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BRIDLE FOR USE WITH A POLE

If we are sailing a deep reach in windy conditions, say 130 degrees or deeper, we will be wing and wing with mainsail and jib if coastal sailing or flying two jibs if passage making. In either case we will have a jib winged out to windward on the pole.

We have developed a bridle system to make using the pole extremely simple and safe. The bridle is a simple piece of low stretch line with three snap hooks. We use a piece of 1/4" spectra, but a slightly bigger 3/8" piece of Dacron would work perfectly. The snap hooks are on both ends and one about in the middle. We use Wichard 4" stainless snap hooks.



To set up the pole you clip a topping lift (or a spare jib or spinnaker halyard) to the top outer end of the pole and lift it about a foot off the deck. Then run a spare sheet from an aft winch thru the pole jaw and then to the jib clew. So the jib now has its regular two sheets and this new third one attached. Finally attach the bridle. One of the bridle ends snaps to the toerail or a shackle near the bow. The middle snap hook snaps to the bottom of the outer end of the pole, and the final snap hook snaps to the toerail or a shackle about amidships or a bit further aft. The bridle lines need to be set-up so they run cleanly inboard of the sheet.

Once all these lines are tied and snapped you attach the inner end of the pole to whatever mast socket you have and haul the topping lift tight. The pole will now be sitting rigidly fixed, with the outboard end held in place by the two bridle lines and the topping lift. At your leisure you can pull on the third sheet and bring the jib clew out to the pole end.

The only trick is to get the two bridle legs exactly the right length. You will need to experiment a bit to get this right. Start out with the bridle legs knotted to the snap hooks and quite a bit too long. Then take the boat out on a relatively light air day – wind that just fills the jib but does not put too much tension on the sheet is perfect. Then you can adjust the bridle lengths to perfection. What you want is both the leach and the foot to be pulled relatively tight exactly when the clew is pulled out to just touch the pole end. Usually this will place the pole end quite a bit lower than where it would end up just clipped onto the sheet with no downward pull from a bridle.

There are three big advantages of this system versus the various other ways to set a pole. First the pole is fixed and set independent of the jib. This means that if you need to jibe away from a hazard or potential collision you can just jibe away without worrying about or doing anything to the pole. You can also set the pole at your leisure, well before you need it, and sheet the jib out to the end whenever you are ready. Second, since everything is fixed and tight it creates the least possible amount of motion between the sail, sheet and pole. This minimized chafe, and in light rolling conditions minimizes sail flopping. Third, it does not require any adjustment so you can set-it accurately when tired or with inexperienced crew.

You would not use this pole set-up for flying a spinnaker because there you need to adjust the pole to the wind angle – forward for a beam wind and aft for a stern wind. So, with a spinnaker you need an adjustable tackle forward to the bow and an adjustable guy aft to a winch. But with a jib, the luff is fixed to the forestay so you can not rotate the sail around the bow so you don't need all the adjustments required for a spinnaker. That makes this simple bridle arrangement much more sensible than the full spinnaker set-up for poling out a jib.