

WINDSURFING PHOTOGRAPHY PART 1: THE SELFIE

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OUR WINDSURFING MEMORIES ARE ALL-IMPORTANT AND A GREAT PHOTO HELPS TO CEMENT THAT PERFECT SESSION IN OUR MIND – PROMOTING OUR SPORT TO OTHERS AND FUELLING THE STROKE FOR NEXT TIME. There's nothing better like a killer close-up shot of the action (and nothing worse than a wonky, pixelated phone photo from a beach 500m away). Friendly people with a decent camera aren't always going to be there however...so let's talk about getting that shot anyway. You're worth it.

Modern-day self-absorption

Mostly unheard of until 2012, the word 'selfie' became the 2013 Oxford Dictionaries word of the year. In 2014 The Chainsmokers track '#Selfie' (with 560 million views on YouTube to date) was a stroke of genius as a social commentary on the vanity of the Insta generation that continues apace. As windsurfers, however, we are more likely to want to see ourselves blasting over the blue or gouging out a turn than attempting to look sassy in the club pulling a duck face or fish gape. The kind of selfies we are looking for are awesome and, done right, can capture us cleanly in the zone – in our good place – and can represent perhaps a more intimate, deeper connection to the moment than traditional photography can.

Essential beginnings

I remember an article from the far-flung reaches of windsurfing history which explained how to secure a normal camera to your mast, fix a doorbell-style button to your boom and run a long air tube between the two. Then, whenever you fancied taking a photo of yourself, you pressed the button with a spare thumb to nudge a dash of compressed air up the mast which depressed the button on the camera! And so the windsurfing selfie was born.



The very first GoPro

The very first GoPro 'Reusable Wrist Camera' appeared in 2005 and used a roll of 35mm film. Things have progressed a lot since. With the fantastic Hero7 Black and the newly-released Hero8 Black, getting a great windsurfing photo has never been easier. Many other great action cams are available yet beware of the cheap stuff. There are plenty of tales of woe from buyers of the budget gear – including camera ruination by water and the loss of all the photos from a session. There are some packages out there including a 4K camera, waterproof housing and a large accessory kit for £30 with four free toasters. Hmmm. My humble advice would be to aim as high as you can. A Hero7 Black is currently £270 on Amazon and worth every penny.

Tommy G loves a good Flymount selfie!



The Flymount is a mechanical wonder and can be fixed almost anywhere!

The mounts

The right mount will help you to secure the action cam in the perfect position – and other riders might even make cameo appearances in some of your photos if they get close enough! There are a number of ways of attaching a camera to a mast, boom or body. Just forget the horribly basic original GoPro handlebar attachment that kind of falls to pieces when you loosen it. The market is flooded with mounts yet the ones I will be referencing (as they are used widely, are of very high quality, are easy to get hold of and function really well due to their excellent design and engineering) are: Flymount, K4 Harness Mount and F-Hot Mast Mount. Also available are short, floating hand grips such as the GoPro Handler. Perfect for lifestyle shots on windsurfing trips with mates these mounts are almost impossible to use easily or safely whilst windsurfing as they would have to be waved in front of your face whilst sailing hooked-in with only one hand!

Flymount

Cost £55 (materials: plastic composite, A4 stainless and brass)

Flymounts, created by windsurfers Joe and Chris Knapton and designed/manufactured in the UK, have been around since 2006. They are, small, neat, lightweight, strong, beautifully engineered and are perfectly suited for clamping your action cam up the mast or onto the boom. They have an incredibly strong grip without too many turns of the screw (no need to overtighten) so are very secure...they just do not fall off.

The perspective is awesome with either a birds eye view of the action (from the mast) or an intimate view of the rider, rig and surroundings (from the boom). You can totally forget about it being on your mast - unless you wish to look up at it to smile (or to hide a bald patch!) On the boom you will have to take care with where you place your hands during transitions. With boom to boom tacks you have to modify the position of your hands slightly and with a rig flip in a gybe you have to take care not to bang your old front hand into it as you slide it forward.

Flymounts only take shots on one tack as they sit on one side. Front-of-mast shots covering both tacks can be taken by adding standard extension links. They are easy to fit in seconds and can also be fastened to handlebars, SUP and kayak paddles, dinghy tillers, RIB A-frames...almost anything – and can carry a load of up to 80kg. Note that the extra weight of the Flymount (even though it is light) would cause a GoPro to sink, even if it had a floaty back door fitted.



K4 Harness Mount

Cost £100-120 (materials: nylon, carbon and A4 stainless)

These mounts first appeared in 2011 when Steve Thorp saw a pole attached to a harness that Ben Proffitt had cobbled together in South Africa and, in Steve's words, "I made a better one!" They are very light, robust, well-engineered and are manufactured in the UK. Images from these mounts have a real wow factor with their sweeping panoramic views - like having a drone flying at speed just behind your shoulders: 'the chase view'. The pics will be of the back or side of your head. The action is captured on both tacks and through transitions. Getting your mates in the shot is easy by sailing moderately close to them in a 'behind and upwind' position.

Longer and bulkier than other mounts yet still light and easy to transport, the carbon tubes are made as standard from one piece that can be stashed inside mast sections. K4 will make you a two-part carbon tube with a strong nylon joining piece if you prefer. Using a K4 Harness Mount originally required the user to mercilessly burn/drill holes into their waist harness in order to bolt the mounting socket into place. Now the back plate is a very popular option (in stealth black to be more inconspicuous in the photos) which simply clips in seconds – modification free – onto any waist harness using two adjustable webbing straps.

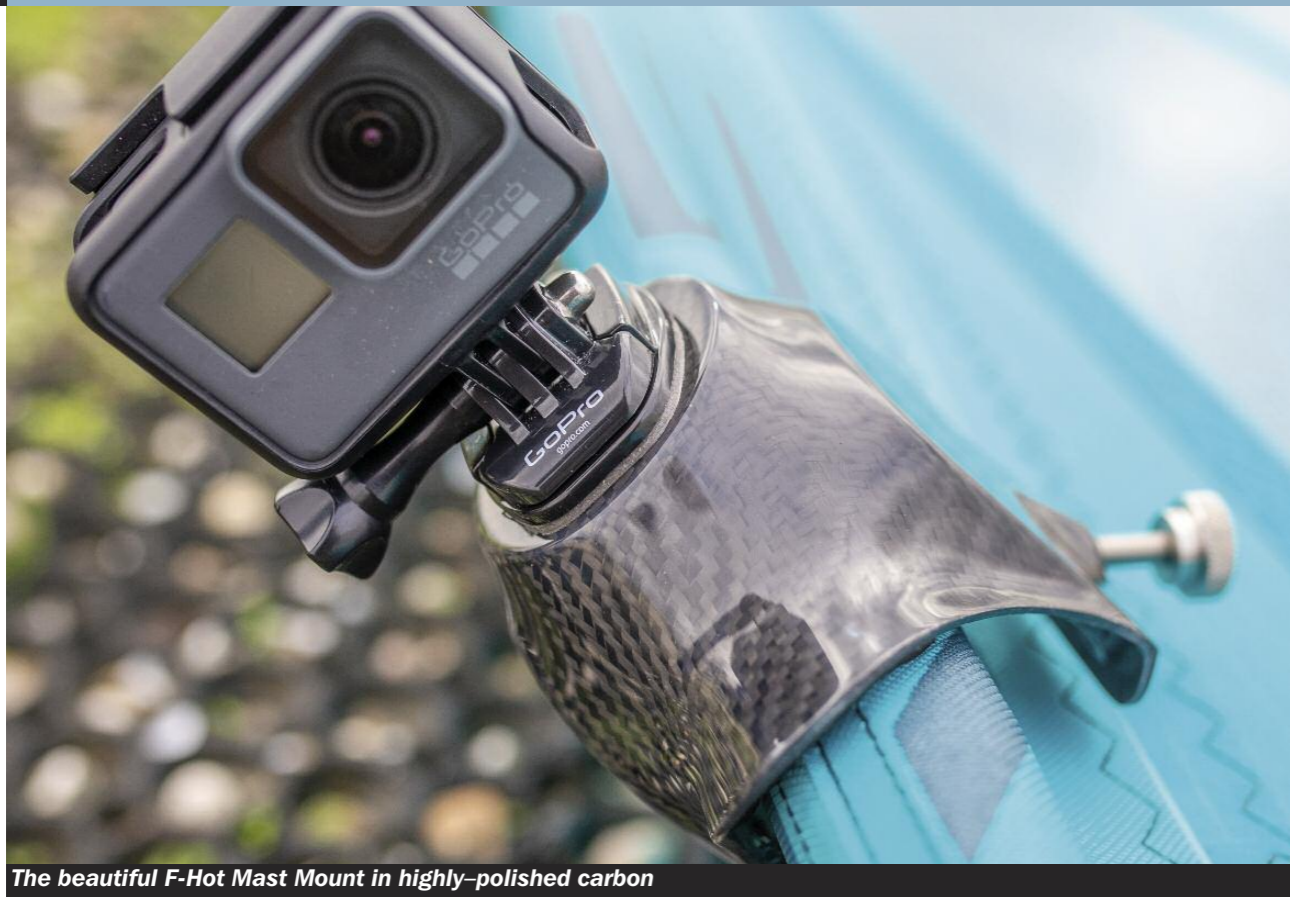
Warning – you just cannot keep a low profile when you are wearing it so get ready to be stared at and take it off for games of hide and seek! On flat and choppy water and on smooth waves you will forget it is there. In very rough conditions with the board slamming down often and when you are jumping high it might feel a bit 'in the way'. Uphauling is recommended as it can touch the sail in a beach/water-start. Also the camera is too far away to reach so you have to either remove your harness to press some buttons then put it back on... or leave it alone and use Voice Command.



There is nowhere to hide when wearing a K4 Harness Mount!



The innovative K4 Harness Mount: either drill and secure the mounting socket to your harness or use the back plate option



The beautiful F-Hot Mast Mount in highly-polished carbon

F-Hot Mast Mount

Cost £130 (materials: carbon, epoxy, A4 stainless and rubber)

Produced by those nice chaps in Essex in a unit manufacturing world-class carbon speed/slalom fins and bespoke mouldings, the re-designed version of these windsurf-specific mounts is a thing of incomparable beauty. The highly polished finish and workmanship is stunning and the design (5 separate moulds bonded together) makes it solid and impossible to flex.

The compact, lightweight mount is secured in seconds with two thumbscrews that have a rubber foot. This puts just enough pressure onto the luff tube to keep it in place yet allows it to rotate during transitions to take photos on both tacks. Like the Flymount, you can totally forget about it being on your mast - unless you wish to face upwards for a face shot.

Amazingly - due to a concealed epoxy foam-filled chamber - it floats with a GoPro attached, even one without a floaty back door fitted. It is windsurf-mast-specific so it cannot be fitted to booms or other stuff. As a nice touch, it comes in a soft cotton drawstring bag which is big enough to fit the mount with a GoPro attached.



The F-Hot Mount floats which prevents cameras from sinking



These photos were taken moments apart as the F-Hot Mast Mount rotates to take photos on both tacks



Standard GoPro Frame Mount (L) and Supersuit (R)



A bunch of essentials in a handy case

The essential accessories

To ensure that you have the best chance of achieving good photos, the following tools of the trade should be considered:

- Supersuit** - the fully water-tight, bomb-proof case for GoPro (designed for diving, now called the Protective Housing for the GoPro Hero8). GoPro Hero5-7 (as well as a few variants) are fully waterproof yet gentle dipping is very different from high-octane windsurfing. Requires the protective lens to be removed. **Cost:** £40 for GoPro and copies for sub £15.
- Moisture tabs** - pop one into the back of the Supersuit to absorb all moisture. Without these, even tiny amounts of moisture trapped in the case can cause the glass window to steam-up. This blurs the image and upsets the auto-focus. Other brands of moisture tabs do as good a job as the GoPro ones yet they do become floppy quicker so need replacing more often. Store in an airtight bag. **Cost:** £3-£15 for a packet.
- Rain-X** - buy from Halfords. A small amount of this clear liquid is put onto a soft cloth, smeared onto the outside of the Supersuit window or GoPro Protective Lens and very lightly/briefly buffed-off after a few seconds. This will prevent water from beading on the window for a time (washing up liquid and saliva are also rumoured to work!) A water-blob is bad news for photos and even worse when it dries out to leave salt deposits as all the photos will be blurred. Even though it needs re-applying a few times during a session, a 200ml bottle should last for ages. **Cost:** £7

- Spare thumb screws** (for fixing cameras to mounts). Forget the shorter 44mm ones as they will sit too close to Frame Mounts or Supersuits, making them difficult to tighten or loosen. Get the longer 54mm ones. Shorter ones are ok for connecting extension links. GoPro brand thumb screws come with every GoPro yet original spares are not available. Other brands come in sets or within accessory bundles. **Cost:** varies.
- Thumbscrew wrench tool** (and/or **size 2 Pozi screwdriver**). Essential for tightening/releasing GoPros to/from mounts. **Cost:** GoPro's 'The Tool' (which also has a bottle opener!) is £4.99. Other brands bundle them with spare thumbscrew sets.

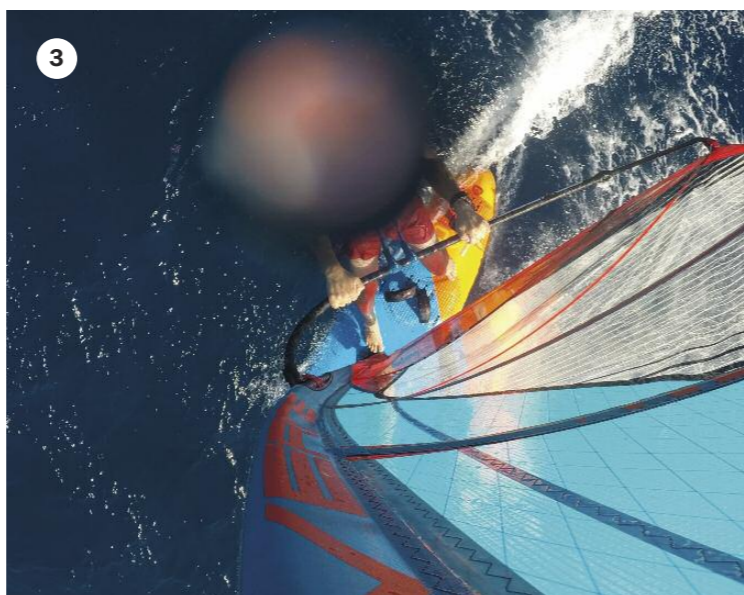


The longer thumbscrews are best (L) as the shorter ones (R) make tightening and releasing difficult



Three ways to tighten your GoPro to any mount (L - R) The Tool by GoPro, The GoBuddy extender or a size 2 Pozi screwdriver

6. **Mounting buckle** – to fit to K4 Harness Mount camera bracket and any flat or curved adhesive mounts including the one on the F-Hot Mount. **Cost:** free with every GoPro and cheaply in accessory bundles.
7. **Extension links** – for hanging a POV camera under the back of a boom or positioning a Flymount in front of the mast. **Cost:** free with every GoPro and sold cheaply in accessory bundles.
8. **Micro SD card.** You need spares especially if taking tonnes of photos on timer mode. I now use Sandisk Extreme as they are shock, temperature and water-proof (just in case!), reliable and fast enough for 4K video. **Cost:** £10.00 for 32GB.
9. **Storage box for memory cards.** The CardBOX by Neewer holds loads of different sized cards firmly yet gently and is rugged enough to be thrown around when closed. A really good product. **Cost:** £6.99.
10. **Batteries.** Running out of battery power sucks. The awesome GoPro Dual Battery Charger enables the charging of two batteries whilst the GoPro can remain in use. **Cost:** £39.00 including a spare battery or £16.00 for single GoPro batteries.
11. **Small towel** – to dry hands, GoPros or Supersuits before opening them to change battery or memory card.
12. **Floaty (also known as a 'floaty back door')**. Adds extra float to solid back doors (to prevent GoPros sinking) as well as impact resistance. Iconic in orange. **Cost:** £16.00 (or sub-£6 for copies) Other versions wrap around the camera.
13. **Safety Back Door for GoPro.** A brand new product made by Flymount, this is a replacement back door for GoPro 5-7 with large built-in leash attachment point. Fits perfectly in seconds onto a standard Frame Mount. Available from December 2019 with future versions for Supersuit and Protective Housing. **Cost:** £19.99.
14. **Safety leash.** Some people like the piece of mind of a bit of string to keep their investment safe if any part of the mount fails or comes away in a crash. Flymounts come with two metres of very good quality 3mm cord with a small noose-style fitting. The noose should be looped between the base of the camera and the thumb screw then drawn tight. When boom-mounting, securing cord to a boom is easy. From a mast mount you can run the cord tightly up the luff tube and tie it around the webbing of an adjustable head sail (no such option for the more common fixed head sail). Or you can run the cord tightly down the luff tube and tie it onto the boom. Avoid getting any flapping string in the camera's field of view! K4 Harness Mounts have a safety leash running neatly through the carbon pole.
15. **USB charging lead.** The newest GoPros and the Dual Battery Charger use USB-C leads. Put iPhone-style USB plug adapters in your kit too.
16. **2.5mm Allen Key** for K4 Harness Mount fittings.
17. **POV camera carrying case** to keep cameras, tools and spares safe and in one place. **Cost:** £9-£35
18. **Lens cleaning cloth** – the type used for sunglasses.
19. **Fleece sock (as a camera cover).** A good idea to prevent GoPros becoming scratched or knocked when not in use.



3 This genuine water blob tried hard to ruin the shot



13 The new Flymount Safety Back Door



19 Stuff your action cam into fleecy socks to prevent damage

Camera settings

Time lapse interval mode

The best GoPro setting for taking selfies is Time Lapse Interval Mode. You can choose for it to take continuous photos every 0.5, 1, 2, 5, 10, 30 or 60 seconds. Setting it for a 60-second interval has the benefit of not filling up your card and not leaving you with loads of photos to sort out later. In a dynamic sport like windsurfing, however, you are unlikely to catch any/many shots of jumps, gybes or perfect blasting when your camera is only clicking 60 times per hour. If you want to catch everything then set it for a 0.5 second interval yet be prepared to trawl through zillions of images just to find the good ones. Five second intervals are pretty good for general planing shots. To capture as much as possible in the frame set field-of-view to WIDE. Set Protune to OFF to allow the GoPro to automatically adjust colour, ISO limit, exposure and other fine settings.

Film mode

Decent screen grabs can be easily lifted from film footage yet this will reduce resolution. Set aspect ratio to 4:3 for POV/selfie shots. Set the resolution and frames per second to as high as you can and as high as your device can display. Hypersmooth Stabilization will only be available at some resolutions (like 1440) and not at others (like 4K). Set Low light to AUTO.

Remote control and voice command

The GoPro Smart Remote is like a large key fob and works with Hero5-8 Cameras yet is not really suitable for windsurfing as you would have to either be fiddling with it on the go or getting someone else to press it (as it has a range of 600 ft/180

metres). The awesome Voice Command control is available on most GoPros from Hero5 Black and Session onwards and is well worth using. Simply toggle Voice Command to ON and then say things like, "GoPro Time Lapse Mode" (to switch to this mode) and "GoPro Start Time Lapse" (to start taking continuous photos) and "GoPro Stop Time Lapse" (to stop taking continuous photos). Your commands will be heard from way up the mast or at the end of a K4 Harness Mount pole even with the GoPro in a Supersuit! At full speed with wind noise you might struggle to be heard so slow down, tell the GoPro what you want it to do, check that the red light is flashing then set off again and fire out all your killer moves.

Camera position

Achieving the best camera position and angle is really important. Action cameras are close proximity devices: consider clamping mast mounts about 1.0-1.25m above boom height as a wide field-of-view lens will still capture all the action from this position. It is common to see cameras clamped to the very top of a mast which will result in a photo of a very small windsurfer with a very large percentage of water in it. So try different mast positions yet generally keep the clamp lower than you think.

For boom mounting the best position is on top of the boom, as far forward as possible, facing backwards as this will capture the sailor's head and torso, harness, boom, sail colours, tail of board, wake and scenery (palm trees, mountains or volcanoes are particularly welcome in these shots!) Boom alternatives are on top at the back, facing forwards or underneath at the back, possibly with a few extra extension links added to enable the camera to be positioned a bit more to windward for a wider perspective.

Positioning the mast mount too high makes the subject quite small yet can still deliver a great photo





Marking your K4 Harness Mount

Camera angle

For mast or boom mounted cameras the best approach is to connect your board and rig and judge carefully where the camera is pointing (maybe positioning your head by the camera for a moment to see what it is seeing). A little trial and error will highlight the best angles. Once you find the perfect angle on a K4 harness mount then extend a straight line from the GoPro onto the camera bracket with a marker pen and then scratch over this line with something sharp. From then on you will be able to set the camera angle easily to this line. Remember to tighten it as the jarring of the board in rough conditions and when jumping can nudge the camera downwards which can result in headless shots or close-ups of the pole or luff tube.

Typically the best shots will be planing ones and this means that the boom will be sheeted in a lot. Bear this in mind when setting the camera angle. If you get the camera angle totally wrong (or you notice that it has moved) then you will have to adjust it by returning to the beach or dropping your rig and having a little swim to sort it out.

I failed to tighten the thumbscrew enough here and over time the angle of the GoPro was knocked down until only the luff tube could be seen



POV cameras can capture some unique and awesome moments



A state of readiness

Before heading out on the water, ensure that you have dropped-in a fully-charged battery and an empty micro SD card, selected your preferred camera settings and set up your mount and camera carefully. Finally, always remember to check that the red light is flashing and the photo counter is rising. Happy selfie taking!

That's it for selfies. . . next time it will be all about getting great windsurfing photos from other types of camera.

Head to:

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Sponsors: Starboard, Severne, K4 Fins, Flymount, Bollé, Bray Lake Watersports & Spinlock.

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