



# Control lines up to the mark

Tips on hoisting, reefing and rig control from solo ocean sailor and circumnavigator Stuart MacDonald's book *Sail This Way*



**Sail This Way – A plain guide to ocean sailing by Stuart MacDonald, £9.99. Available from Amazon in hard copy or Kindle. [www.beyondsailing.co.uk](http://www.beyondsailing.co.uk)**

**M**ark everything. You should mark all control lines so that you can easily repeat the right settings. This is standard practice on racing boats, but it's very useful on cruising boats as well.

The best way of marking a line is to put a whipping on it where you want the mark to be. I make these whippings with a sail needle, passing a few stitches through the line to make sure that the whipping will not come off. You could, of course, mark the line with an indelible marker, but the use of twine has a couple of advantages. First, you can feel the mark at night, which can

be very useful when you may be looking at the sail or the wind angle screen. Second, if you want to move the mark, as you may do at some time, you can just cut the twine off and relocate the whipping. If your marks are on with marking pen, and you need to change their position by a few inches, you will end up with a confusing array of extra marks. Twine also allows you to use two colours, one colour for one position and one for another.

The real value of the marks comes in the dark when you could be in a situation such as having your head under the sprayhood, grinding in a reefing line with your head torch shining on the winch. Get

to trust your marks and you won't have to try to look at the sail and the winch at the same time.

## Jib cars, furling line and backstay

On *Beyond*, my 1991 Comfortina 38, I have only two positions for the jib cars. One, a metre or so back from the front of the track, which is used when the sail is fully out, and another right forward for when I have a few rolls in the sail. The mark on the car control line for the fully out position is done with green twine, and the mark for the forward position is done with red.

The backstay tackle is similarly marked, green for light to moderate weather, and red for full on, in strong winds.

The genoa furling line is also marked. One sewn-on mark, which comes just past the clutch when the sail is fully out and two marks that will be just at the clutch when the sail is furled to the point where I will have the cars at their forward position and the backstay on the hard weather position. The position of these marks has been determined over many

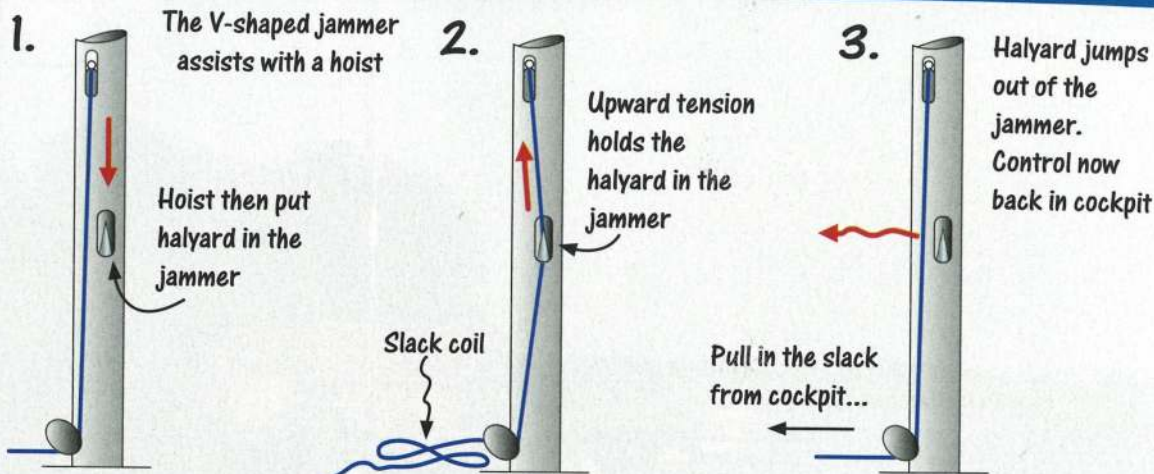
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stuart MacDonald is a qualified sailing instructor who first went to sea as a teenager with a Glasgow-based shipping company, becoming Master of his first ship at the age of 30. He started cruising solo on the west coast of Scotland, where he now lives, and participated in the Single Handed Transatlantic race and other solo events. He set off on a long-term cruise in 2010 and returned four years later after a 43,000-mile circumnavigation that is the subject of his first book, *The Long Way Home*, available from Amazon in hard copy or Kindle. [www.beyondsailing.co.uk](http://www.beyondsailing.co.uk)



## HELP WITH RAISING THE MAINSAIL



An 8oz Dacron mainsail on a 38ft cruising boat is a heavy piece of gear. If the halyard passes round a turning block at the foot of the mast, then through an organiser on the coachroof then through a closed clutch, just forward of the winch, there is enough extra friction load by the time it reaches the winch to make raising the sail quite a

tough job. It is much easier to hoist at the mast, pulling down on the halyard where it exits the mast. To help, I have a V-shaped jammer riveted to the mast about a foot below the halyard exit point and just off to one side of the direct line between the exit point and the turning block at the foot of the mast. I hoist the sail, then stick

the halyard into the jammer, allowing the weight of the sail to pull it tightly into the V, which then holds it in position until I can return to the cockpit, pull in the slack and take the weight on the winch. When you do that, the halyard jumps out of the jammer and you have control back in the cockpit.

## TOP TIP

An important rule to stick to when hoisting any sail is just before you start hauling on the halyard to look up the mast and check that it has not caught on anything.

hours of sailing. I know that if I set the car lines and the backstay up on green, or on the red marks, and the furling line on one or two marks, the whole thing will be more or less correct for either moderate, or strong conditions. In the log, I just write, "changed to R" or in easing weather, "changed to G".

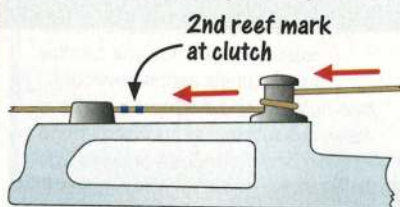
All the other control lines, such as the outhaul for the mainsail and the kicker, are similarly marked. I know that if I put the main outhaul on the winch and tighten it until the mark is at the winch, the foot of the sail will be completely flat, also, that if I ease it until the mark is just at the clutch, the foot of the sail will be eased.

On an ocean passage, with a cruising rig, you are not concerned with the finer points of matching foot and luff tension, mast bend and so on. You just need to know that the tension is on, or off and the marks allow you to do this, quickly, even in the dark.

## Main halyard and reefing lines

The main halyard on *Beyond* is 12mm white Dyneema. It has a single green whipping, which lies midway between the clutch and the winch when the halyard is at the correct tension for the full sail at moderate winds. If the wind increases, I apply more tension until the mark just touches the winch, and if it goes light, or I am sailing downwind in moderate conditions, I ease the halyard back until the mark is almost at the clutch.

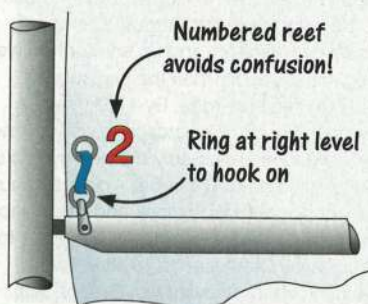
## Marks locate the halyard's position



There are other marks corresponding to the correct halyard position for each of the three mainsail reefs. One red for the first reef, two for the second and three for the third. To take the second reef, for example: I slack the halyard away until the two marks are at the clutch, at which point there will be just enough slack to slip the reefing ring over the horn, but not so much that it falls off again.

I have two rings joined by a webbing strap that passes through the stainless eye on the luff. It's the best way and

## Numbered luff eyelets help avoid mistakes



makes hooking on really easy. This is crucial when you are taking a reef on your own. Once I have the slack on the reefing line pulled in, I tighten the halyard until the two red marks are just at the winch, which gives me the right halyard tension for the conditions.

The reefing lines are different colours, and each has one stitched whipping, positioned so that it is just at the winch when the reef is in hard and you have sufficient tension on the foot of the sail.

Remember this may not be at exactly the same place each time because the sail may not lie on the boom exactly the same way each time. It will, however, be accurate enough.

I also number each of the luff eyelets, with indelible marker, on each side of the sail. If you go straight to a second reef, you will find you have several folds of sail lying above the gooseneck and it's easy to hook the wrong reefing eye onto the horn. The big numbers will prevent you from making this mistake.

There is an anti-chafe patch on *Beyond's* mainsail, which happens to be just level with the luff eye for the third reef. I have drawn a smiley face on it, to help cheer me up when things are getting bad and the final reef goes in.