



Optimist Racing Guide

Boat Preparation

Check to make sure the mast hole, centreboard, and rudder are in a straight line.

Wash your hull with soap to clean it, getting rid of the dirt that accumulates on road or water.

Be sure not to leave your foils sitting in the sun all day – this could warp them.

Check that your mast doesn't move too much laterally and adjust it if needed.

Always check your airbags to make sure they are ok. This is very important for safety. Plus, if you are unfortunate and capsize, a full airbag will let less water into your boat!!! (So you will have less water to get out!)

Make sure your ropes are a good length! You don't need 2 meters of extra sheet in the boat. It will cause other problems.

Be sure to read through the rules about attachments to the centreboard. Choose a rope that is just long enough to pull the entire centreboard out of the water, but so the centreboard is still in the case. This will allow you to check the centreboard quickly and then put it right back without causing too much disruption.

Make sure that you have two bailers in the boat.

Adjust your hiking straps so they are not too loose. A good position is when the "bank" is around 5cm behind the knee.

Mast Rake

We recommend using a rake between 275cm and 285cm. The rake depends on your weight and the sail design used. Generally, a heavy sailor will have more rake (close to 284cm) than a light sailor (close to 278cm). But 80% of the time, 282cm is a good average for most sailors. Start with 282cm and adjust it as you see fit.

Sail Shape

The Ullman Sails mainsail has been designed for top performance in standard conditions – typically 12 knots of breeze and moderate seas. As you will see below, there are different ways to adjust the sail shape as the conditions change to keep you going fast.

Sail Ties

On the Mast

The sail ties along the mast allow you to adjust the luff curve of the sail if you choose. The rules allow you to space the sail a maximum of 1 cm from the mast. If you keep all of your sail ties the same length between the mast and the sail, you will keep the sail shape designed by your sailmaker. (The shape won't change whether you have 1 mm or 7 mm between the sail and the mast – as long as each sail tie is the same). We recommend setting your sail ties at 3 mm in order to allow the sail to move freely.

For most conditions, we recommend releasing the top and bottom sail ties. However, secure the top and bottom sail ties in choppy conditions to help the sail power up.

On the Boom

The sail ties at either end of the boom are the most important. We recommend securing these two ties at a maximum of 8-9 mm. The other ties should all be an equal distance from the boom. This distance allows the sail to move easily from side to side.

Sprit

The sprit is the sail control that is adjusted the most during racing. Generally try to adjust the sprit so there are no creases in the sail. If you have too much tension on the sprit, there will be creases from the peak of the sail to the bottom of the mast. If you do not have enough tension, there will be creases from the top of the mast to the end of the boom.

It is important to remember that in some cases, it is faster to sail with creases in the sail. Why? Because the sprit has a major affect on leech closure. In windy conditions, you can have creases from the clew to the top of the mast to help depower the sail. When you're having trouble keeping the boat flat by hiking in wave conditions, adjust the sprit so there are creases in the middle of the sail. This will help depower the sails through the waves by keeping the top of the leech open. Plus, it will keep the boat flatter, so you don't have to adjust the rudder as much.

Boom Vang

The boom vang controls the leech of the sail when sailing downwind and reaching. More tension will stabilize the sail, while releasing it will destabilize. Always remember never to let it off completely.

Mainsheet

Not only does the mainsheet determine how far out you want the sail to be, but it also has a major influence on the leech when sailing upwind. This means that every time you trim in and out, you are not only adjusting the position of the sail, but the shape of the leech as well. (1 cm of mainsheet trim is more than a 5 cm adjustment to the leech!)

Boom Preventer

The boom preventer is very important – when you use it, you are cancelling the pressure on the sail along the mast caused by the boom vang. In light conditions, adjust it so it is almost in. In nearly all other conditions except lots of wind or very flat water, adjust it nearly in.

Outhaul

Foot tension is easy to trim on the water and affects the shape of the sail. Plus, it adjusts the bottom of the leech. When you have creases from the mast to the end of the boom, it means that you need a flatter sail. You will want to open the bottom of the leech, so tension the outhaul. When the sail cloth looks like it has big waves between each eyelet, release foot tension to make your sail deeper and powered up. Less foot tension is typically only good downwind.

Sail Care

Always wash your sail with fresh water after sailing. When you roll the sail, roll top to bottom parallel to the battens. And when you are on water and not sailing, don't let your sails luff (flap).