



Sail Care and Repair

The majority of yachts have sails made from Polyester (Dacron). Although this fabric was invented over 50 years ago it is still the most durable sailcloth available for most cruising yachts. Some of the larger yachts opt for a cruising laminate which provides less stretch than the woven alternatives but at the expense of some durability. Racing yachts almost exclusively use scrim laminates using yarns of Pentex, Kevlar or Carbon fibre. These fabrics are not encased in layers of taffeta like the cruising laminates which makes them much lighter but also far more fragile.

Although sailcloths are all different, they all have the same enemies and defending against them will increase the life of your sails and their performance. Remember, prevention is cheaper than correction.

Sunlight

It may be hard to believe, but the UV in this country can destroy a sail in less than two seasons. It doesn't matter whether the cloth is woven or laminated, the UV is no respecter of the yarns found in Sailcloth. Some sailmakers use specially treated sailcloth which is better than standard fabric, but the problem is you cannot tell when the cloth is starting to degrade until it tears and by then it is too late; a replacement sail has to be bought. Fitting a sunstrip to your genoa may not be cosmetically pleasing, but at least you can see when it starts to degrade so you can replace it before the underlying sailcloth is affected. The alternative to a sunstrip is a genoa sock. These are raised over the rolled up genoa whenever the sail is not being used. They provide better protection than a sunstrip but they are inconvenient to fit especially when it is cold and pouring with rain and you want to get back to that hot bath.

Chafe

The main causes of sail chafe are the spreaders. They will puncture the genoa if the sail is over sheeted and when sailing downwind they will defile the mainsail with their relentless caress. Fully battened mainsails are the most susceptible to the attentions of the spreaders as the battens hold the sail hostage against the rigging. Always keep some sticky backed Dacron on board so you can position this on the sails wherever there is chafe, and then when convenient, take the sails to those awfully nice people at Sanders Sails who will fit some more permanent protection.

Mildew

It is obviously impossible to ensure that your sails are always dry when rolled and folded at the end of each sail. This is totally impractical; therefore I will not incur your wrath by suggesting that this is done. However, when stowed it is important that the sail can breathe to enable any retained water to evaporate. To assist in this; an uncoated fabric should be used for the sail cover. If the sails cannot breathe the retained water creates a wonderful damp playground for Mildew. Dacron/Polyester is a woven fabric which allows evaporation due to the tiny gaps in the weave; however the layer of 'film' in a laminate sailcloth prevents the water evaporating making it essential that the sails are regularly "aired".

When winter comes don't forget about those "trusty triangles" that have propelled you around the seas all season. Give them a holiday at the 'Sanders Spa'. We will wash them, dry them and check them over before storing them in our heated Sail loft for the winter. They will not be alone we have over 2000 similar sails already vacationing here.

Whilst in our loft there are many treatments on the menu to tempt them; we can recommend the following:

Mainsail

- a) Conversion to Fully Battened
- b) Fitting better quality batten cars
- c) Fitting strategically placed chafe patches
- d) Fitting an extra reef
- e) Adding sail numbers

Genoa

- a) Replacing that worn out sunstrip
- b) Webbing replacements in tack & clew
- c) Fitting a foam luff padding

Downwind Sails

- a) Fitting a snuffer
- b) Buying a Tacker for your cruising chute
- c) Upgrading your furling system



If you would like any more information regarding the caring and protection of your sails please contact Sanders on 01590 673981 or send an email to peter@sanders-sails.co.uk.

