

Tips for the Beginner Sailor

Warnings/Cautions

- When first learning to sail your Paper Tiger Catamaran, it is best to do so in the company of other sailors and a rescue craft. It is highly recommend that you join a local sailing club, especially one with Paper Tigers or other small catamarans. Nothing will help you more than having others who also sail these boats available to assist and answer your questions.
- The ideal wind strength in which to begin sailing your Paper Tiger is around 8-12 knots.

This article was written by Peter Anderson, a four time International Championship winner. It was extracted from the 1997 Paper Tiger Catamaran Tuning Manual.

Leaving the beach

Perform a final check of your boat and gear before leaving the beach making sure that the hatch covers are on tight, the ropes are not tangled and all the cleats and gear are operating smoothly. Ask for a hand to lift your boat into the water, always keeping the boat head to wind (bows into the breeze).

The wind will generally be blowing from one of three directions: along the beach, out to sea (off-shore) or straight onto the beach (on-shore). If the wind is along the beach, keep the sail nice and loose, your back to the wind and turn the boat to face out to sea. Put one rudder part way down, jump on board and pull in the sail a little and sail straight out into deeper water before lowering the centreboards and rudders completely.

If the wind is off shore and fairly light, put one of the rudders part way down and with the sail loose, turn the boat and then sail out into deeper water. Be prepared for a gybe as often with off shore breezes the wind can be very shifty (changing direction constantly). If the wind strength is strong you will need a lot more room to manoeuvre the boat into a downwind position as the boat is often difficult to turn with the rudders only half way down. Additionally, beware of unsuspecting swimmers. It is sometimes easier to leave all boards and rudders up and drift out backwards by just sitting on one of the bows of your boat (you have no steerage, so make sure that the way out is clear).

If the wind is blowing onto the shore then the sea is likely to be rougher (a shore break may be evident). You will need to put a centreboard part way down as well as a rudder because you will be pointing into the wind while trying to get out through the waves (the centreboard will prevent some sideways slip). You may have to walk the boat through some of the waves in order to achieve a little more water depth in the troughs between the waves so that the centreboard may be partially lowered. This will also reduce the chances of your boat being washed backwards into the shore and your rudders being broken. Don't try to point too high, just go for some speed to get you through the waves.

Basic Sailing

Beating to windward (sailing into the wind)

When beating to windward the traveller should be set about 15 to 20 centimetres from the centre of the boat and the main sheet (main rope to control boom angle) should be pulled in tight. The centreboards and rudders should be all the way down. The wind will feel like it is coming straight from the bow of the boat. If the bow is steered too high into the wind the sail will begin to luff (the wind hits the back of the sail and causes it to back wind or become distorted in shape near the mast). Generally, you will find that 45 degrees from the true wind (actual wind direction) will be the best angle of beating to windward.

Tacking (turning the boat through the eye of the wind)

In order to tack the boat you need to keep it moving as smoothly as possible all the way through the tack. Start your tack going up a wave and finish it coming down the back of the same wave. The rudder is moved by pushing the tiller away from you smoothly. Sometimes it helps to tie a cord from the centre of the tiller crossbar to the centre of the boat's rear beam to restrict the rudder movement to about 45 degrees. This prevents excessive drag in the water by the rudders when turned too far. It is important to not let the go of the tiller during the gybe, as the rudders will return to the centre, putting the boat into 'irons'.

The boat may get into 'irons' (stuck head to wind or pointing directly into the wind and not moving forwards) if the tack is not performed cleanly. That is, the boat is neither on a starboard tack or a port tack. To get out of irons push the tiller away from you and push the boom out in the same direction. The boat will reverse in an arc and at the end of this arc straighten up the rudders and pull the sail in using the mainsheet. This will get the boat moving again.

Reaching (sailing across the wind)

Reaching is great fun. The boat travels at its fastest and you have a wide range of sail positions and directions in which to move. Reaching angles include a 'close reach' (just off the angle of beating or pointing about 90 degrees to the wind) and a 'broad reach' (sailing side-on to away from the wind). The traveller must be let out towards the side of the boat (the further away from the beating position the further out the traveller should be set). Centreboards should be all the way up in most cases, the exception being a very close reach where the windward centreboard should remain down.

Running/dead run (sailing with the wind / the wind is coming from behind)

When on a dead run the wind will feel lighter and the boat will be travelling slower. However, sailing down wind in heavy breezes will break more masts and 'bottle' (capsize) more boats than any other sailing angle. It is important to keep your lower front stays firm to support your mast and reduce the chances of a breakage.

Gybing

Gybing is when the sail and boom go from one side of the boat to the other while travelling downwind. This manoeuvre occurs very quickly so be prepared to duck under the boom. The traveller will be right out as far as it can possibly go and both centreboards will be fully up. It is best to control the gybe by pulling in the main sheet a little way first and then let it out as the boom swings across the boat. This will also cushion the shock load on the mast.

Capsizing or bottling (tipping the boat over)

Capsizing is not uncommon in sailing and should be treated as part of learning to sail. A Paper Tiger is a very buoyant boat and will not sink even if full of water so always stay with your boat. The Paper Tiger is also a very easy boat to right.

Returning to the beach

Returning to the beach is in the reverse order to leaving the beach. The centreboards and rudders need to be considered together with the angle of the wind to the shore. Leave rudders in the half down position so the boat can be manoeuvred but also sailed into shallow water at the same time. Keep an eye out for swimmers and leave plenty of room to turn the boat up into the wind to stop it before the hulls hit the bottom.

Always ask for the help of the more experienced Paper Tiger sailors at your club. Most Paper Tiger sailors are more than willing to pass on their knowledge to new comers.

For assistance with your Paper Tiger Catamaran, or suggestions for this or other Guides, please contact the
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