of his DVD please contact Jim on [jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk](mailto:jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk)

## HARNESSING

As we saw from last month's issue on getting planing, achieving skills in windsurfing is not about making mountains out of mole hills and making everything super complicated, but about keeping it all at base level and very simple. The same very much applies to harnessing.

If you were to put harness lines on a boom for an absolute beginner and put them in a harness, the chances are that they would try and hook in after gaining a bit of confidence sailing backwards and forwards. This, as well as being down to pure curiosity, is also because the actual process of attaching yourself to a line on the boom with a hook you are wearing, is not that difficult. In actual fact, as the beginner would quickly find out, the skill of harnessing is not so much in your ability to hook in or out, but your ability to be as settled in the harness when sailing around, as you are when you're not in it.

With this in mind, the fact of whether or not you are planing is fairly irrelevant. As long as you can get the same feeling of security and control that you have before you

hook in, once you are actually attached to the rig via your harness, the fact of whether you are cruising through the water or skipping along on top, is immaterial. Obviously the psychologically daunting element of speed comes into play here, but gaining confidence in the harness at low speeds and then taking that confidence and gradually increasing the speed aspect as you practise your harnessing, can easily conquer this psychological barrier.

Aside from understanding that the skill of harnessing is very achievable, there may be many of you thinking that you can sail perfectly well without one, so why change what works?

The simple answer to this is that by using a harness, you can double if not treble the amount of time you spend on the water. When not hooked in you rely on your arms and shoulders a great deal, to control the power in the sail. When hooked in you can use your legs and bodies to control that power. If you consider the size of the muscles in your legs alone, compared to those in your arms, it is quickly obvious why by using a harness you can tend to last longer on the water!



Sailing out of the harness – shoulders and arms being used



Sailing in the harness – legs and body being used

## BEFORE THE SKILL

Before Harnessing, you should 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. Starting harness work in a Force 2 and then gradually moving into a Force 3-4 as you gain more confidence will help you to achieve this skill very quickly.

You should have set your harness lines up on the shore and be wearing a harness that fits you.

As mentioned above, the process of setting your harness and harness lines up on your kit is not covered in this article.

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 to help keep the board flat (inboard and central if not planing, more outboard and back if planing)

**BODY** - In a comfortable position (lower if feeling slightly threatened and powered-up, more upright if feeling slightly inefficient and underpowered)

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



Sailing comfortably



## TOP TIPS

- The key to hooking in and out and maintaining a comfortable position when in the harness, is remembering to straighten your arms once you have bent them to attach yourself to the harness.

- Remember to settle down and relax before and after the skill (using the 5 themes from K.I.S.S. can help you to do this)

If a picture is taken of someone sailing comfortably before they have hooked in and after they have hooked in, the visual image should be the pretty much the same except for the fact that in one picture there is a harness line attached to them and in the other there isn't!



Not planing



Before and after...only visual difference is the harness line!



Planing



Whether planing or not, it makes no difference... the technique is the same!

- If attempting the skill in less than ideal conditions (severely underpowered or over powered), then adjust your head and body to have control before and after doing the skill. For example, if the wind is a bit stronger then to be settled and feeling secure before doing the skill, look upwind more with your head and drop your body lower. Do the skill as normal and then, when you are hooked in, keep your head looking upwind and keep your body low so as to settle down and retain comfort and control once again.

## JIM COLLIS TECHNIQUE

### DURING THE SKILL

To hook in you are going to alter one thing – what your arms are doing...

**ARM** - Pull the boom towards you by bending your arms so as to connect your harness hook with the harness line

- As soon as you are hooked in, straighten your arms again so as to re-establish a good distance between you and the rig.

Your head, legs, body and breathing should be fairly similar to what they were doing before you started...

**HEAD** - Keep looking where you want to go

*N.B.* Having a little peek at the harness lines to check you have hooked in is fine, but try not to stare at them!

*N.B.* If you are struggling to pull the boom into you, as the sail feels too powerful, then look upwind to reduce the power in the sail and make it easier to pull in...but remember to look where you are going again as soon as you are attached!

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

**BODY** - In a comfortable position.

*N.B.* You might find that you raise your hips a bit as you pull the boom into you to hook in. This is fine as long as you remember to drop your hips again once attached.

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



Hooking In



### AFTER THE SKILL

Just as you were doing before the skill, you should now return to sailing in a comfortable and relaxed fashion according to the 5 elements of K.I.S.S., even though you are now hooked-in...

**HEAD** - Looking where you want to go.

**ARMS** - Front arm and back arm straight.

*N.B.* Now you are hooked in you 'sheet-in' the sail through the harness using your body and legs. As a result you shouldn't pull in on the boom with your back arm, as it stops your harness being effective and might even cause you to hook out inadvertently!

**LEGS** - Front leg straight, back leg bent and flexed, feet positioned to keep the board flat.  
*N.B.* To 'commit' to the harness using your body and legs you should sink over your bent back leg, so as to help 'sheet in' the sail.

**BODY** - Similar to doing a 'crunchy sit up' we should 'crunch' our stomach and push our 'core' away from the boom so as to 'commit' to the harness and 'sheet in' the sail.

*N.B.* You are still in a comfortable sailing position, but now you are using your body and legs to control the power in the sail rather than your arms.

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



Hooked in



### HOOKING OUT

To hook out you just reverse the process above, remembering to straighten your arms again once you have pulled the boom in momentarily, to unhook.



Hopefully this episode has given you some food for thought, whether a first time harness user, or an experienced old hand looking for some top tips to make you even more effective on the water.

As always, the important thing to remember overall is to keep it simple!

Next month we will be moving onto the skill of getting into the footstraps in comfortable, controlled and easy manner.

The Fluid Foundations Series 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](mailto:jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk) or visit [www.windsurfevolution.co.uk](http://www.windsurfevolution.co.uk)