

SAIL CARE

by John Hearne

SAIL MAINTENANCE

Diligent sail care and maintenance will ensure that your sails last as long as possible.

We recommend that your sails be inspected and serviced once a year.

Your local Doyle Loft will inspect all stitching and hardware.

The sooner any chafe, mildew or other problems are detected, the easier and cheaper it is to take care of them.

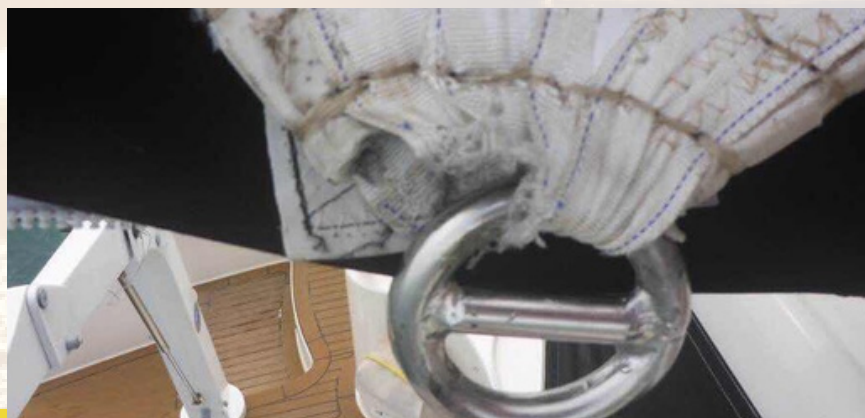
UV PROTECTION

Ultraviolet rays are a sail's worst enemy. Left exposed to the sun when not being used, your sails will deteriorate rapidly.

All mainsails, mizzens, and club staysails should have sail covers that protect them.

All roller furling headsails should have leech and foot UV strips to protect the sail fabric from the sun when the sail is furled.

Make sure that your sails are furled correctly with the UV strip on the outside.





FLOGGING & OVERLOADING

Sail care starts with learning how to properly set and trim your sails. If you let your sails flog and flap in the breeze, the sailcloth will break down quickly and become prone to tearing.

Understanding where to correctly position your genoa lead and how to maintain proper halyard and sheet tension will lead to a properly set sail.

Be sure to keep the leech line adjusted so that the leech does not flutter.

Properly set sails last longer, and will give you better performance.

It is also imperative to correctly secure and tie off the roller furling line. A sail that unfurls itself when you are not there, can destroy itself in minutes.

WASHING YOUR SAILS

Depending on the number of hours and type of use, it may be necessary to wash your sails periodically.

Washing serves two purposes:

Firstly, it rids sails of salt, dirt, and other contaminants. Salt-encrusted sails are harder to handle, and because salt is a crystal it will shorten the life of your sails.

Secondly, washing helps remove unsightly oil, grease, rust and mildew stains.

Be sure to read, follow and understand directions on any cleaning product you may choose to use.

Note: Diluted bleach will not affect polyester (Dacron), Spectra, or Vectran fabrics. A thorough rinsing is required after applying bleach.

DO NOT use bleach on nylon, aramids (such as Kevlar, Twaron, or Technora). Bleach will destroy these fabrics.

Remember not to let the sail flog whilst drying!

FOLDING SAILS

Always fold your sails at the end of the day.

Rolling is a better option but is only practical on smaller boats.

If not using the boat for a week or more, leave sails as flat as possible.

- Try not to fold sails in existing creases as this only weakens the yarns in that place
- Only brick the sails as tight as is needed.

BATTENS

Batten tension should always be eased when sails are not being used.

Sail materials have complex properties and battens left tensioned when a sail is not in use can affect sail shape.

Battens should always be left flat to ensure uniform straightness.

MINOR REPAIRS

Always carry a sail repair kit with you. This should contain stickyback (light sail cloth with adhesive) or Mylar with adhesive, needle and thread, webbing etc.

Small patches can be done instantaneously.

Stickyback or PSA Film has very strong glue.

Make sure the damaged area is clean and dry.

The quickest way to do this is to wash the affected area with Methylated Spirits.

This removes salt, dirt and moisture and will ensure a much better repair. Most sails can be repaired this way.

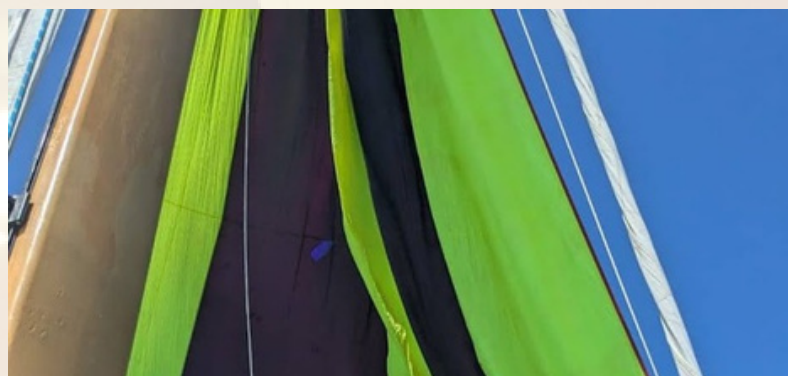
PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE.

Check over the boat regularly for sharp and dangerous points. Check pulpits, stanchions, spreaders, mast lights etc for anything that could damage your sails.

TIPS

1. When lowering mainsails, always take load off the foot tension first. This takes the load of the bottom slides and avoids unnecessary damage.
2. When not sailing for a while, ease the luff tension on roller furling headsails.
3. Store sails dry or dry after rain.
4. Always secure your furling line when leaving the boat.
5. "Sheet on" and don't let the headsail wrap around the forestay in gybes. Sail wraps can break the top batten and or tear the sail.
6. Be prepared to reef a sail, practice reefing and reef early.

Your sailmaker is there to help and advise with all these points. Getting your sails serviced each year is well worth the investment. Small issues can become big issues very quickly if not addressed.



About the Author

John Hearne, an experienced Sailmaker and Sailor, can often be found racing in regattas throughout SE Asia. When it comes to his own boats, John engages AMS for Pre-purchase and Insurance Surveys.

