

From The Experts

Here's a reprint of an interview with George Szabo, Quantum Sails San Diego, that first appeared in a 2005 edition of the SCIRA USA Snipe Bulletin.

After a recent seminar in the Midwest, George Szabo, four-time US National Champion, agreed to answer a couple of questions for our newsletter.

We started by defining what he considers light air, medium air, and heavy air. He defined them as follows: light air 0-8 knots; medium air 8-15 knots; heavy air 15-22+ knots. Remember this as he tells you how to set rake or adjust your rig.

How are you setting your rig tension before each race?

What weather conditions make you adjust?

Proctor – rake 21' 6"; spreaders 16 3/8" x 29 3/4"; 18 tension on the Loos gauge. Above 12-15 knots, down half a hole on shrouds using same halyard mark. Over 20 knots, down a full hole.

Sidewinder 21' 6", 1 1/4" pre-bend; 18 tension on the Loos gauge. Spreaders 16 1/4" x 29 1/2". Same shroud tension through wind range. Get forestay tension by dropping traveler and sheeting hard on mainsheet.

When are you changing your rake, and how much are you adjusting?

I tried numerous halyard marks several years ago, and got the rig tune super complicated, but now I am using the same halyard mark through the whole wind range.

A lot of questions centered around the boom vang at your recent seminar. How would you summarize using the vang?

In 0-6 knots, just loose. In 6-10 knots, just snug when the main is trimmed properly (for upwind). This way, you are not pulling on it, but when you ease the main to duck or tack, there is some vang tension. At 10+ knots, pulling on vang to flatten the mainsail. As it gets windier, I use more and more vang, but I am careful to NOT hook the top batten toward the boom.

What is the "sweet-spot" for your jib leads? Distance apart?

I have the Persson track with ratchet blocks. I think that putting them at 28" apart bearing point to bearing point works well, until the wind is over 15 knots. At that point I will barber haul the sheet outboard 1" upwind. As it gets windier, I will barber haul another 2" outboard. Basically, when the boom is out and you are vang sheeting, we barber haul out the jib to match the angle of the foot of the jib to the angle of the foot of the mainsail.



George Szabo and Alan Capellin at the 2006 Western Hemisphere and Orient in Miami.

Give us a couple of techniques on sailing reaches.

Board all the way up. Leeward chine in the water to promote planing (once you are planing you can sail the boat flat). Before you are planing, skipper and crew are sitting forward in the upwind position. As a puff hits, go outboard - and as the wind increases, go aft. More aft as the wind increases - to the point where everyone is in the skipper straps as far aft as possible. When a lull comes, moving in and forward will keep the boat on a plane.

How are you setting up before a start? What determines the favored side of the course when you're out there?

Going upwind before the start I get high and low compass readings on each tack. Watch the puffs to see how they are coming down the course, and try to get a feel for how the wind shifts are reacting - basically, can I tack on the edge of a shift, or do I need to sail into it before I can tack? Is there a weather shore of a lake to sail toward? If so, go to the weather shore. Is the current stronger on one side than the other?

Finding the favored side on your lake could be because there is a weather shore where there are lifts coming off the shore, or an expected weather pattern coming through that will make the wind shift one way, but the puffs will come from the opposite side. Seeing where the wind will be stronger is a big determining factor.

Quantum's motto is "anticipate the shift". What are you doing on the course to do this? Any advice for new sailors?

When sailing upwind, there is a circle of things to check - like driving a car where you are supposed to look at the road, then check your speed... sailing is similar. As with driving, the primary focus to come back to is the telltales, giving quick glances in between at the main trim, jib trim, puffs, fleet positioning, etc. Keeping an eye out for puff lines coming down is key, and sailing for the dark spots (puffs) on the water is key. When you can connect a few dots by sailing from dot to dot, you're going to have a great beat. 🌊