

# Get the best from your cruising chute

Knowing how to reach, run and gybe with a cruising chute will give you the confidence to make the best use of it, says David Harding

**U**sing your cruising chute starts with getting it up and filling. Knowing how to douse it afterwards is just as important.

Those are the stages we looked at last month (PBO July 2014). But what about the bits in between? Once it's up there, how do you get the chute working to best advantage – and what happens if you need to change course? If you've ever set it only to find it flapping around aimlessly, or had to gybe again to gybe, read on...

## Gybing

In heavy airs, or if you're feeling cautious, you can drop/snuff/furl the chute, swing it across to the other side of the boat and re-hoist. Otherwise it's much quicker to gybe and, with a little practice, you will probably wonder why you've never done it before.

Unless you have a long bowsprit, like sports cruisers with asymmetric spinnakers such as the J-boats, for example, lead the 'lazy' sheet (the one not doing the work on whichever tack you're on) around the front of the sail, outside everything. Then you're set for an 'outside gybe'. This is generally easier and, importantly, it provides less scope for tangles.

The rule of thumb with gybing asymmetrics, whether inside or outside, is to 'gybe the sail before you gybe the boat'. Don't take that too literally, because you can't normally bring the sail all the way round until the boat has gybed, but it's vital to have the sail well on the way before the wind comes from the other quarter. If you gybe the boat first, the sail is more likely to blow through the gap between the forestay and the mast and, potentially, get wrapped around the forestay. That's when things can get messy.

## How to carry out the perfect gybe



**1** At the helm, Jim sails as deep downwind as he can while still keeping the chute filling.



**2** Chris is letting off the port sheet – the one that was doing the work – while Jack pulls in the starboard sheet, rotating the sail in front of the forestay.



**3** It doesn't look very pretty at this stage because you will never keep a cruising chute filling throughout a gybe. What matters is that the sail isn't tangled and it's all still in front of the forestay. The boom can come across now.



**4** The sail has now come round to starboard as Jack keeps sheeting in. Jim has started to steer further to port...



**5** Gybe complete! The chute is filling on starboard tack. Total time for this gybe was 19 seconds. It might take a little longer until you get used to it.

## How to rescue a gybe that's going wrong



**1** This starts well enough. The boat is almost dead downwind as the crew prepares to dump one sheet and bring the new one in.

**2** This is not looking good. Whether the boat has started to turn too fast or the crew is bringing the sail across too slowly, the effect is the same. Coordination is the key.



**5** The sail is starting to fill on the new side – and it's only three seconds since the last shot.



**4** The solution is to bring the boat back on the original course. The sail doesn't need to start filling again – it just needs to be in front of the forestay. The clew is already nearly back to the cap shrouds, so things are looking better.



**6** Another four seconds and it's back to business as usual. Like most aspects of boat-handling, successful gybing is not only about avoiding situations that might lead to tangles – it's also knowing how to get out of them before they present a problem.



**3** If the boat were to complete the gybe now, the chute would end up inside the forestay and that could make life difficult.



## Points of sail

Last month we saw how to fill the chute after hoisting, when sailing on a broad reach – the point of sail it generally likes best. More challenging is to keep it working when the wind moves forward or aft, so let's take a look at what needs to happen.

**DEEP DOWNWIND:** When sailing deep (wind well abaft the beam), ease the tack line and allow the chute to 'rock' to windward so it projects from behind the lee of the mainsail. How well it will do this depends partly on the cut of the sail – some are better than others.



**SAILING CLOSER:** To sail closer to the wind, tension the tack line to take some of the curve out of the luff, and sheet in. Here the apparent wind is at about 90° – pretty well on the beam. That's good going for this wind strength: a combination of a well-cut sail and a well-behaved boat. In lighter conditions it could be used closer than this.



**ON A DEAD RUN:** As we saw last month, the chute becomes blanketed by the mainsail as the boat approaches a run. That's just what you want when hoisting and dropping, but not when you're trying to keep it driving. The tendency to become blanketed is perhaps the greatest weakness of a cruising chute flown in the conventional manner.

One solution is to drop the mainsail. That can be difficult once the wind comes abaft the beam. Hoisting it again, especially if the wind has increased, can be a challenge too. If you have a spinnaker pole with an uphaul and downhaul, you can fly the tack of a cruising chute from the end of the pole like a conventional spinnaker. The trouble is that gybing then becomes an issue. If you're going to do this, you might as well fly a proper spinnaker and enjoy its far greater versatility.

A third option in the right conditions is to goose-wing. Chances are you will only get away with this in moderate winds and reasonably flat water so the boat isn't yawing too much, but when it works it's very effective.



## PBO conclusion

**W**ith a small boat in moderate conditions, handling a cruising chute can be straightforward and add a whole new dimension to your downwind sailing, making it faster and more fun.

If you don't fancy any of the handling aids we mentioned last month (snuffer and top-down furler), don't forget the oldest and cheapest system of all: rubber bands. Starting at the head, pass the sail through a bucket with the bottom cut out and around which the rubber bands have been placed. Ping the bands off the bucket and around the sail at whatever spacing works best, then hoist it. As you tension the sheet (and guy if it's a conventional spinnaker) and the sail starts to fill, the bands will break from the bottom up. For environmental reasons, lengths of wool are now preferred to rubber bands – it just takes longer this way.

As for what you do when the chute is up, that's what this feature is for. The important thing is to use it, play around with it – and have fun.

# Saare 41

## ...the boat beneath the chute

This new design from the Baltic doesn't just look the business. She also delivers, as David Harding reports

about 80% of the price on a spec-for-spec basis – so if that sounds appealing, read on.

### Cruising credentials

It's clear at a glance that a good deal of thought has gone into the design. On deck you find chunky, teak-capped bulwarks, multiple deck-vents, an abundance of locker space both forward and aft, a practical liferaft arrangement, a cockpit that's not stupidly wide and nav lights that you can switch on from the helm. She feels solid and the finish is hard to fault.

All this would be irrelevant if the Saare 41 didn't sail. Thankfully – and not surprisingly – she does. The combination of a slippery hull, a generous amount of low-down lead ballast and an amply proportioned rig lets her clock 7 knots upwind and tack through 80° without breaking sweat.

On our first outing we had 12-18 knots of wind from the south that made for shifty conditions in the Solent. The Saare got into her stride nonetheless, hitting an effortless 8 knots as soon as the sheets were eased an inch or two and proving to be both powerful and responsive. Her large rudder provides plenty of grip and the wheel never became heavy, but there was always a noticeable amount of weather helm, to the extent that she would spin rapidly into the wind if the wheel was let go. This might have been due to the way this particular boat was set up, even though nothing was obviously amiss. Most of Stråhlmann's Finn gulfs are exquisitely balanced, so it's

**I**f you have never heard of the Saare 41, or you looked at the photographs and thought 'what's the boat?', that's no surprise.

Not only is the boat we were sailing the first bearing the Saare name to be seen in the UK, but the name Saare Yachts is still relatively new even in its native Estonia. The yard responsible, on the other hand, has form: Saare Paat is where many of the Finn gulfs were built. If you're familiar with Finn gulf and we have tested several

models in PBO over the years – you will know that they set pretty high standards. Further connections with Finn gulf include the designer, Karl-Johan Stråhlmann, and the co-founder, Stig Nordblad, who founded Finn gulf back in 1981.

Given this pedigree, it's no surprise that Saare yachts have a Scandinavian air about them. On seeing the 41 you might wonder whether she was a Malo that had been working out, or the result of a liaison between a Hallberg-Rassy

and a Finn gulf that had spent a long dark winter in a shed together. She's clearly a cruising boat, but there's a litheness about her lines that hints at some serious get-up-and-go.

The boat modelling the cruising chute, which I had already sailed on another occasion, is the Saare 41 a/c (aft cockpit). There's also a centre-cockpit version (the 41 c/c) and a little sister, the 38. Steve Bruce of Saare Yachts UK reckons the 41 is directly comparable with the Hallberg-Rassy 412 but for



Beautifully finished in mahogany, the interior provides plenty of scope for customisation



A small fixed windscreen shelters the companionway



Details on deck include this protector-cum-mini-seat over the vents forward of the mast



Details that make a difference include the through-deck scuppers



Control lines led aft from the mast run through the moulding that forms the hatch garage



A comfortable helming position, a practical cockpit layout and well arranged hardware make for easy short-handed sailing

### TECH SPEC

**PRICE: from £315,000**

LOA	12.52m (41ft 0in)
LWL	11.20m (36ft 9in)
Beam	3.92m (12ft 10in)
Draught	2.00m (6ft 7in)
Displacement	10,500kg (23,148lb)
Ballast	3,900kg (8,598lb)
Sail area (main & foretriangle)	86sq m (926sq ft)
Displacement/length ratio	150
Sail area/displacement ratio	18.19
RCD category	A
Engine	Volvo Penta D2-55/130S, 55hp diesel
Headroom	1.95m
Designer	Karl-Johan Stråhlmann
Builder	Saare Paat, Estonia
Distributor	Saare Yachts UK. Tel: 02380 458272

unlikely he got his sums wrong with the Saare.

Overall, the sailing experience is thoroughly agreeable: this is a boat that's stiff, fast, comfortable and extremely reassuring.

### Tough enough

A welcome feature of Finnish boats is that they're generally designed to withstand clouting rocks with their keels, and the Saare is no exception. Many of us know of boats that have needed expensive surgery after relatively minor groundings, or urgent pump-work following more robust encounters.

Substance doesn't come at the expense of style, however, because the finish below decks is what you would expect from the best of the Scandinavian yards. Features include a relatively deep bilge (with built-in wine storage), a beer fridge in the saloon table so the galley slave can use the other fridge for things the crew actually needs, low-level lighting to help you down the companionway at night, notably good access to the systems, and sole-boards that hinge up on gas struts. The only omissions obvious from a relatively brief sail are fiddles to break up the expanse of worktop in the galley.

### PBO's verdict

If you're looking for a boat in the Scandinavian style that's sportier than a Malo, cruiser than a Finn gulf and less expensive than a Najad or Hallberg-Rassy, a Saare might be the answer. This is a new name that demands to be taken seriously.