

HELP OR HINDER?

If you've been overwhelmed when waterstarting, confused when cornering or dunked when duck gybing, there's a high chance that you might have been fooled by a counterintuitive moment! **Simon Bornhoft** explores those instances when our natural instincts hinder progress.

Photos: WindWise / Karen Bornhoft

A few years ago I heard a 'health and safety' statistic that said you're more likely to drown while horseriding than you are by partaking in watersports! Yep, apparently there's a higher chance of meeting our maker by being thrown off a disgruntled stallion into a shallow brook than coming to a watery end falling off a board or out of a dinghy. A counterintuitive 'fact' if ever there was one. Thankfully, in this humble windsurfing feature we shall deal with more relevant and less gloomy counterintuitive moments, but it illustrates how our assumptions can be erroneous. So as the cantering classes sport their

buoyancy aids bounding over the Chilterns, let's get on with some counterintuitive windsurfing moments.

This time we're going to look at three defining counterintuitive moments that, in my coaching experience, are linked to tipping points for making key moves. If you read this and think "That doesn't sound right", or "That's not what I would have imagined", then it might explain why you're having difficulty and how you could well be going against the grain. I hope these true to life coaching experiences help you solve your technique issues with a more lateral approach.



WATERSTARTING – FLYING THE RIG

When you look at a rig being 'flown' out of the water, the natural reaction and assumption is to lift the mast to expose the sail and release the rig. Yet this 'lifting' action is so often the crux of many problems.



ASSUMPTION: LIFT MAST ❌

You're down in the water desperate to clear the rig, and that damned clew catches! Virtually everyone learning tries to lift the mast even higher at this stage. But every action has an opposite, so if you 'lift' the mast trying to encourage more wind under the sail the clew actually drops and catches even more. Plus the lifting action sends you down!



COUNTERINTUITIVE MOMENT: PULL DOWN ON MAST, AND SLIDE... ✓

This is so against common reasoning. If ever the clew catches you actually need to pull down on the mast to release the clew. Pulling down (and also sliding it to windward) helps level the boom and consequently releases the clew. While this seems like the last thing you want to do when semi-submerged gasping for breath, it definitely works. You have a far greater chance of fully flying the rig if it's kept low but horizontal than if the mast is high but the boom's angled down into the water. So – especially for long booms, choppy waters or just reluctant rigs – I'll spend just as much time pulling down and to windward with the mast hand, rather than trying to lift it straight up.



GYBING – UNHOOKING

The moment of 'unhooking' has a disproportionate effect on the success of your gybes, yet it's one of the most overlooked, underrated and counterintuitive moments in windsurfing.

ASSUMPTION: LIFT HIPS ❌

The natural reaction is to come up from your sailing position and lift the hips to take the weight off the harness line before unhooking. Actually, it's this common assumption that is the root of many gybing evils. Lifting the hips and consequently standing up to unhook is great for jumping, but it's the last thing you want to do when setting up for a gybe. Here's why:

1. It reduces the downforce on the boom, making it harder to stay sheeted in and keep the board flat.
2. An upright body reduces your leverage over the rig for a controlled 'bear away'.
3. You have to try and stay sheeted in through arm strength rather than bodyweight.
4. You're pulled up over the board when bearing away, leading to that awful unsettling bouncing and poor clew control.



COUNTERINTUITIVE MOMENT: SINK HIPS ✅

Resist your 'standing to attention instincts' and **put masses more weight down through the harness line prior to unhooking**. By sinking much further back, down and into the harness prior to unhooking, it makes it easier to unhook by pulling **down** on the boom to release the line. Here are the other benefits of doing so:

1. Pulling the rig to windward more makes it easier to control a powered rig before, during and after unhooking.
2. A low 'super-7' body position enables you to initially turn the board downwind through front leg pressure rather than being up over the board bouncing downwind.
3. Crucially it massively increases your chances of staying sheeted in as you bear away.
4. It helps lighten the rig and makes it easier to stay sheeted in when you do lever yourself over the board and start to carve.

DUCK GYBING

If you've ever made a gybe – even a planing in and wobble out version – you're more than capable of starting your duck gybing career. Once again there's a counterintuitive moment that catches everyone out when they first attempt to duck the sail.

KEY POINTS

1. Sail fast, straight and broad to lighten the rig.
2. Duck the sail early in the arc of the turn (i.e. don't get half way round the gybe and then try it).
3. Opposition: rig forward and downwind as the body stays back and to windward.
4. After pulling the boom close to the body the front hand releases and grabs the boom well past the rear hand to allow the rig to drop downwind into the turn. It's at this point you need to resist your natural instincts to grab at the rig.



ASSUMPTION: REACH FORWARD ❌

We're addressing the moment when you've ducked the rig and you're left holding the sail with the old front hand. At this point every sinew in your body wants to get your hands on the new side of the boom. The common response is to reach forward for the rig, but this unweights the back foot (which stops the board carving), actually keeps the new side of the boom further away from you, and often pulls you forward off balance.



COUNTERINTUITIVE MOMENT: WAIT AND KEEP BACK ✅

So rather than intuitively reaching for the rig, **wait**, and try to keep the body back and actually **away** from the rig. This has a number of advantages:

1. Maintaining weight on the back foot keeps the board carving.
2. Waiting creates time for the rig to drop and swing into the turn.
3. The resulting 'swing' brings the rig in towards you, rather than away from you.
4. With the body back it is easier to yank the rig across the body so that the new front hand can grab the boom forward of the harness line.

Q: Why does the rig constantly get ripped out of my hands?

A: Ducking too early!

Bear away fast, sheeted in on a straight broad reach to lighten the rig before ducking.

Q: Why, even if I let the mast drop and swing into the turn, is the new side of the boom too far away?

A: You're leaving the duck too late

It should happen well before the dead downwind stage of the gybe.

SIMON SAYS

All these points have come from thousands of real life coaching successes, moments when clients say: "You just don't realise it by watching it", and "Until you understand what you're meant to be doing, you waste masses of time doing the wrong thing entirely". Windsurfing isn't always what you think it should be.

Next month we'll have some more counterintuitive moments for non-planing and planing gybes, high speed steering and jumping. Until then, I'll be the one on the water wearing chaps, riding hat and using reins for harness lines. Tally-ho!

Join SB on his UK Skills Training Tour at Hayling, Southend, Axbridge, Llandegfedd, Brogborough, Rutland, Barrow, Derwent, Bigbury – and more to come! Also join the Bornhofts for their new Family Week, Alaçati, 5-12 August...



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If you have any questions regarding your technique, or any subjects you'd like covered in the magazine, you can contact sb@windwise.net

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Founder of FastFwd – the new RYA National Coaching System.

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