

YACHTING

MONTHLY



Master your cruising chute

Don't let your cruising chute rot in a locker. Fly it with confidence! says John Goode

For many sailors, the cruising chute is buried deep in an inaccessible forepeak locker and has not seen the light of day for years. What a shame! This sail is in fact a versatile fair weather friend that can help us get much more fun out of light wind sailing.

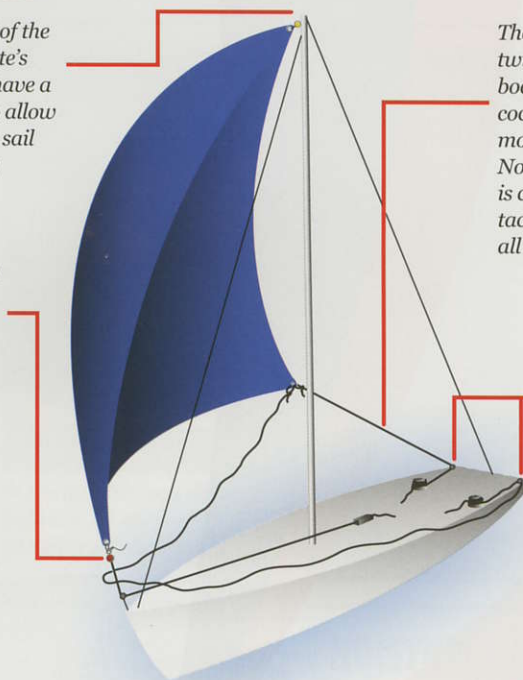
A cross between the genoa with its raised clew, and the larger, fuller spinnaker, the cruising chute is designed to be carried from a close to a broad reach, without a pole and all of the gear that goes with it. This makes it the preferred choice of many who sail shorthanded, when there's only one person to helm and one to work the deck. However, there are many crews who have lost a little confidence after an unfortunate strong-wind experience.

Easy to handle and a boon in light winds



Rigged forward of the forestay, the chute's halyard should have a swivel shackle to allow any twists in the sail to unravel easily

Attached to the chute's tack with a swivelling snap shackle that can be easily tripped under load, the strop is led aft via a turning block mounted as far forward as possible – so that it clears the pulpit when the eased sail is pulling ahead or sideways



The two sheets (each twice as long as the boat) are led to the cockpit via quarter mounted turning blocks. Note that the lazy sheet is carried forward of the tack strop and outside of all other rigging

On smaller yachts without permanent fixings, the turning blocks can be either tied or shackled to any convenient strongpoint that leads the sheets to headsail winches and cleats

The set up I favour should be particularly helpful to them. I hope what's shown over the next few pages also encourages anyone who has one of these sails, but is not sure how to fly it, to dig it out.

When close or broad reaching I set the chute in much the same way as a genoa. But when running downwind for any length of time I convert it, in easy stages, to (almost) replicate a poled-out spinnaker, which is far more stable on that point of sail. The 'spinnaker-rigged' chute can provide nearly as much pull as the real thing – and be depowered instantly if the wind pipes up.

As always, there are other ways of setting up and flying this colourful sail, but what I've illustrated has given me a lot of summer sailing pleasure over many years.



What you need

To start with we'll only need a few extra lines and blocks, a spare halyard with a swivel shackle to prevent twists, and a snap shackle that can be tripped under load

Read John's expert tips over the next six pages



PHOTOS: MALCOLM WHITE/WHITEPIX
GRAPHICS: MAXINE HEATH

Our Expert on Board this month is John Goode, a sailing journalist and author who owned the Southern Sailing School for 25 years and is an RYA Examiner



EXPERT ON BOARD

Even with little wind, the lightweight cruising chute will fill beautifully and give you more speed – and colour – than white sails

'A versatile fair weather friend that helps us get more out of light winds'

The greatest stability is achieved by sailing slightly by the lee, so wind spills from the main onto the chute. You can rig a preventer on the boom for safety

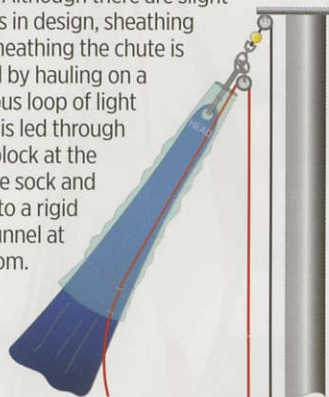
The set-up I demonstrate here is perfect for double-handed crews. And don't worry about getting caught out by the wind – on page 32 I show you how to rig an emergency cord to release the chute in a hurry



Hoisting

SOCK

The surest way to set a cruising chute without it getting into a tangle is to hoist it contained in its own sock (or snuffer) before releasing it in the mainsail's wind shadow. Although there are slight variances in design, sheathing and unsheathing the chute is achieved by hauling on a continuous loop of light line that is led through a small block at the top of the sock and secured to a rigid plastic funnel at the bottom.



1



Put the boat well off the wind, attach the tack strop and hoist the contained chute in the lee of the mainsail

2



With the halyard and tack strop secured, partially unsheathe the sail and secure the sock's control line before taking up the slack and securing the working sheet

3



Then continue raising the sock until the chute is fully set

STOPS

If you don't have a sock, there's a risk the chute will fill prematurely while halfway up. We prevent this by putting it in 'stops', trussing it up like a long sausage, using either weak cotton or thin elastic bands (the 'stops'), before packing it in its bag. Note that hoisting the chute out of a standard sail-bag can be a bit of a pain. It's better to use a 'turtle' that has a rigid opening that won't close up and jam. Once the bagged chute has been secured on the foredeck with its lanyard, the 'sausage' is raised and the halyard and tack strop secured. We then set the sail from the cockpit in three easy steps.

1



With the wind on the quarter, sheeting in the chute's clew will snap the lowest few stops

2



When the bottom of the sail begins to fill, the wind should break the rest

3



If it doesn't, keep sheeting in while bringing the boat around harder onto the wind until all the bands have broken and the chute is fully set

PACKING & BAGGING

To ensure a loosely packed chute will run up smoothly – with the halyard, tack strop and sheets connected to the correct parts – it's important to ensure there are no twists in the sail and that the three corners (marked head, tack and clew) are left sticking out.

RIGHT: First find and tie the head of the chute up high somewhere. Then run your hands down each side (known as 'chasing' them down) until you find the tack and clew. Then tie or hold these up with the head while the bundle of sail is stuffed, bottom half first, into its bag



RIGHT: This is the easiest way to fit the 'stoppers', in this case thin elastic bands. First, stretch each elastic band around a plastic bucket with its bottom cut out. Then, the head is held clear as the two edges are 'chased' down to the two corners, but this time keep them clear of the head. Draw the bucket down the chute from the head, slipping the bands off a few metres apart. Soon your sail will be transformed into a sausage!



HOISTING LOOSE

A loosely hoisted chute – without a sock or stoppers – needs to be hoisted quickly and almost simultaneously sheeted in to avoid it being wrapped around the forestay. When we're short-handed it's best to drag it up under the lee of a sheeted-in headsail, which can be lowered at leisure once the chute has been fully set.



John's expert tips
continue on p4

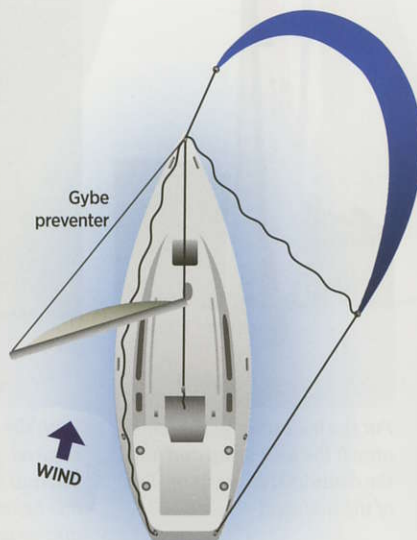


Trimming, gybing and dropping

PHOTOS: MALCOLM WHITE/WHITEPIX



Running downwind, goose-wing and for stability sail slightly by the lee with the set-up shown in the diagram



TRIMMING

To get the most out of a cruising chute we must take full advantage of all its controls – the halyard, tack-strop and sheets – to replicate the shape of a genoa when sailing on the wind, and nearer to that of a spinnaker when running off it.

On a close reach, tension the luff for a straight leading edge, by tightening the halyard and tack strop, before hauling in the sheet. Then, as we come further off the wind, gradually ease the luff tension and sheet, to keep the chute drawing nicely.

When running dead down wind, offer as much sail area to the wind as possible



On the wind, tighten the halyard and tack strop for a straight leading edge

by goose-winging, with the main boomed out over one side and the chute over the other. Have all three controls eased well out, so that the chute bellies ahead of the boat in a nice pulling shape. To keep this set-up stable it's best to run very slightly 'by the lee' with the (prevented) mainsail spilling its steady wind into the free-flying leeward chute.

DROPPING WITH A SOCK

When it's time to take the chute down, a sock really does come into its own. With the boat on a broad reach, trip the chute's tack and let it flag ahead in the lee of the mainsail

1



2

Then haul down the sock to completely sheathe the sail before lowering and bagging it for re-use



3

Note that a sock with its control line and fittings will add considerable bulk to the sail. I find a holdall-sized bag with a wide, double-zipped opening is ideal for storing it and moving it around the deck easily



GYBING

1 With the wind on the quarter, straighten the chute's luff by tightening the halyard and tack strop and haul the mainsail amidships



2



ABOVE: Then put the boat dead downwind and let the chute fly. Without the mainsail's drive, boatspeed will gradually fall off and the apparent wind will increase – so that the chute and its two sheets will flag out well ahead of the bow

RIGHT: We can then turn the stern through the wind to bring the flagging chute onto the new lee side before sheeting it in and easing out the mainsail

3



DROPPING WITHOUT A SOCK

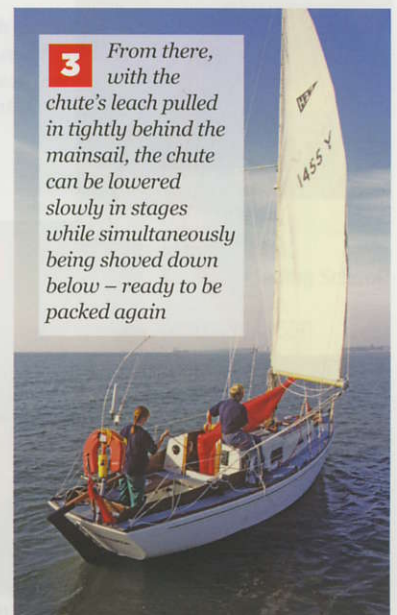
1 Dropping a chute without a sock will require considerably more dexterity from a shorthanded crew. Trip the tack of the chute and let it flag downwind in the lee of the mainsail



2 Walk aft and drag the still-sheeted clew to the top of the main companionway



3 From there, with the chute's leach pulled in tightly behind the mainsail, the chute can be lowered slowly in stages while simultaneously being shoved down below – ready to be packed again



John's expert tips continue overleaf →

Convert to a kite

A cruising chute is generally more popular than a spinnaker among shorthanded cruising sailors because, with a defined luff and raised clew, it can be carried from a very close reach to a run without a pole and all the gear that goes with it.

However, when running dead downwind in a stronger wind and with a lively sea running, this rig requires skilful trimming and helming to stop the chute from wildly swinging around and inducing a broach.

Fortunately, we can stop this happening by introducing a pole to the set-up. This replicates the far more stable downwind characteristics of a pole-braced spinnaker without falling prey to its well-publicised foibles. And the real bonus is that this 'conversion' can be made on the move – with just one crew doing all the work.



PHOTOS: MALCOLM WHITE/WHITEPIX

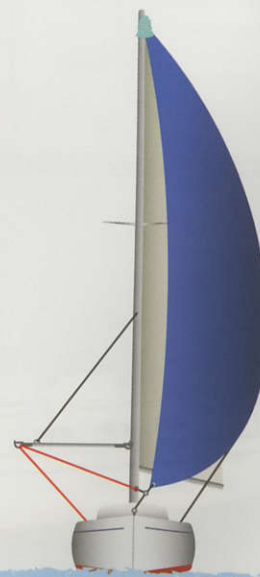
Take your time to rig the pole – the foredeck work requires only one person!



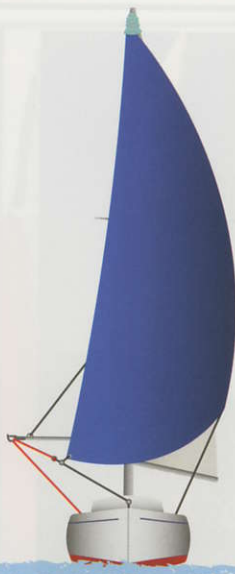
1 With the boat running on a broad reach, the pole set-up (topping lift, fore guy and after guy) can be singlehandedly rigged in easy stages on the clear weather side. Before it's raised and braced out, secure an extra sheet (shown in red on the diagram) to the tack strop's snap shackle and lead it back through the pole's jaw to the turning block on the quarter. The chute is now ready to 'convert to a kite' without leaving the cockpit



2 While broad reaching with the mainsail prevented and the pole braced out to windward, take up slack on the extra red sheet and stand by to ease the chute's tack strop



3 Put the boat on a dead run, then alternately winch in the extra red sheet and ease out the tack strop so that the tack of the chute is gradually hauled towards the end of the pole



4 When the tack nears the end of the pole, trim the sheets to get the sail pulling evenly. To go back onto a broad reach simply reverse the process and then de-rig the pole at leisure



Trip out of trouble

PHOTOS: JOHN GOODE



Not surprisingly, the all too familiar sight of a strongly crewed racing yacht being beam-ended by a spectacular broach doesn't inspire much confidence to fly any sort of spinnaker on a shorthanded cruising yacht.

The prospect of being caught out by a sudden squall and having to get a kite down in a hurry with just two people aboard will deter all but the experienced (or brave!) from flying such a sail in anything more than a light wind. If hit by a big increase in wind, the load is likely to be too great, and time too short, for one person to follow the standard tripping procedure. Without sufficient crew to ease the heavily loaded pole forward under



If the wind picks up unexpectedly, trip the line with one pull from a position near the mast



The emergency cord is tied between the snap shackle on the chute's tack and the pole's inboard end

control, while someone else goes forward to trip the tack, there's a serious risk of getting into trouble if just one control line is eased too fast or the wrong one let go in the heat of the moment.

However, all this excitement can be avoided simply by rigging the chute as shown on p30 and then extending the lanyard of the tack stop's snap shackle with a length of light line. Tie the end of the emergency cord to the lanyard of the tack stop's snap shackle before the pole is raised and pulled back to its braced position. To prevent it from accidentally tripping the sail at the wrong moment, leave plenty of slack in the cord until

the chute has been hauled out and trimmed. Finally, gather up any spare line and secure the cord so that it hangs in a loose bight under the pole – ready for action.

Rigged as shown in the diagram above, a single crew can instantly trip the yacht out of trouble with just one pull – no matter how hard it's blowing – leaving the pole safely braced in position while the sail is sheathed and lowered at leisure.

And because this 'emergency cord' imparts such great peace of mind, it can be just as handy in a lighter wind if, for example, we need to get rid of the sail quickly when we're in a fast closing situation with another boat. ▲

Using the emergency cord

The effectiveness of the 'emergency cord' when used in conjunction with a sock is shown here, with a pole-rigged cruising chute being singlehandedly dropped, under full control, in a wind gusting up to 20 knots



LEFT: With the boat on a broad reach, a single sharp pull on the cord, from a stable position near the mast, trips the tack of the chute

RIGHT: With the chute's tack disconnected from the pole, the sail loses power instantly



The chute flogs out to leeward of the mainsail



It's then just a matter of hauling down the sock until the sail is completely re-sheathed and secured

RIGHT: With the chute now contained and the pole remaining safely braced out to windward, there's plenty of time to dismantle the rig in easy stages – before unfurling the headsail and getting under way again in a more sedate manner!



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