POLE LAUNCHERS ARE HERE!

Carrying the pole on the boom is easy. Here's how...

by Pete Fenner

Well over half the competitors at the 1987 Snipe Worlds in La Rochelle, France, sported pole launchers. While the types and schemes varied in detail, all had the same basic idea in common.

Everyone I saw, except Birger Haavard of Norway, used the "lazy launch line" jib attachment. For me this was the idea which makes carrying the pole on the boom worthwhile.

A line is tied to the jib clew (where the sheets attach) and runs up into the first end of the pole. This same line runs all the way through the pole, exits out of the rear end, and then runs forward, along the boom, to a pulley on the mast, near the gooseneck.

To launch the pole, you pull this line. The jib clew is then pulled to the end of the pole and then the pole is "pulled out" until the clew end is near the mast. The pole is up, like magic! No more hassles with the crew trying to snap the pole end on the clew.

Taking the pole down is even easier. Just release the line and let go. The shock cord holding the back of the pole pulls it back to the boom. Be careful that the pole doesn't get tangled in the vang or hit you. Pulling the main in a little before retracting will help.

To give you the pole a good launch about two-thirds before swinging the boom over. The pole will automatically swing back. Then you pull on the line and the pole goes back out.

This magic is all accomplished by the shock cord that holds the pole onto the boom. Designs vary a bit, but the basic idea is a 3 1/4" shock cord attached to the aft end of the pole. This cord passes through a pulley on the aft end of the boom. It holds the pole to the boom and is tensioned when the pole moves forward during launching. When you release the launch line, the shock cord tension automatically retracts the pole. The shock cord must be at least 12" length of the boom, if out longer.

Tomlin Cruel, 1987 World Champion, uses two boom lengths by mounting a pulley inside the boom near the mast. The shock cord, tied to the aft end of the pole, passes through the boom, forward to the pulley and then back in the aft end of the boom, where it is tied off.

Some systems at the Worlds used only one boom length of cord, while one had five, along with the necessary multiple pulleys! Two or three lengths seem adequate to me.

When retracted, the pole is held in place by a guide ring mounted on the forward end of the boom, near the gooseneck, and a length of lighter (1/4") shock cord. This ring serves as a guide when the pole is launched or retracted. On the simplest rigs, the single 5/16" shock cord holds both the aft end of the pole and the gooseneck. Tomlin's two-part system uses a separate shock cord for the gooseneck. His ring is a short (about 2") plastic tube. His guide ring shock cord is about 1/8" and runs through the sail's tack grammar aft to the endmold shackles. This method seems to work quite well.

Pole sizes ranged between Tomlin's 7/8" OD tube of 102" (256cm) in length up to 1 1/2" OD poles of 105" (272cm) length. All poles were aluminum.

The new SCIRA rule, adopted at La Rochelle, limits pole length to 104" (264cm). I asked Tomlin if 7/8" OD wasn't a little tight. He smiled and said, "sometimes, I believe 1" or 1 1/4" OD tubing is less likely to bend in the heavy going. It should be noted that the heavier poles have a tendency to pull the launch of the main lighter in high air.

All poles had a plastic gooseneck in the forward (jib) end to keep the launch line from chafing on the edge of the tube. The
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