

# 5 TIPS DOUBLE-HANDED SAILING

## HOW TO SET UP TO WIN WHEN RACING TWO-UP



**ANDY RICE** talks to **ALEXIS LOISON**, whose double-handed victories include the overall Rolex Fastnet Race prize

**T**he popularity of double-handed sailing is on the rise. This year Cowes Week is running a double-handed category for the first time, with inshore round the cans racing for two-person crews.

So why is two-up catching on in such a big way? According to Alexis Loison, it's partly because the logistics are much

easier to organise with just two of you, rather than having to pull together a full crew of seven or more people all with different levels of commitment.

Also, autopilot developments have made it much easier to handle a boat shorthanded. But for Loison the main attraction is that there's always something to do – no sitting on the rail for hours at a time. "When you're sailing double-handed, you have the helm, you navigate, you are busy during all the manoeuvres. There's never a dull moment."



**ALEXIS LOISON** is a professional sailor who competes regularly on the Figaro circuit. In 2013 he and his father, Pascal, became the first double-handed crew ever to win the Rolex Fastnet Race – not just in their class, but outright, ahead of the fully crewed boats



Double-handed: Ed Fishwick and Nick Cherry on *Redshift Reloaded* at the start of the 2017 Fastnet Race

Carlo Borlenghi

## 1 FORGE A PARTNERSHIP

It's really important to team up with someone you like and respect. You have to have a similar outlook on sailing and on how you approach competition. With my father, I couldn't find a better co-skipper; he's the man who knows me the best, and that's very important. When you team up, make sure you discuss everything in detail before you go afloat: how you'll communicate, how you divide the roles, what weather you expect. It's all about agreeing the processes in advance, and having systems in place. Routines are vital.



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## 2 CHOOSE THE RIGHT BOAT

I love Class 40s; they are fast, powerful boats. But for two-handed racing, a two-tonner is not all that much fun. The gear is big, and the boat is maybe too powerful. It can feel like the boat is in control of you, rather than you being in control.

A 33-footer, like the JPK10.10 *Night and Day* that I sail with my father, that's my favourite size of boat. It's small enough to make it easy to change a sail; it is what I call a 'human' boat!

Of course the boat is not the whole answer. Whichever one you choose, it's important to really know your boat, to have practised all the manoeuvres so there is no hesitation about what to do. When it's blowing hard in the middle of the night, you have to be ready.

## 3 TWIN RUDDERS

While we were racing in the Fastnet that we won overall, we found ourselves in a match race with another JPK10.10, pretty much identical to us except it was fully crewed. We were both reaching along in 25 knots of wind, yet despite them having more crew weight on the rail, we were faster in a straight line.

Why? Because our boat has two rudders and theirs only had one. They suffered a number of broaches while we didn't spin out once.

Two rudders give you so much more stability and control, which is even more important when you consider how reliant we are on the autopilot when racing double-handed. For this type of racing, two rudders are definitely better than one.

## 4 PREPARE FOR THE WORST

Before a big race we do a lot of weather preparation. We look closely at the GRIB files, we analyse all the currents. We make up a route book with key points for different parts of the race.

Also, we talk through worst-case scenarios about what we'll do if a sail breaks, and so on. Be meticulous about your safety planning, double-check your lifejackets, the liferaft.

We have an EPIRB and personal AIS system connected into the autopilot, so if one of us falls overboard this sends an automatic alert and logs the position.

## 5 SURVIVE THE HEAVY WEATHER GYBE

A heavy wind gybe is the most difficult manoeuvre in two-handed sailing. We always follow the same procedure. Firstly, we use only one pole but we have two sets of guys and sheets each side for the spinnaker.

- I take the helm and my father handles the No.1.
- Cleat the mainsail traveller in the middle of the track.
- Adjust the sheet to the 'standard position' at the point the clew is sitting near the forestay. Barber- haulers are set at an equal distance, in line with the top of the guardwires.
- We ease a lot of downhaul on the pole and, once we're surfing nicely on the wave, I gybe the boat with the new sheet in my hand so I'm able to adjust the stability of the spinnaker.
- We ensure the boat is stable, then my father passes the pole to the other side with no stress because we have guys and sheets in hand to help out. ■