



{ Feasible Freestyle for everyone! }

FLUID PROGRESSIONS: FREESTYLE FOR EVERYONE

PART 4: CLEW-FIRST SAILING

JIM COLLIS CONTINUES THIS MONTH with the fourth part in his “Freestyle for Everyone” series, a string of articles designed to help us consolidate our general windsurfing skills, whatever our ability level, by building and developing our rig and board confidence whilst having fun out on the water. Having looked at the first five freestyle skills in the last three issues, namely lifting/dragging a foot, kneeling/sitting/lying down whilst sailing, switch stance sailing, pirouettes, and rig 180s & 360s. Jim is moving on this month to the sixth feasible freestyle move: clew-first sailing.

A LITTLE REMINDER...

“Freestyle for everyone”

This concept is not about learning the latest ‘hoochy-ka-poochy’ manoeuvre, it is 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 every time we go on the water, we will be learning and consolidating core skills so that we improve our general sailing without even realising it; gaining key foundations in freestyle so that if we wanted to take it further, we would 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 are going to work 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, 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. We will find that certain skills 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 to create new skills and gain new and far-improved confidence with our rig and on our board.

Kit and conditions

We should help ourselves from the start by jumping on a bigger board than perhaps we would usually go on and by using a smallish rig rather than some monster. Ideally, good kit would be a board of 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!

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 for that day, there is always the option of taking your fin off and doing some of the skills on land on a finless board and rig. Remember...all time spent on your kit is time well spent!



{ Practicing skills on land on a finless board and rig is also invaluable }

Keeping it stupidly simple!

As always with learning any skill, simplicity is key. As such, each of the 10 skills are broken down using 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).

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. 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 6

Skill 6: Clew-First Sailing

Practicing the skill of rig 180s & 360s, as covered in last month's issue, is the perfect lead-in to clew-first sailing. By learning and feeling how a rig rotates well, we inadvertently start to understand the way a rig performs best when held the wrong way around, or clew-first. Clew-first sailing itself, other than an enjoyable skill to learn and do, is also very useful to know when put back into the mix of our general windsurfing.

- It is a vital skill that helps to heighten our level of rig control
- It is a huge helper for gybe exits, both planing and non-planing, and can also be used to rescue failed gybes through clew-first beach and water starts
- It provides the building blocks and rig control for progression into more advanced manoeuvres, such as duck gybes, heli tacks and push tacks
- It is a vital skill in the world of new school freestyle, where a huge quantity of skills are initiated or finished clew-first

Before we look at the actual skill of sailing clew-first, we first need to get ourselves into a clew-first position on our kit.

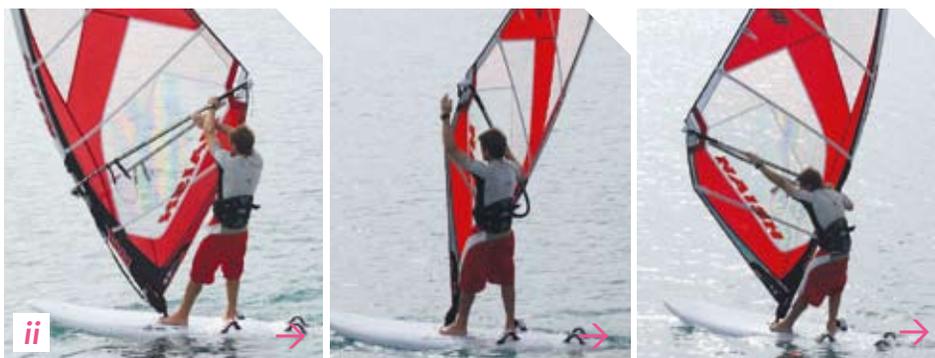
There are several different ways that we can get clew-first when we are sailing, the two best methods for learning and consolidating the skill are:

- Doing a rig 180 (See Freestyle Skill 5: Rig 180s & 360s last issue for a recap)
- Doing a gybe without rotating the rig at the end
- Doing a clew-first beach start

The rig 180 method:

- Rotate the rig 180 as we did last month, remembering to steer onto a broad reach before ducking (rotating) the rig
- Remember to keep your head looking where you are going (and NOT at the rig!), keep your arms straight/rig away as the rig rotates, and move your body in opposition to the movement of the rig for good counterbalance
- Once clew-first, keep your hands wide on the boom and arms straight/rig away for good control

{ Going clew-first by doing a rig 180 }



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TECHNIQUE

The gybe method:

- i. Do a non-planing gybe (Please see my Fluid Foundations Series – Episode 6: Gybing, October 08)
- ii. At the end of the gybe, change your feet but don't rotate the rig and you will sail out in the new direction with the rig the wrong way around, or clew-first
- iii. Remember to keep your hands wide on the boom and arms straight/rig away for good control when clew-first

The clew-first beach start method:

- i. Set yourself up as if you are going to beach start back onto the beach
- ii. Hold the boom with a very wide grip (for rig control), steer the board to face away from the beach, and keep holding onto the boom (don't let the rig flip). You will now be standing ready to beach start but with the rig the wrong way around, or clew-first
- iii. Do the normal beach start technique (Please see my Fluid Foundations Series – Episode 7: Beach start & Water start, Nov/Dec), but position the board a little broader to the wind than normal
- iv. Once up and away, keep your head looking where you are going, and keep your hands wide on the boom and arms straight/rig away for good control



Once we are in a clew-first position on our kit through any of the three methods above, here are some points to help us get comfortable and confident whilst actually sailing clew-first:

Assume a comfortable sailing position:

HEAD – Keep looking where you want to go
ARMS – Still working the same as normal despite your hands being much wider. The front arm remains the arm nearest the front of the board and should be straight, and the back arm is still the arm nearest the back of the board and should be drawing power from the sail by gently sheeting-in

N.B. If you let out or even let go with your back arm, then the sail just opens up and depowers...exactly the same as sheeting out with the sail the normal way round

LEGS/FEET – Doing the same as normal; keeping the board flat and us stable!
BODY – Still adopting a comfortable position according to how we feel; getting lower if we feel threatened or over powered, and becoming more upright if we feel inefficient or underpowered
BREATHE – Remembering to take deep breaths to help us relax and perform more naturally



Steering whilst clew-first is the same as when we are sailing normally, even though the rig is the wrong way around:

HEAD - looks where you want to go; upwind to go upwind, downwind to go downwind, straight ahead to go straight ahead

N.B. Due to the very thin and not very stable leech of the sail being the leading edge (edge closest to the wind) when you are clew-first, sailing across and away from the wind (beam and broad reaches) are easier and more comfortable than sailing closer to the wind (upwind)

ARMS - extend to the back of the board to steer upwind, they extend forwards to the front of the board and slightly upwind to go downwind, and resume a neutral position to go in a straight line



To return to sailing with the rig the right way round, rotate the rig a further 180 back to normal



Try sailing for longer/bigger distances clew-first, and, as always, remember to try the skill in the other direction! Why not try tacking and gybing clew-first as well, and for the more adventurous still, try doing some deeper beach starts and even some water starts clew-first!



TOP TIPS FOR CLEW-FIRST SAILING:

- Keep head looking where you are going
- Keep arms extended/rig away with wide hand positions on boom
- Remember that it is easier and more comfortable to sail across or away from the wind when doing anything clew-first

This brings us to the end of this episode on clew-first sailing. Hopefully there is something for everyone here and, as always, remember that these 'feasible freestyle' skills are all about having a good time out on the water and getting better at our general sailing without even realising!

In the next issue we will be moving onto the next skill: the 7th out of the 10 freestyle skills in this Fluid Progressions: Freestyle for Everyone series: sailing backwards.

In the meantime, get out there and enjoy!

"Freestyle for Everyone" is written by Jim Collis - Pro Coach and Instructor Trainer for Windsurf magazine. If you'd like any more information on coaching or training to be an instructor with Jim please contact him on

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