

Those of you familiar with this part of the Bay know that this is one of THOSE places on the Bay where the sea conditions get aggravated above what you would expect to be created by the prevailing wind. This is caused by the currents from the Potomac flowing into the Bay's current flow and mixing it up. I had the "Youngster" point the boat into the increasing wind and 3 foot chop as I completely released the mainsheet AND the outhaul completely at the *same time* (I was going to furl this quickly, right?). WRONG! The combination of the mainsail luffing, the choppy waves, and my inexperience with IMF created a nasty situation. Before I could begin furling the main, the boom had whipped around and caused the totally slack clew outhaul line (which was flapping wildly) to wrap itself completely around the end of the boom and TIE ITSELF INTO A KNOT! And I do mean a KNOT! I couldn't roll the sail up, and couldn't pull it back out. (In retrospect, if it was a real emergency, I could have allowed the main to roll back out by the wind pressure and then drop the main halyard).

I was happy to have someone who could keep the boat pointed close to the wind. I was also happy for the strong Hunter arch which allowed me to climb up and stay secure while undoing my mistake!

Needless to say, that was the beginning of my more advanced learning of IMF. Of course, those of you who sail with IMF already know, YOU ALWAYS keep tension on the outhaul as you furl in the mainsail! This is not just to keep the above from happening, but also to help the main roll up tightly inside the mast so it will come out easily the next time.

Less sail area

Due to the required shape of an IMF sail, the roach is gone. Planning to race or want to have a spare mainsail? On most of the mast extrusions I have seen, there is a slot for a traditional bolt rope or sail sliders (see your owner's manual for dimensions for the sail maker). You also have that second main halyard that is currently being used as a topping lift!

Less control over sail shape

IMF mainsails typically don't have a grommet at the tack for a cunningham/down haul. They also can't have traditional horizontal battens. (Vertical battens have been offered as an option on some boats). To help keep the leech from "flapping" in a batten-less mainsail there is a leech line. As the wind increases, the leech will start to vibrate. Tighten the leech line until it stops. If you find that you have significantly tightened this line during the course of the day sailing, be sure to ease it before putting the sail to bed. Doing this helps the shape of the main going in, reduces possible wrinkles, and makes it easier to furl and unfurl.

Since the sail is loose-footed, you still have control over the flattening of the sail by using the outhaul. In light air, I find that adjusting the clew outhaul so that the gap between the boom and the foot of the main at its widest should be no more than 24 inches. This seems to provide a nicely shaped sail. As the wind increases, narrow that gap (flatten the mainsail), by tightening the outhaul. When blowing hard, there should be NO gap. Even after you have eased the outhaul to reef (by rolling up the main), make sure you re-tighten that outhaul back out for a flat sail.

Heavier mast section and more weight aloft

Weight aloft is never good for a sailboat. The boat manufacturer has taken this into account.

Possibility of a jam

After sailing many IMF boats over the last 6 plus years (98% of them Selden), I truly believe that with the proper training/technique one will RARELY if ever, have a problem with a stuck sail. The systems have been improved over the years. Heck, even with TRADITIONAL mains, you can get a sail stuck with a halyard problem, or a stuck sail-track guide, or a full batten coming out the FRONT of the sail and getting hooked above a spreader (true story)!

Maintenance

The system does require more maintenance than a traditional main. There are grease points for the furling shaft and the swivel bearings at the top and bottom. There are also requirements to lube the beveled gears at the furling drum/winch. A tube of water-proof grease comes with the mast system. Selden recommends lubricating at least once a year.

Problems starting to furl the main

After my first IMF article, I had a reader who sails a larger Hunter send me an email. He explained that some owners have had issues with a curve/belly at the tack of the mainsail making it hard to start the furling operation. This area of sail is below where the main's bolt rope enters the track on the furling unit. Tightening the halyard didn't help enough so they have had a sail maker sew a sleeve/tab arrangement which is attached to sail by Velcro. He has promised to send me a pic of this inexpensive fix this spring. I will pass it on and give him credit hopefully in the next newsletter.

Final tips and tricks:

1. When you furl the mainsail, be sure that your topping lift is loose so that the mainsail leech remains relatively tight with no wrinkles on the roll in. (Really, ANYTIME the mainsail is out, the boom should be held up by the sail ONLY, not the topping lift!)
2. When leaving your boat for any length of time, I would recommend selecting the ratchet mode on the furling drum on the mast. It is heartbreaking to see a furled sail, somehow get "loose" in a strong breeze and flap itself out. It then can beat itself to death if no one corrects this quickly.
3. As part of your spring maintenance, if you have left your sails up and furled, I would recommend dropping the sails and checking the head (and tack) straps on both the main and the jib. I have noticed that after 4 or 5 years from new, the straps tend to sun-rot or dry rot and break at the most inopportune moments. As the main or jib comes gently (or NOT so gently) fluttering down, the day of sailing is cut short. It's probably at the start of a weekend with PERFECT weather, and your friends are scheduled to arrive for a sail with you! Of course, you will need a boson's chair to retrieve the halyard at the mast head. A simple and inexpensive preventative repair at the sail loft before

starting the season, will keep that from happening. While the sail is there, make sure the clew of the sail has been reinforced and the Sunbrella fabric is in good shape. This is the only piece of the sail consistently exposed to the elements.

4. Ask Mandy (service coordinator) at Norton's Service Yard to lubricate your IMF furling system if you haven't done it in a while!

5. Ease off the leech line before rolling the main up. Note: After the "Everything Sail Seminar" I was approached by several sailors that reminded me that they were not as agile as I am and that just GETTING to the leech line is a problem! I agree it can be difficult to reach without climbing things. I have also noticed that the plastic jam cleats don't seem to be able to hold the line when enough tension has been applied to stop the leech from flapping. I would love to hear from those who have come up with solutions.

6. Always keep some tension on the outhaul when furling. When I am single-handing in a strong breeze, I wrap a couple of turns of the outhaul around the cabin deck winch and step on the line before releasing the Spinlock cleat. This helps me keep control of the outhaul and provides friction on it in case I need to take two hands to start the initial furling operation.

7. Having a problem getting the sail out? Think it's stuck? Relax..... Take the time to double check EVERY aspect of the system. Ten times out of eleven, at least as far as my personal experience, it is operator error! The ratchet lock is still on, or I didn't open BOTH the spinlocks for the continuous furling line. There could be too much tension on the mainsheet or boom vang, or I am pulling on the wrong line thinking it was the outhaul.....yes it happens (sigh).

Once all those are properly verified, if I still have an issue I probably have already noticed that there is a clump of rolled sail squeezing out the mast slot. Remember, other people have used the boats I am on and perhaps they didn't roll it up right. I lock the outhaul, sometimes with tension, sometimes without, and then take both sides of the furling line and try to "shuffle" the furler gently back and forth. Once, I took a winch handle and went forward to the drum and winched the sail in (with outhaul locked). I was able to tighten up the sail inside itself. *DO NOT TRY TO FORCE THE SAIL OUT WITH THE OUTHAUL IF YOU SEE PART OF THE ROLLED SAIL JAMMING THE SLOT!*

8. Although, with the ratchet lever in "free" the sail will roll up by pulling either side of the continuous-furling line, the proper direction for furling the main is for the drum on the mast to be turning clockwise! This rolls the sail up on the starboard side of the furling rod inside. The mast extrusion and furling rod are asymmetrical internally and designed for the sail to roll in that way. Also, should you need to reef, when selecting "ratchet" it will allow the sail rolling in this way to be flattened back out with the outhaul. You will be pulling against a mechanical lock on the system, not just the friction of the continuous reefing line.

Hope this was interesting reading. Any input on these articles is welcome. Just email to

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