

Heavy-Air Crewing in a V15

When the breeze comes up in a V15, things can get dicey pretty quickly. The boats go fast, and they can make you tired really easily. So here are a few quick tips (in no particular order), which may make your life easier the next time the breeze comes up.

1. When tacking in breeze, a roll tack is not really a roll tack. Think of it as a delayed cross. It's often difficult for V15 crews to sense when to cross. In general, you should start your move across the boat right around the time the jib backs. However, this is only a general rule, and you should communicate with your skipper about more specific timing.

Also, make sure that you are really working the whole way through the tack. The tack starts when the boat begins to go head to wind, and it doesn't end until you are hiking on the other side of the boat, with the jib pulled all the way in. When it's windy, it's common to see crews hurry across the boat, and act like they are finished as soon as their butt hits the tank on the other side of the boat. However, it's crucial to get your feet in the straps and your weight out as soon as possible. Then you can deal with pulling the jib in that last three inches, untangling your feet from the other lines in the boat, or whatever other issues you have.

2. Tighten up your hiking straps. You can hike harder with loose straps, but you will get tired much quicker. It's very important to find the place where you hike most efficiently, not the hardest. You want to hike hard, but you also need to make sure that you will last all day. There will be key parts of a race where you will need a burst of energy, such as the start, or when you are trying to pinch a competitor off. You want to make sure you have the energy when you need it.

3. If you have trouble pulling the jib in, then get the person in the back of the boat to help you. At the post-race party after a windy day, it is common to hear crews complaining that they were unable to pull the jib in all the way. A V15 jib is very large, and the sheet does a big turn in a fairlead, which causes a solid amount of friction. So if you have problems pulling the jib in, it does not mean you are a weakling. It means that your skipper needs to find the time to put his/her mainsheet in the tiller hand and reach forward to help you pull the jib in the rest of the way.

4. Learn to anticipate the moves your boat will make. Things happen fast when it's windy, this much is obvious. But your ability to react doesn't improve when it gets windy. So the only thing you can do is better anticipate. You need to know where all the boats on the race course are, so you can tell which ones your boat will be responding to when things change. This way a quick tack or a crash duck is not a surprise. Communicate to your skipper what you see. But when you do this, it's important to present your skipper with options, don't tell them to do something.

For example, you are going upwind on port tack; there is a boat three boatlengths to leeward and three boatlengths ahead, also on port. Ask your skipper, "When boat #74 tacks, do you want to duck or lee-bow?" Just before you are about to round the leeward

mark, ask your skipper if he/she wants to round the mark and go straight, or if you will be tacking right away around the mark. Questions like this will allow you to anticipate things better, and they will also raise the issue in your skipper's mind. If your skipper can't answer either of the above questions right away, then they need to plan ahead more than they currently do. If your skipper doesn't like you asking these questions, then tell him/her that to relax or go back to second grade where closed-minded people learn not to throw tantrums whenever anyone else dares question what they're doing.

5. Find a way to get yourself "locked in." This helps most downwind and during the pre-start. Tim Wadlow emphasized the importance of this to me, when I was sailing with him at a breezy team-race regatta in V15's. Before the start, he was so aggressive with his direction changes that I almost fell out of the boat a few times. The same thing can happen during a big turn around the jibe mark. You need to find a way to firmly brace yourself, so you can do what you need to during big boathandling maneuvers. Find a way to sit with your legs locked into some combination of tanks, centerboard, and hiking straps. It's difficult to describe exactly how to do this, and people with different body sizes will have to sit differently in order to get "locked in." I usually find myself straddling, sort-of, in the cockpit, with one foot jammed against each tank. The goal here is to sit in a manner which allows you to manipulate the boat, rather than having the boat manipulate you.

6. Be conscious of your jib leech tension. When your boat is reaching, and you are on the leeward side holding the jib outside the shroud, make sure that you're trimming the jib leech properly. It is common to see jibs with very open top sections, rendering that portion of the sail totally useless. In big breeze requires you need to exert a surprising amount of downward tension on the sheet in order to properly tension the leech of the sail. You look at the top of the sail almost as frequently as at the telltales, so you can be sure you are trimming the entire sail correctly.

When close reaching in a V15 in breeze, a peculiar situation arises. This happens when you can no longer hold the jib outside the shroud because your weight is needed to help keep the boat flat. So you are up on the windward side of the boat now, trimming the jib with the sheet through the fairlead. The V15 jib fairlead is not in a position to properly trim the jib at this point of sail. If you trim the foot of the sail properly, the top will be too open. So you will find yourself slightly overtrimming the bottom of the sail so the top is not totally lost. Look for a happy medium between inefficiently trimming the bottom and trimming the top more efficiently. However, keep in mind that there is more area in the bottom of the sail, make sure you don't stall out that part too much.—Stan Schreyer is an all-American member of the BU sailing team that won ICYRA Nationals this year, won the sportsmanship award, and now works for Vanguard.