

Blasting in the footstraps in beautiful Langebaan



KIT SETUP AND TUNING FUNDAMENTALS

PART 2: FOOTSTRAPS

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BACK IN THE DAY I WORKED AS AN INSTRUCTOR AT MOON BEACH IN EGYPT – A MAGICAL YET BLEAK PLACE WITH STRONGER AND MORE CONSISTENT WINDS THAN I HAVE EVER FOUND SINCE. The magazine of the day, *Boards*, used Moon Beach as a test centre and it was at this point that, as a fascinated and inquisitive observer of the testing, I really started to get a feel for kit setup. The testers – typically using new kit they had not used before - would pay more attention to their rigging and tuning than the regulars who sailed at the spot. Not only that, they tended to do a few runs before returning to the beach to tweak the settings a little until they found something that felt just right. This was a level of connection to the kit that I had not really noticed before and, speaking to the testers, I could tell that it paid back in terms of a better session afloat.



In the last article we looked at the importance of setting up our kit correctly to include sail/mast/extension, boom length, mastfoot position, boom height, outhaul and harness lines. I continue now with the all-important subject of footstrap setup and, with the exception of a few comparative references to other kit, I will be keeping it true to freeride basics. I hope to communicate some useful ideas and to encourage you look at your footstrap setup to see if there's anything you can do to tweak it for the better and, perhaps, to try some new things.

The importance of footstraps

Getting into footstraps at planing speed is the gateway to becoming a true windsurfer. As the direct connection for the only part of our body actually touching the board – our trusty feet – footstraps could not be more important. They provide a level of traction and grip that would not be possible by just using friction to stand on the board.

They have an adjustable nylon webbing/Velcro construction with integrated covers made from a range of materials to include neoprene, fabric made from recycled PET bottles, minimalistic lightweight racing materials and the latest neoprene-free Yulex. Yulex is new to Starboard for 2019 and this is the first time footstraps covers have been made from a material based upon natural rubber. One exception to the Velcro type of strap is the dual windsurf/kitesurf DaKine X-Lace Wave footstrap which has an external lacing system which is pulled until the right fit is achieved.





Replace long before the footstrap degrades into more layers than a Viennetta!

Struggling to get into the straps because they are wonky, have been trodden flat, are neither positioned nor sized correctly, slip open, are split apart or are generally turning to dust will make controlling a planing board harder which will cause frustration, slow progression, waste time and make any session less fun.

Footstrap size

Imagine wearing shoes that are too big or too small. Walking around would be weird and running would be rubbish. Like a dancing shoe on foot that can't stay still, footstraps need to

be just right - even when you are using rental equipment that perhaps lures you into a quick grab and dash for the water.

The size for freeride should be adjusted to be neither too small nor too large. If you have big feet, for example, and you get on a friend-with-small-feet's board then you will experience the mild panic that comes with trying to tiptoe into footstraps that are too small for you...no one wants to carry a polo stick with them to smack their foot into the straps on the go. Too large and - imagine if you slipped and your whole leg went though up to your knee - erm, no.

The perfect sizing should be one that is comfortable yet not tight and so you can see all of your toes through the strap. If you fall off then your feet should easily come out but you do not want your feet to slip out as you are blasting along. I like my straps to be a little loose whereas a freestyler who needs a guaranteed emergency exit for an aerial bailout will have them much looser and twist their feet to get a good connection to the board when they need to.

Think about the season: most of us wear boots all winter for cold UK conditions and then, when we go back to bare feet in the summer, we have to make the straps a little smaller or they would be way too loose now that the boots are off. Then when it gets cold again and the boots go back on we need to open the straps up a little or we run the risk of getting our feet stuck in them. If you are working on your carve gybes there is nothing that will ruin the latter part of the carve more than having your old front foot jammed so hard into the strap that you are unable to release it smoothly when the critical time comes. So if your carves are smooth only up to the



The stages of connecting all the parts of the footstraps



point that the old front foot has to twist out of the strap to come across the board then loosen them up a bit and see what happens!

If you're lucky your footstraps will have strap-size indicators printed on the inside. If so, then once you have set one footstrap up perfectly (ideally with a fin-less board flat on a mat on the ground to avoid damaging the board/fin) then remember which number you lined up when connecting the first parts of the Velcro. Then repeat that on the other straps and there will be no need to use your foot again to measure them. After setting the size of all of them, quickly pop your foot in each one as a final check to make sure they are ok before you head out.

Footstrap position

A taller person will need a wider spread between the front and back footstraps to provide a stable base for their height whereas a smaller person requires a narrower spread. Measurements are typically taken from the rear screw on the front strap to the front screw on the rear strap (on the same side of the board of course). The measurement will be taken using the centre of the screw heads and, for general freeride kit, is likely to be between 38cm for a smaller person and 44cm for a taller person. I am 5'8" (173cm) and use a measurement of 40.5cm, with 0.5cm to 1.0cm less on smaller freewave boards.



Measure the spread between the back screw of the front strap and the front screw of the back strap on the same side



The range should be 38-44cm. For me it's 40.5cm on a freemove board

**Can't see all the toes?
Too tight**



**All of the toes through and comfortable yet not too tight?
Just right!**



**Lots of foot protruding?
Too slack**



Big gap above foot? Not as efficient for lifting toes to dig heels in to flatten board when overpowered



Heel too far inboard to control lift from fin? Too slack



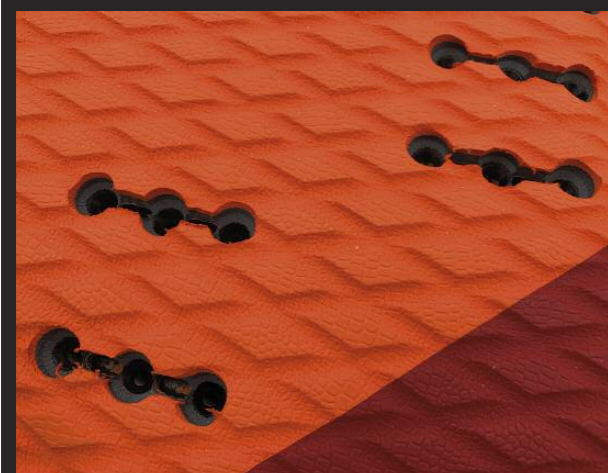
Small or no gap above foot? Good for lifting toes to dig heels in to flatten board when overpowered



A freewave board of approximately 100 litres is designed to have either:

- four straps outboard (for powered-up blasting) or
- two straps inboard on the front with a single back strap (for waves or easy carving)

The strap-free photos below allow you to see the positioning options clearly



Most boards will have 3-5 holes per insert. It is not necessarily the case that you will use, say, the front hole of the set for the front of the strap and the front hole of the set for the rear of the same strap. The width of your foot (in or out of a boot) and the spread should dictate which holes you use. Trial and error can be a good thing here until you find something that feels right for you.

Inboard or outboard?

The front and back straps can be positioned further in towards the centreline or further out towards the rail of the board. Generally speaking it's better to have the straps more inboard when learning to use them (whilst going at gentler planing speeds) and more outboard when you're ready to go faster. Inboard straps are easier to get into yet make flattening a well-powered board much harder. Outboard straps are harder to get into yet are better at keeping a board flat at speed as weight is positioned on the rail for maximum leverage against the lift from the fin.

On the other hand you might consider inboard straps for easier control of the board when carving. Using a short, wide, carve-oriented freemove board or a smaller, lively freewave board with inboard front straps makes it way easier to carve smoothly into a gybe than a board that has footstraps pinned to the rail. Yet, as already mentioned, having the straps inboard for easy carving means less control when full-power blasting at speed. So there's a compromise to be struck here depending on what your priorities are. You can always slide your heel out of an inboard strap towards the rail a little if you need more leverage at speed to keep your board flat. If the straps are outboard, however, you probably won't be able to slide your foot further in for smoother carving.

Sometimes people learning to get into the back strap might have outboard straps on the front (to keep the board flat in stronger winds) and inboard straps – or a single centre strap – on the back (to make getting in easier). This can work for those who need the experience of using the back strap to be as easy as possible yet caution is needed. When the front foot is on the edge of the board yet the back foot is inboard on or towards the centreline, this will direct the rear shoulder inboard resulting in the back arm sheeting out which can cause a loss of power. Once confidence has been gained (assuming that the best place for the front strap is still outboard) then the rear strap should be moved to the outboard position as well. This will enable the body to face the sail, allowing the back arm to pull the sail in properly.

A very wide slalom board will have only one option of a very outboard setting. This is to allow all the body weight to be positioned right out on the rail to lever the board flat against the maximum lift created by a longer-than-normal fin powered by a larger-than-normal sail. Getting into the footstraps and carving this type of board, however, is not easy.

On some very wide, high-volume beginner boards that double-up as entry-level intermediate boards you might see a



A 91cm wide iSonic 147 slalom board with very outboard footstraps

rather confusing array of sets of screw holes in odd places. Some of these can be really far forward next to the mast and/or on the centreline. I have even seen them in front of the mast! These 'placebo positions' are not entirely helpful as they encourage the feet to be in the wrong place and cannot possibly control any lift from the fin. They do not help the board to be sailed well and users of them might feel that they have 'nailed the footstraps' when actually they haven't really started. Avoid using those positions unless you simply like the look of footstraps on your feet when you glance down – and in that case you could always glue some straps to your feet to give the appearance of being in them wherever you stand – including walking back up the beach or hanging out later in the bar...

If you're not sure how the inboard versus outboard thing feels then I really encourage you to mix it up a bit and to give some different settings a go – both in straight line and carving mode.

Three straps or four?

For freeride boards above 100-110 litres with a wider tail (especially modern shorter/wider freemove boards) you should be using two rear straps to control the lift from the fin as you flatten the board. As you step down to a freewave board around 100-110 litres then you have a choice of either single or double rear straps. Much less than that and it will be just a single back strap as the tails get narrower. A wave-oriented board with a narrower tail will have a loose





Blasting with control is only possible through the use of footstraps – often locking the heels down by lifting the toes to flatten the board

single back strap to enable the board to be carved either way using full toe or heel pressure with the foot remaining in the strap. You don't want to be taking your back foot out to carve a turn on a wave! Whatever your choice of back strap you will always need two front straps of course!

Footstrap screws

A windsurf-specific stainless screw is needed with a very deep thread - so raiding your neighbour's shed for a random screw is unlikely to achieve much. To move the position of the footstraps (or to put them onto a new board) then you must have the right screwdriver. Avoid using a power drill/driver at all costs. Whilst some busy rental-centre-ninjas know the exact torque of a footstrap screw and use such power tools with finesse, the risk of over-tightening and ripping a hole in your board far outweighs the time or energy saved compared to using a manual screwdriver. Stubby screwdrivers can blister your hands as they make it hard to tighten the screw properly so you need a long one for plenty of torque.

Incorrectly sized or tipped screwdrivers can shred the head of the screw causing 12 levels of pain later when the head is too damaged to enable the screw to be removed. The vast majority of footstrap screws require a size three Philips screwdriver. That's a large, plain crosshead, not a Pozidriv one (with four extra points on the tip) and not the smaller size two version more common in toolkits and DIY stores.



Special long, course-threaded screws and spiky inserts are needed to keep the strap secure and to prevent twist



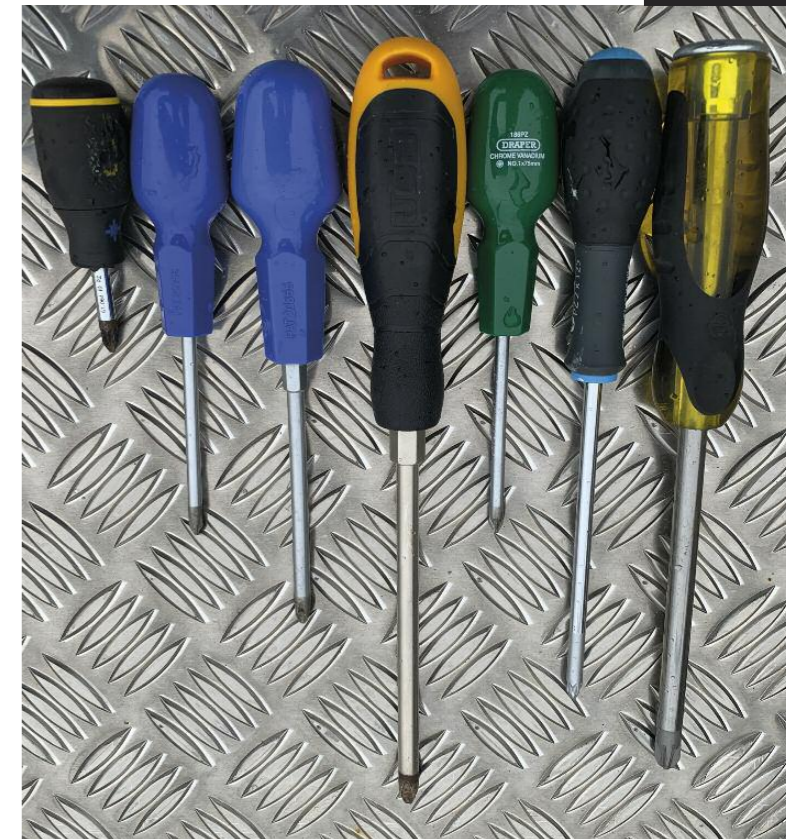
I see screws being damaged all over the place by badly-fitting screwdrivers. A damaged screw with sharp burrs can also cut through the neoprene flap which is supposed to be covering the screw to provide comfort as you step on it.

Footstrap washers

Unless you have the less common footstrap with a double screw at either end (sometimes used on a wave board for the back strap), footstraps come with a single screw either end with some sort of anti-twist washer which locates in one of the other holes and grips the bottom of the footstrap as the screws are tightened. If you have problems with your footstraps twisting into unusable shapes then incorporating a set of these should help to keep them from twisting around. A stainless washer is also required on the top between the screw and the strap. This stops the screw head cutting through the webbing material of the strap and some also have 'teeth' on the bottom to provide further anti-twist assistance.

When you get your kit out next time why not unscrew your straps and check that they are in good condition and that the screws and washers are all present and correct? A trip down to your local windsurfing shop to get some friendly advice will enable you to replenish any of the items that are missing or damaged. Carrying a couple of spare screws and washers is a good idea in case you move a strap and something falls off into the sand. You might also be able to bail a fellow windsurfer out if they have hardware issues in a remote place.

A final tip is to consider storing and transporting your board using tennis balls or a piece of swimming noodle/woggle to hold the natural arch shape of the footstrap. This will stop them getting squashed flat over time and keep them perky so that your feet can slide in and out of them like a dream...



Seven similar screwdrivers but only the middle one is good for most footstraps

So there's plenty of info there to be getting on with. Remember to try some new things if you can to become a fluid and informed user of the footstraps.

Next time, to complete the kit setup, it's all about fins: how they work, fin boxes, sizes, types, materials, how many you need, care of them, etc. Subscribe today to avoid missing out!

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