



## PUSH OR PULL BLASTING

When merrily blasting along, our aim is to remain committed in the harness, which is where the **pull** should come from. Yet as soon as we encounter a loss of speed, control or feel and things are getting out of hand, the common reaction is to pull on the boom with the arms. It's just so instinctive but it instantly destroys the downforce and tension through the harness line, our counterbalance, and the ability to reposition the body should the rig suddenly move.

### the problem

Losing speed or control when getting into harnessing and footstraps, be it 8.0m marginal winds or 4.0m wavesail conditions.

You're trying to get going, you've just hooked in, you're about to go for the straps, or maybe you're in the straps and the board starts to slow. The common and 'natural' reaction is to **pull** on the boom for more power, yet this has a number of negative effects...

# sb windwise KILL OR CURE?!?

Simon Bornhoft explores the counterintuitive moments in windsurfing...

Photos: WindWise / Karen Bornhoft

**A** frustrated gyber once proclaimed that windsurfing was like getting in a stunning sports car, throttling down the road, only to find the steering worked in completely the opposite direction to what you'd expect.

Many will agree that the sport is punctuated with moments that can contradict, confuse or just don't feel natural. Often, what you assume to be 'right' isn't actually the way it works at all. For instance, if someone asked you which way you throw your body for a forward loop, you'd naturally think forwards, but, as many learned loopers will tell you, the body actually moves backwards towards the clew – only the rig goes forwards! Back in the real world, there are many scenarios where we need to resist our natural instinct or reasoning. So, over the next few issues I hope you'll find empathy with these situations, as they link into many key moments within the sport. First off, let's look at a very common windsurfing tendency to **pull**, when in fact we should be **pushing**.

### HUMAN INSTINCT

You'd be right to assume that there needs to be a constant 'pull' against the boom to maintain control and get more power from it. But there's a big difference between hanging down and back off the boom in the harness and actually **pulling** on the boom with the arms. Pulling on the boom (and by that I mean flexing the arms and heaving the mast / rig towards you) is often the moment when control, counterbalance and visions of greatness deteriorate. Because when you pull you often end up just bending the arms, bringing the upper body closer to the rig and reducing your leverage. **Yet when we encounter difficult situations, panic or seek security the natural instinct is to grab or pull.** This 'rig hugging' is so often evoked in tricky windsurfing situations, be they blasting or cornering. Those who excel have the experience to resist getting too personal with their rig and use distance to create calm, control and counterbalance. In many situations we need to counterintuitively extend, distance and sometimes repel or push the rig away for greater effectiveness. Let's look at a few examples.





## the solution: push or extend

Next time the board isn't quite accelerating, or you want more power from the rig getting into the straps, **push** the boom away by extending your arms, rather than flexing them. If you're blasting along and want more stability and leverage against the rig and board, work on keeping the **pull** from your harness and not your arms.



## into the straps

Even if you momentarily pull or flex when getting into the straps, try to extend soon afterwards.



## upwind

Extending, pushing or at least 'not pulling' on the arms makes it easier to move the hands forward, lean the upper body forward, and sheet the boom in, back and down to maintain that all-important opposition going upwind.

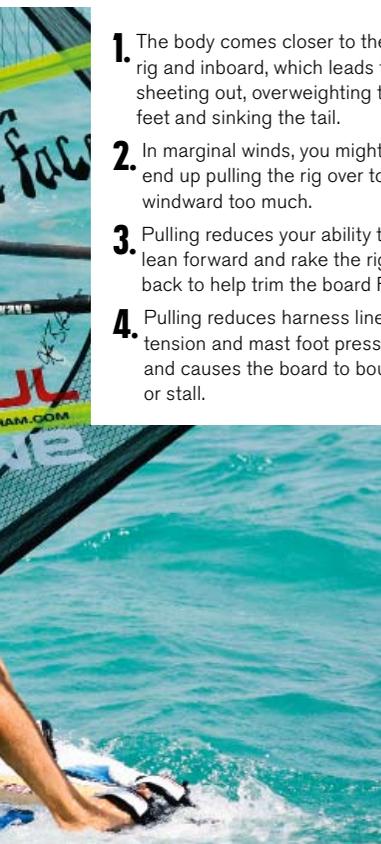


## push it good!

If you combine **pushing** with a straight-7 tightened torso stance it has huge benefits – especially when getting (and keeping) small, medium or large boards planing in tricky situations. As an experiment try sailing with a finger-light grip to see how little you need to use your arms.



1. The body comes closer to the rig and inboard, which leads to sheeting out, overweighting the feet and sinking the tail.
2. In marginal winds, you might end up pulling the rig over to windward too much.
3. Pulling reduces your ability to lean forward and rake the rig back to help trim the board FLAT.
4. Pulling reduces harness line tension and mast foot pressure, and causes the board to bounce or stall.





**Q: What about strong winds?**

**A: The same applies**

If you over-pull on your arms it lessens the loading going through harness line. Essentially, the arms are there to steady the rig and let the harness take 95% of the strain. In very strong winds the extra pull comes from the harness, so you should be able to unweight your hands and move them up and down the boom to adjust to the sailing line and work on holding the rig still. So make sure those harness lines free your hands to move! You'll see good sailors often hunch and flex the arms, but 95% of the pull is from the harness. The arms are still just holding the rig still.

**Q: How do you know you're pulling too much?**

**A: Here are the signs...**

- The harness line drops out when you're blasting along.
- You encounter regular speed loss, you sheet out, stop or have difficulty getting planing compared to others.
- The board luffs, lifts, rails, skews or rocks about.

**Q: Why do you sometimes write 'pull' on the boom?**

**A: If it's nuking and you're fighting for control out of the harness**

Primarily when getting planing or during entry and exit of gybes, **YES** you can pull **DOWN** on the boom, but not excessively. And also you should always seek to re-establish a decent distance from the rig – pronto!

# PUSH OR PULL TRANSITIONS

This pull vs push counterintuitive theme continues into transitions – especially when the rig's moving, rotating or is sheeted out, there's such a natural reaction to pull. It's very counterintuitive to push or move it in a sliding action away from the body and forward, rather than heaving it towards you.

## tacking pull

Mid-tack it's very common to **pull** the rig / mast close to the body. This immediately reduces stability, sends the body forward, sinks the nose and leaves a lasting impression of never being able to tack a small board.

## tacking push

If you counterintuitively push the rig / mast away from you (downwind on entry and middle of the tack, and then forward at the end of the tack), you maintain a greater opposition and counterbalance.





### gybing pull

Even before the rotation the rig is too close, so it swings round and every sinew in your body wants to pull the rig to windward and towards the body. This unbalances the sailor and actually sheets the rig out even more.



### gybing push

This is the exact moment you need to counterintuitively push the mast hand downwind, away from the body and then forward (not to windward). This creates a scooping action that enables you to hang outboard, with the rig being scooped downwind and then forward as a counterbalance. This is for both planing and non-planing gybes.



## SIMON'S SUMMARY

The secret to counterintuitiveness is developing the discipline to reduce that vice-like grip on the boom and to trust and use the harness more than you ever thought. Even when coaching very accomplished sailors we work on constantly lightening the grip and letting the hips and harness do the work. The hands are there just to steady the rig. As for transitions like tacks and gybes, trust and belief are the key factors to overcome the human nature to pull. So next time you're out, experiment, try some of the suggestions here and also take a more lateral approach to other moments that are causing you the most grief.

Next month we look at an assortment of counterintuitive moments for waterstarts, gybing, steering and waveriding.

**SB kicks off his UK Skills Training Tour with a whole range of courses for improver to advanced windsurfers. Locations include: Hayling, Southend, Axbridge, Llandegfedd, Brogborough, Rutland, Barrow, Derwent, Bigbury – and more to come!**

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