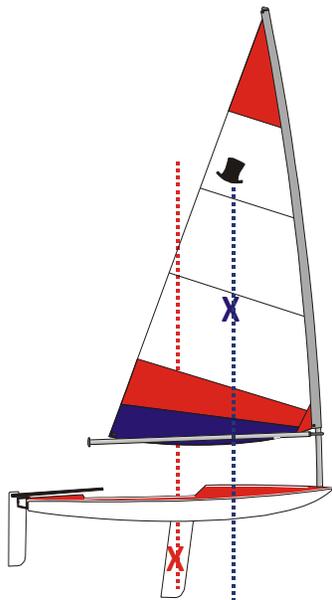




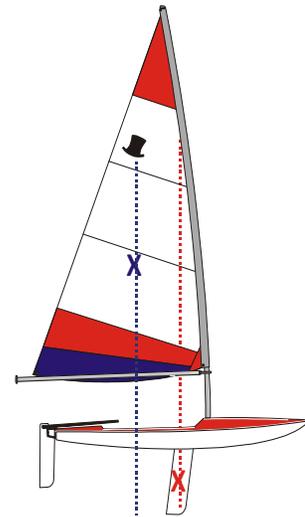
Sailing a Topper when it's Windy

The Topper was originally designed to teach people to sail and to be used as a 'beach boat'. As such it needed to be safe and it was unlikely to be sailed in very strong winds. With this in mind Ian Proctor set the mast slightly further back than in a racing boat. The effect was that, left to its own devices it would round-up into the wind as the point of push in the sail

was behind the centre of pivot in the hull (the daggerboard). It's a brilliant design concept but it does give racers real problems when it's windy, especially when sailing upwind. Try it for yourself – sail upwind as normal and then just let go of the tiller extension. The boat tacked didn't it! Think about it



you must be stopping it trying to tack all the time; pulling on the extension and causing lots of drag. You know what they say – when you are learning to sail the tiller is your friend, when you are racing it is your enemy (because every time you use it slows you down).



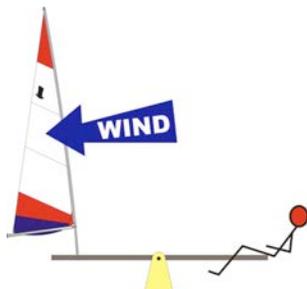
BALANCING THE RIG

In an ideal world we want the boat to sail in a straight line by itself and the boat was designed to head into the wind and stop all by itself for safety reasons. Thankfully Ian didn't but the mast too far forward or we would never get upwind at all!

We would love to move the mast but we can't do that so what can we do to minimize the problem?

SAIL THE BOAT FLAT

Practice and practice until your boat is a Heal Free Zone! I know that's tough if you're on the smaller side but it is vital and it is possible:



1. Make the sail flatter and therefore less powerful by a) putting on lots of kicker (vang) so the mast becomes bent which pulls out the bag in the sail and b) pulling on the outhaul so these is a bit of a crease in the foot of the sail.



2. Hike hard which will be painful but it's painful for everyone who wins. Just remember to hike hard until the sailor next to you gives up. You must not give up first!
3. Let the sail out with the mainsheet, when the gust strikes (or just before it strikes if you can), at the same time as you make sure you don't bear away (if anything head up just a little especially in flat water). You'll know how much to let in and out if you think about it like this I am hiking hard and I need to hold myself flat and still by letting the sail in and out as if the sail and myself are two ends of a seesaw in balance.

PULL THE DOWNHAUL ON UNTIL THE SAIL IS ON THE BOOM

Yes really! Downhauls are a big topic of conversation in the Topper class, and for a very good reason.

When you pulled on lots of kicker (which is something we have to do remember, in a Topper, when it's windy see above) you made the 'screwing into the wind' even worse because stretching out the sail by bending the mast makes the front of the sail less powerful. This is good to de-power the sail but it does give relatively more power to the back of the sail which pushes us even more into the wind. Oh no!!!!!!!

Fortunately you have a friend and smart sailors have realized this over the years. **IT'S YOUR DOWNHAUL!** The downhaul also de-powers the sail (think of it as the bowstring and your mast as the bow itself) but it does it in a way that depowers the back of your sail and powers up the front. The point of push on the sail goes further forward and the rig is better 'balanced' (the boat does not want to screw into the wind so much).



- Over the past few years you may well have noticed a lot of sailors using two sets of triple blocks, the bottom set with a camcleat to allow easy adjustment.
- It is a better system because the top triple moves at the same speed as the sail and therefore does not run out of travel.
- They are more expensive but they are the answer, especially for smaller, less strong and less experienced sailors. They have allowed the weight range of competitive Topper sailors to drop even further. A good thing in my view.

I know that Topper coaches bang on about downhauls. It is my hope that a few more sailors will now understand what their coaches are saying and use downhauls properly:

- Unwind in a breeze – pull them on until the

boat sails more in a straight line without using the rudder.



- **Downwind – let them right off** (even to the extent of pushing the sail up the mast!). We need the back of the sail to be stable so you don't death-roll.

LIFT THE DAGGERBOARD

The final and surprising thing is to lift your daggerboard so the top is level with the deck. (In fact it can stay at that height all day, when it's wind, because you'll need it for fast downwind techniques but that's for another article.)



Good hiking and a flat sail. Mainsheet hand held high ready to ease the main and thereby 'balance the seesaw' when the gust comes. These sailors think there boats are flat but they could do more.

Dave & Adam Cockerill

Help Line – 0044(0)1243 379444