

Wannabe a Wavesailor



COMPLETE GUIDE TO WAVESAILING – PT 2

In this month's instalment of his comprehensive series covering every aspect of wavesailing, **Jem Hall** turns his attention to choosing and setting up your gear...

Getting it together...

This month's feature was put together in the harsh wave environment of Cape Town, a stark contrast to the softer waves and warmer waters of Jericoacoara in Brazil that were featured in the previous article. The difference really underlined the absolute necessity of setting your gear up right. Poorly tuned equipment makes it much harder to get out the back (i.e. outside of the breaking waves), harder to jump and definitely inhibits your riding too.

KIT CHOICE

Choosing the right board and sail to make the most of the conditions is a skill that comes with experience. If you already own just one waveboard then that makes the board choice fairly straightforward. If you have two then presumably one is high wind and one is lighter

wind, and it's only that transitional area in the middle where either could work which might cause choice problems. In which case consider other aspects; is the wind forecast to strengthen (go smaller) or drop (go bigger)? Is it gusty / lully or tough getting out (go bigger). As for sail size, if you prefer to sail well powered up the best choice might be smaller board and bigger sail, whereas if you prefer to feel slightly underpowered (a risky strategy in this environment, as power is a good thing for almost every aspect of wavesailing) then take the bigger board. But as said, finding out what works best for you comes with experience. It's good to think about it after each sailing session; contemplate your kit choices – whether you got it right or whether you'd take something different if it was exactly those conditions next time.

If you're new to the wave environment, stepping down from a big board or just getting into your first wave outings then it's often better to look for a bigger platform and some more *oomph* in the engine room. A slightly bigger board will allow you to get planing quicker, and therefore give you the all-important speed and power that you need to punch through. Basically, it will get you out of trouble!

It's tempting to rush out and buy yourself the smallest waveboard you can find because, after all, that is what you are now – a wavesailor. However, the modern freestyle-wave (FSW) boards, all-rounders from 60cm wide / 95L volume down to 56cm / 75L, and some of the more speed and grip oriented onshore riding boards (ORBs) will give you an excellent platform to get out and get some jumps on. You'll find them far easier to get planing and hold speed on. Whereas waveboards are →

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Above Your 135 reference point

Below Bigger is often better

narrower, smaller and more about control than early / easy planing. They also have more rocker throughout, which isn't a big help when not powered up and battling to get out – especially as the wind is generally gusty in waves. So going slightly bigger can be a very wise move, unless it's absolutely howling and you have power to spare, and control is the over-riding issue. I weigh 90kg and was using a 58cm / 85L FSW or speed-oriented ORB throughout most of the pix seen in this series, accompanied by 5.2-4.7m sails.

As for sail size, again bigger can be better in these early forages. Top UK wavesailor John Skye agrees: *"If in doubt over what size sail, go towards the bigger side. If you're overpowered you can always get yourself out of trouble, if you're underpowered you can be left helpless!"*

Other issues which affect kit choice are wind direction, wind strength, size of waves and so on – we'll cover these later in the series. For now we're looking at cross-shore (or just very slightly onshore) winds, and small waves.

KIT TUNING

Now you've chosen your tools they must be tuned in the right way. You wouldn't go skiing or boarding with boots 3 sizes too small or drive a car with your knees bunched up around the steering wheel, yet some of the kit set-ups I see on wave beaches can be likened to this, and are equally as prohibitive to performance. Clients I've worked with on wave and flat-water clinics reap massive rewards from better tuning.

So what can we adjust? We have three main variables; mastfoot (position), footstrap (size and position), and fin (size and, in classic or US finboxes, position).

Mastfoot: The position of this has a major effect on the amount of waterline the board shows to the water. Bringing the mastfoot back in the track gives you less waterline and a more excitable board that rides more nose high. Moving it forward gives you a longer waterline and therefore a flatter, more sedate board. The best way to find what works best for you is to

set up a reference point and experiment from there. A cm back or forward can make a big difference. The old whack-it-in-the-middle approach is far from ideal, as the mast-track

board as you can see in the picture, use that as your reference and then experiment from there.

John Skye: *"The mast-track is super-important. Move the mastfoot forward 2cm if you're having trouble holding speed in your turns. If you have sufficient speed but are having trouble turning tightly enough, then move it back a fraction."*

Footstrap Size: In wavesailing you have to be dynamic in order to be able to pop the board from the water, control it in the air, carve nice turns and sail with sound fundamental skills. One of the easiest ways to raise your game here is simply to make your footstraps bigger! Pros favours a bigger strap to facilitate bending the ankles and knees – and so as to be best able to go from heelside to toeside, an absolute necessity in waves! Meanwhile less experienced, developing or plateaued wavesailors make the mistake of barely having their little toes protruding the other side of the straps, and as such suffer the inability to trim the board in the air and waveride effectively.

Ensure the straps hug your foot from side to side and that you have plenty of space to get

“You wouldn't go skiing with boots 3 sizes too small or drive a car with your knees bunched up around the steering wheel...”

isn't positioned in the same place on all boards – far from it! What has worked best for my clients, the pros I work with and myself is to mark up a point at 135cm from the tail of the

your foot in with all five toes showing. So – top tip here: **Open those straps up further.** It will make it easier to get in and out, and will help you become a proper wavesailor!



ADVANCING & ENHANCING



“ Open those straps up further. It will make it easier to get in and out, and will help you become a proper wavesailor! ”

Footstrap Position: This also affects your waterline. Move the straps forward for a flatter board; easier for turning and giving you more speed for jumping and riding. Most boards have 3 or 4 strap position options and I've found that being in the forward or second-to-forward hole in the front set of plugs works best for that all-important flat board. You would then measure out where to put the back one according to your leg length and overall height. For me at 6'1" (186cm) I have a spread of 41-42cm from the inboard screw of the front strap to the front screw of the back strap. Shorter

people might be at 37-39cm and taller people at 42-44cms. If you can't get the spread you want you may have to bring the front straps back. I usually end up in number 1 hole on the front strap and number 2-3 on the back.

Fin Size: There are many different factors to take into account here – bodyweight, ability, wind direction, and sail size – so I'm not going to go into a full prescription here but give you some basic rules. If you're getting used to smaller boards then you should err on the side of caution and go slightly bigger – it'll help with



early planing, speed and power to get out and to catch waves out the back. However, a smaller fin gives more control at speed and better turning, so as your skills develop and you get better at earlier planing, you can get away with a smaller fin. A smaller fin has less lift and is therefore more manoeuvrable and enables you to stand over the board, making jumping easier. So go smaller when you're ready and you'll be able to sail smaller boards in the future, get better jumps and turn your board with more fluidity.

For me on a 58cm / 86L board, I would use a 23.5cm fin with bigger sails and 22cm for smaller sails. Boards this size often come with a 25cm fin, great for bigger sails or for burn-&-turn sailing. Having 2 or 3 fins for a board or as part of your quiver will allow you to get the most out of your boards; changing up or down a fin size is actually often as effective as changing sail size – and a whole heap quicker and easier!

Fin Position: If you have the option, then moving the fin forward will make the board turnier, but slower and more prone to spin-out – back will be more directional and fast. As a starting point, position your fin so that the front edge is just under or up to 2cm in front of the back of your back foot. From here you can make a mark so you know where your reference point is so you may tune it in the future. ➔



Next month we'll look at rig tuning: Boom height, harness line length and position, and sail tuning.

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HALL'S HOMEWORK

So have you done your homework? Tail up in jumps, how did that feel? What about the gym and your fitness – and are you being kinder to your fuel tank?

This month you have two assignments to do and reflect upon.

TRANSITIONS

Your gybing needs to be efficient and consistent to be a wavesailor, but you will most definitely also require the skill of staying upwind in the waves. This means being able to tack and heli-tack both ways and consistently – oh yes, and on smaller boards. Rome wasn't built in a day so start to visualise the move, seek resources that will explain in to you and break it down. But you *have* to do it, to quote Skyeboy: "The extra 20 metres you gain from tacking can give you the room to bear away, get planing and then either get out easily or get a quick jump in." It will also put you in the best position to catch a wave and ride it as you often lose ground downwind whilst getting out the back.

VISION

You now have to start *seeing* the ocean. This means where waves form up, how they break, where you might be able to catch them, and where they break less. You also need to see gusts and lulls, so you can anticipate changes in windstrength and direction and then capitalise on them. It isn't going to happen fast but start looking around more whilst you sail and when watching windsurfing become and avid and informed viewer. ☺



Jem Hall is sponsored by RRD Boards, Ezzy Sails, Pro Limit & 2xs.co.uk – www.jemhall.com is powered by herringbone.co.uk

Jem's new technique movie, *Beginner to Winner*, is out now. If you seriously want to improve and have a fantastic holiday, book one of his coaching clinics – *now!*

John Skye is sponsored by F2, Naish Sails & Helly Hansen

John was coached by Jem during their time in Team Fakefish.

