

'MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU'

The rudder is the devil

It's probably not the correct way to start however that's what I think of that extension in my hand, the devil.

My boys have recently become obsessed with Star Wars and they often have conversations about the "The Force" and "The Dark Side". Maybe I should start calling the rudder "The Dark Side"

Every time I force the rudder, the dark side is taking control of me.

Every time the rudder follows me, the force is flowing through me.

One thing that sticks in my mind is a conversation I had with Sarah Ogilvie (nee Blanck, Olympian & Laser Radial world champion ) She regularly checks in with herself "Am I following the rudder or is the rudder following me?" The implication being is the rudder following my body movements and trim or am I forcing or dragging the boat to do something it doesn't want to do.

Every time you force the rudder, you may as well throw a sea anchor out the back of the boat.

Here's an example. You are going upwind and a gust hits. The boat heels and rounds up. You yank on the rudder to try and make it bear away. (You have just thrown a sea anchor out the back). Eventually you ease sheet and manage to get the boat flat and your bow back down, the rudder is back to neutral. You just followed the rudder.

Now a different scenario, a gust hits, or just before the gust hits, you ease mainsheet, you hike harder, you move your shoulders back and roll onto your back leg. You have just adjusted trim for a change in wind speed and apparent wind, you have prevented heeling of the boat to leeward and you have moved your centre of resistance back. Three things, ease, hike harder, shoulders back but now you have balance and you haven't had to yank on the tiller. You haven't thrown out the sea anchor.

Instead of rounding up and yanking on the tiller, you have created balance.

But I hear you say "Brody and Casey are always using their tiller, their tiller is hardly ever stationary". But is the tiller following them or are they following the tiller? I bet if they relaxed their grip, what you would see is the tiller responding to their trim and balance.

I often comment to people they should pretend they are on a windsurfer. A windsurfer hasn't got a rudder so how does it bear away? Balance. They shift the centre of effort forward by moving the mast forward, ease leach tension by letting the wishbone out, weight on a rail and in the right part of the board to help steer and balance out the forces.

How do we bear away on a laser? drop leach (mainsheet and vang), weight (shoulders) back, slight heal to windward.

How do we round up? Tighter leach (sheet mainsheet in), slight leeward heal, shoulders forward.

Remember your leach is your rudder, a tight leach and the boat will want to round up, a loose leach and the boat will want to bear away. So next time you go downwind and you want to dive down a wave to leeward, you need to loose that leach tension and the boat will naturally want to scoot to leeward. Or you could just yank on the tiller and throw out the sea anchor. Miss the wave, and the next and the next..

When lasers go out training, they aren't trying to grind out agonising miles upwind because they are masochists, they are practicing more efficient sailing through balance and not succumbing to "The dark side" .

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