

# Downwind without the hassle



**About the Author**  
Duncan Wells is an RYA  
Instructor and Principal of  
Westview Sailing.

Which is the best sail to get us going downwind with the minimum of fuss?

**Duncan Wells** looks at Spinnakers, Cruising Chutes and the new boys on the block – the Parasailor and the Parasail – to see what they deliver and how they handle.



**1** Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a sail that you could set for a downwind run, that drove the boat fast without constant trimming, that kept rolling to a minimum, that could handle gusts and that wouldn't collapse if the wind dropped a fraction? It would be the shorthanded and singlehanded sailor's dream. Well there is such a sail, apparently. It's called the Parasailor **Pic 1** – it has a younger brother called the Parasail **Pic 2** and I will explain the difference between these two, shortly.

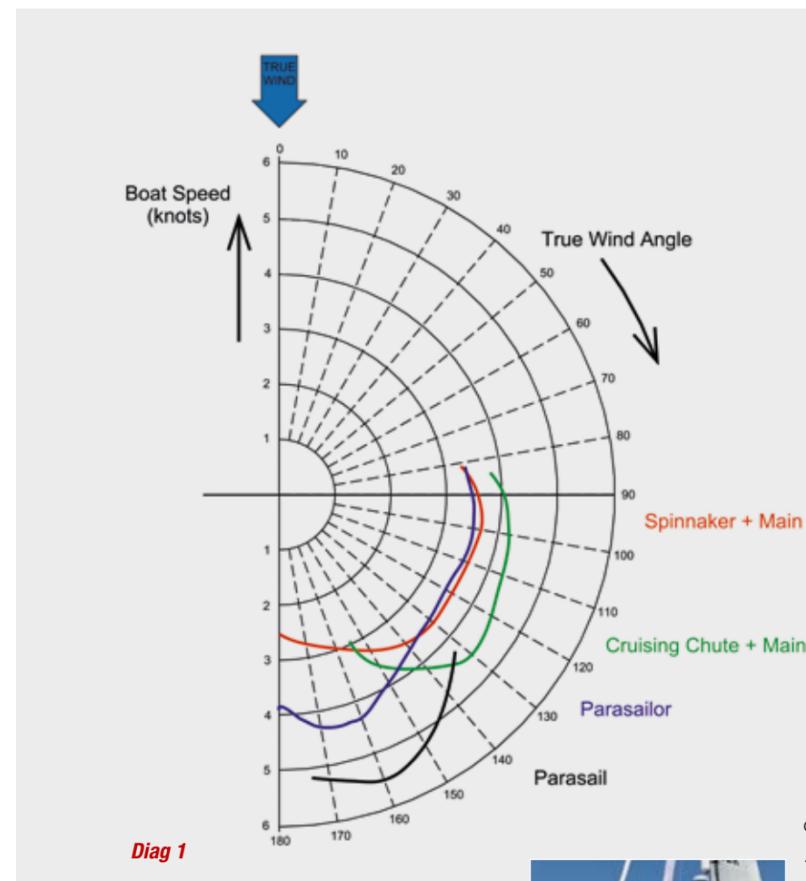
I have no problem singlehanded a cruising chute with or without a mainsail, but I do find it difficult to set a spinnaker, gybe it, hand it and so forth when I am

on my own. I seem to be almost out of control for most of the time.

As I have demonstrated before (*ST149 Downwind without the drama*) with a cruising chute on its own I am able to sail dead downwind and indeed up to 20° by the lee before the sail complains. So what could this new breed of sail offer?

I contacted Stuart Anderson at SeaTeach, the UK distributor, and he agreed to try the sails on *Dorothy Lee*. I

assembled an able crew whose experience encompassed racing, ocean passage making and Solent day sailing and we set off to compare our four sails – cruising chute, spinnaker, Parasailor and Parasail. We would put them all through the same exercise, measure the results and compile polar diagrams for each. At the same time, we would look at the suitability of each sail for singlehanded or shorthanded use.



Diag 1



**Our Polar Diagram** This plot needs a health warning, because on the day we ran our test we had very light airs. It does show that the Parasailor was matching the spinnaker and main combination, from wind abaft the beam, but that it really came into its own further downwind. The Parasail figures need to be taken with a pinch of salt, because we lost the wind during the test and I suspect that it would have continued its better performance onto a beam reach. Unsure what to make of this diagram? Clive Loughlin explains polar plots on page 102 of this issue.



## STANDARD CRUISING CHUTE

We started with the cruising chute **Pic 3** or 'A' sail (an Asymmetric Sail) as they are known in racing circles, to differentiate them from a spinnaker or 'S' sail (a Symmetric Sail). They are also called coloured sails, even if they happen occasionally to be white; White Sails are the jib, staysail, main and mizzen.

Our cruising chute, like many, has a handy snuffer. We set the main first then head downwind and raise the cruising chute in its sock **Pic 4**. Breaking it out is all done in the lee of the main **Pic 5**. This sail will work from 80° True Wind Angle (TWA) through to 155°; beyond that it begins to lose power, so it won't take



you dead downwind. Single/shorthanded this is a very easy set up to work with.

## SPINNAKER

Next up was the spinnaker **Pic 6**. Interestingly, it was outperformed by our cruising chute, until we got to a TWA »





Diagram 2



of 155° when the cruising chute ran out of puff. I think the spinnaker may be too small for the boat. As we set the sail I realised why I find it difficult on *Dorothy Lee* to handle a spinnaker and that's because I only have one set of cockpit winches.

We run the sheet from a block on the quarter up to the leeward winch, around this, in front of the helm and across to the windward winch where the trimmer can see the luff of the sail and trim so that it is permanently on the point of collapse **Pic 7**. This ties up two winches, so the guy has to

go on a jammer. Gybing then requires several people in the cockpit to handle the sheets and guys as they transfer from being working to lazy and vice versa. We really could do with two more winches in the cockpit. For single/shorthanded this is the hardest set up to work with.



Setting the Parasailor in light airs was a breeze. The sail is remarkably light and colour coding on the clews means you are less likely to get in a tangle when hoisting with the help of a snuffer.

of the snuffer was slightly flared and there were red and green clips to which you attach the red and green clews of the sail. If you make sure these are attached as soon as you have snuffed it then you will not get any twisting of the snuffer round the sail when you raise it next time. I quite often have to sort out a twist as the snuffer rises up my cruising chute when setting it and colour coding the clews is a good idea. The less that can go wrong the better.

The snuffer rode up the Parasailor without any hitches **Pic 9**. The Parasailor can be set with or without a main, although if you have a main set you will have to keep an eye on your wind angle to prevent any accidental gybe.

You will notice that the Parasailor has a slot in the top part of the sail and a wing above it **Diag 2**. With a conventional spinnaker, a gust hits the sail and a tremendous load is put on the boat and the fittings. With the Parasailor the slot allows air to pass through, which smooths and evens out the impact of any gusts **Pic 10**. The pressure filled wing performs a number of functions: it helps to prevent the sail from collapsing if the wind dies and it provides lift, which keeps the leech open and lifts the bow. This will set the boat down on its haunches, which is good for countering rolling and which helps the rudder to bite. It is much more forgiving than a conventional cruising chute or spinnaker. You can set the Parasailor either directly ahead of the boat with two guys running to blocks or cleats on the foredeck to prevent the sail from rising up or you can set one of the clews as a tack. Stuart also brought along a handy device called

**PARASAILOR**

When we brought the Parasailor up **Pic 8** I could not get over how light and compact it was. Our cruising chute and

spinnaker are also very light, but then they are nowhere near as big as the Parasailor. We hoisted the Parasailor in its snuffer to the masthead. I noticed that the throat



**11**

The 'Tacker', shown here being used by our cruising chute, keeps the tack and luff in line with the bow.

a 'Tacker' **Pic 11**, which fits over the furled headsail and keeps the tack of any downwind sail tight in to the bow. To gybe the Parasailor when it is running ahead of the boat you simply ease the working sheet and harden up the lazy sheet. To gybe when you have a tack attached to the boat or when you are using a Tacker, you will need to snuff the sail, swing the snuffed sail around the forestay, change the tack to the other clew, change over the sheet (have the sheets set for either tack and then simply unclip one and clip on the other) gybe and then raise the snuffer. Single/shorthanded – without a main – this and the Parasail were the easiest of set ups to work with.



**13**

## PARASAIL

Finally we set the Parasail **Pic 12**. This differs from the Parasailor in that the wing is not inflated. The wing creates lift, but if the wind drops the sail will collapse faster than the Parasailor. I got the impression that the Parasail is more of a coastal or inshore sail, which needs a little more attention, whereas the Parasailor is definitely a blue water sail. We didn't have a chance to get a very good idea of the power of this sail, because the wind died during the test and the data used for the polar diagram is a bit suspect. We were, however, quite taken by its neat Barber Hauler **Pic 13**, which used a round thimble instead of a block. You just thread the sheet through the thimble and make off on a winch or in our case around the midships cleat and onto a cleat in the cockpit. With



**12**

Inset: The Barber hauler.  
Main pic: The Parasail.

this, we were able to bring the clew down to the level of the tack in order to balance the sail nicely.

One comment the crew made afterwards was that they might have liked to have some control over the wing on the Parasailor/Parasail to be able to steer it or to give it more or less lift, although this

might over complicate things and it is the simplicity of the 'no fuss, mile eating', downwind ability of these sails that blue water sailors such as Mike Harker and Jimmy Cornell like. When I head off for the blue yonder I will definitely get one.

Thanks to Clive Loughlin for his help in preparing the polar diagrams.

## PRICE COMPARISON

The costs are for my HR 352 – 35ft boat with P = 11.80m, J = 4.05m, FL = 13.90m, I = 12.90m

Spinnaker 0.75oz Tri-Radial/Full Radial	Parasail incl. snuffer and the launch bag
<b>Kemp Sails £1,412.40 North Sails £1,496.48</b>	<b>SeaTeach approx £3,116.10</b>
Cruising Chute 0.75oz Tri-Radial/Full Radial	
<b>Kemp Sails £1,109.93 North Sails £1,169.13</b>	
Snuffer for either Spinnaker or Cruising Chute	
<b>Kemp Sails £266.12 North Sails £299.63</b>	
Parasailor incl. snuffer and the launch bag	
<b>SeaTeach approx £3,688.33</b>	

All prices shown include VAT.

## CONTACTS

**Kemp sails** – [www.kempsails.com](http://www.kempsails.com)  
**North sails** – [www.northsails.com](http://www.northsails.com)  
**SeaTeach** – [www.seateach.com](http://www.seateach.com)