

# SURVIVAL SAILING

»»» WINDSURFING ISN'T ALL SUN, FUN AND SHALLOW, CLEAR WATER. SOMETIMES IT'S ONE SAILOR, ONE SAIL AND ONE BOARD IN A BATTLE AGAINST HARSH ELEMENTS, UNFORTUNATE CIRCUMSTANCE OR EVEN THE SAILOR'S SKILLS AND GEAR. BUT YOU DON'T GET THE REWARD WITHOUT TAKING A LITTLE RISK. HERE ARE SOME TIPS AND STORIES ON HOW TO GET YOUR SAILING THRILLS WITHOUT GETTING KILLED.

## SAILING 60 KNOTS

Think 60 knots is too much to sail? Not for 140-pound Hawaiian waterman Kai Lenny. Despite the fact that he's still in the welter-weight class, he charged a nuking south shore Maui day and not only survived but thrived. "I remember checking Ho'okipa that morning – the wave was small and the wind had a northerly cant to it, at about 25 knots," says Kai. "A lot of north in the wind means it can really howl on the south shore, so when I got a call from photographer Darrell Wong, I headed down there. We went to the spot known as Thousand Peaks. When I pulled into the parking lot at Ukumehame, the truck was shaking from the gusts coming down off the west Maui mountains. I'd never seen that much wind there in my entire life. Small rocks were rolling down the beach." So what did Kai rig? "I put my Boxer 3.6 onto my Naish Wave 64. As soon as I hit the water I was overpowered. Every time a gust came off the mountain it would just explode on

the water like a little bomb. When I got hit with one of those, I would pick up board speed without even trying. It was not only windy, it was straight offshore, and way in the back of my brain, I was nervous about falling and seeing my gear go flipping through the channel between Kaho'olawe and Lanai. But I got used to it pretty quick, and had a really fun three-hour session." Of course, Kai made some adjustments to sail comfortably. First, he moved his mast base up an inch to settle down the nose of his board. For technique, he had to remember to sheet in. "Sheeting in on the gust meant more speed and more control. Sheeting out on the gust flicked you into an unintentional push loop!" And at those wind speeds, even something as simple as jibing becomes a matter of timing as well as skill, says Kai. "You would wait till right after a massive gust, and try to jibe in the lull. Even then you had to really commit – like a bottom turn at Jaws on a big day."

PHOTO: DARRELL WONG

## ↓ GET OFF THE ROCKS RIGHT

Want to score epic Kona winds at Lanes? Be ready for a treacherous launch. Jason Polakow delicately walks his gear down to the tip of the rock outcropping at Ho'okipa Beach Park, and from there, it's all a matter of timing. He's been keeping an eye on the wave while rigging, and has a good idea of the spaces between the sets. Once he's rigged and ready to go, his goal is to toss his gear off the water

after the last wave of a set breaks onto the rocks. Then it's a leap of faith into the quickly receding water, where he'll try to get on board as fast as possible and get through the channel before the next set of waves hits. What do *you* need to know about launching off rocks? Jumping with gear isn't all that difficult – hold it as you would walk with it, find a good foothold (be especially careful of this – rocks that

are sometimes submerged can have slick plant life on them) and launch forward – just make sure the water's deep. Coming in on the rocks is more difficult – Jason will ride a wave into the beach at Ho'okipa. If you're going to be launching off rocks, make sure you've got a friendly spot to come in – preferably downwind of where you're sailing, in case the breeze shuts off.



## SIX THINGS EVERY WINDSURFER SHOULD KNOW

BY RICK MARTIN

- 1 **Never, ever leave your board.** Your board is your float, even if it is in four pieces. Abandon your rig if necessary, but never, under any circumstances, abandon your board.
- 2 **Know how to signal for help.** The standard mariner's sign is to wave both hands over your head, back and forth. Try to get the attention of anybody who can help you. The Law of the Sea (seriously – it's a real law) requires all mariners to assist those in distress. Most people are generous with help.
- 3 **Know wind and water conditions and how they affect your time on the water.** Be hyperaware of changing conditions. This includes tidal currents and river currents. If the wind and current are going in the same direction, be very careful about sailing too far downwind – it will be tough to get back home. Practice staying upwind of your launch.
- 4 **Assume that powerboaters and PWC riders do not see you.** Most of the time you will be correct, so give them a *lot* of room. They don't know to look left and right, one of which is usually where you will be.
- 5 **Equip yourself with proper wear and equipment for safety, performance and comfort.** Water will suck the heat right out of your body, so a proper wetsuit is a must. Consider a PFD and/or a helmet. The helmet will protect your head from collisions with your own gear. Don't forget the sunscreen, and slather the tops of bare feet – sunburned toes really hurt.
- 6 **Inspect all your gear every time you rig it.** Look for nicks and cracks in the mast and boom. Inspect the rubber in the U-joint for cracks. Inspect the fin, especially at the base, for cracks. Inspect the sail for tears, holes, delaminations and loose threads.

« Jason Polakow preps for an off-the-rocks launch at Ho'okipa.

## ↓ SWIM YOURSELF IN

Sometimes sailing in isn't an option. If you're close enough to shore to swim in, you should. If not, wait for help with the rig attached to the board – it's more visible and slows drifting. If the rig is intact and the board is long enough to rest the boom on the tail, you can climb over it, lie on your belly and swim yourself in. If you can't rest your rig on the tail, a self-rescue in which you derig is the best option:

1 **Start by removing the boom from the rig.** Take it off from the top so your rig can stay attached to the board. Use the uphaul to tie the boom to a foot strap

so it doesn't get lost. 2 **Detach the rig from the board.** Straddle the board while you loosen the downhaul, then place the mast extension back on the mast base so it doesn't get lost and your hands are free. 3 **Remove the mast from the sail.** Hold the mast under your leg while you get to the head of the sail. Start rolling the sail, then start to wrap the two mast pieces in the sail. Roll it as tightly. 4 **Place the extension inside the roll and use the downhaul to secure the roll.** Do the same with the boom's uphaul and outhaul. Lay the package on the board, then lie on your stomach to swim in.

Get more fantastic instruction from Tinho Dornellas at [calema.com](http://calema.com).



## ↓ SHARKS AND SAILORS

The man in the gray suit. Old toothy. The landlord. Jaws. Whatever moniker you prefer, sharks are out there almost any time we're sailing in salt water. And just because you're not dangling your feet like a prone surfer doesn't mean you're not at risk. Stories involving sharks and sailors are few but they're real. Joe Dihl of Davenport Surf and Sail in Northern California relates the story of local sailor Mike Sullivan, who in 1995 was knocked off his board by a great white. How did he know it was a great white? After it knocked him over it bit the board, and marine biologists were able to identify it by the teeth marks.

Alex Pang, another Northern California sailor, has kept a record of the times he and his buddies have seen sharks while sailing – and it's a little bit more often than you'd like to think. More recently, an attack that killed a experienced kiteboarder and former windsurfer in Florida has got folks worried about what might be swimming below. "They're out there," says Joe. "Attacks on windsurfers certainly don't happen often – but as close as we are in NorCal to major breeding grounds like the Farallon Islands, it's a possibility." So does a windsurfer look like food to a great white – or are we big enough to be intimidating?

Considering that the great whites swimming in the surf zone in Northern California eat 5,000-pound elephant seals for lunch, probably not. How do you know when a shark is around? Salty old surfers and sailors talk about the "heebie-jeebies" – an uneasy feeling for no apparent reason. And perhaps windsurfers could take a cue from surfers and adopt the international signal for a shark sighting (one hand, palm open, held over the head with the fingers pointing up.) If you see that, it's a sign to go in. But shark attacks still remain statistically rare, and fatalities even rarer, so sail on – just keep your eyes open.

PHOTOS: (TOP) MERK (2); (SUSIE DORNELLAS) (LEFT)

## 14 TIPS TO HELP YOU SURVIVE

**Break the outhaul:** Replace it. You have extra line in your pocket, right? **Break the U-joint:** If there are no straps to keep the sail attached near the mast track, wrap the extra downhaul line once around the extension, do a half hitch, then loop it under the mast base to keep the sail where it should be. **Break a foot strap:** Sail home. You'll be amazed how much control you have without straps – even planing. **See stingrays:** Shuffle your feet. They sting you when you step on top of them. **Bust a harness bar:** Hold on. Sail back. **Break the boom:** Have another boom sailed out to you – one mast will hold two booms. Or if you can make it back in one tack, sail home without hooking in. Take the boom off the mast and flip it upside down if necessary. Take it slow – booms aren't made to work with one arm, so it's easy to break the second one if you hook in and plane off. **Break the mast:** A small tear (1-2 inches) high up in the luff sleeve isn't going to hurt the sail's performance. Sail in as is. If it's a low break, derig and swim your gear in (see previous page). **Get swept out to sea:** Stay with the board. Actually, stay *on* the board. **Lose a fin:** Tie the harness through the back foot strap and let it drag under the board. It'll offer enough resistance that you can sail across the wind instead of straight downwind. **Get lost:** Get to land to gain your bearings – especially if it's becoming dark. **Bust a harness line:** Uphauls have been known to work as clutch harness lines. **Break an ankle:** If sailing with no weight on your injured foot isn't an option, get in the water-start position and let your legs float behind you – you can body drag along until you get to shore or someone can help. **Hit someone:** Make sure everyone's conscious and uninjured first. Worry about gear next. **Run out of beer:** Go keep company with that guy slowly derigging his gear. He's got beer.

» Allan Miller unwittingly tempts a giant boat on the Columbia River.



## HAS LIGHTNING EVER STRUCK A SAILOR?

Let us answer this clearly and simply: Yes. More than one windsurfer has been struck by lightning. One such sailor is Gordon Eatman of New Mexico, who was sailing at Cochiti Lake, about 35 miles from Albuquerque, when he was struck by lightning. "New Mexico sailors searching for wind in the summer often try to sail in front of thunderstorms. We follow the five-second rule – if you hear thunder within five seconds of seeing lightning, get off the water. Well, during one session about 12 years ago, I wasn't fast enough, and lightning struck my mast. It knocked me off

the board. As I fell on my back in the water, I saw my mast and sail on fire before they dropped into the lake. It destroyed the mast and sail, and left a big ring of carbon deposit on the board. My leg went numb, and some buddies on shore had to help me get my gear back." Fortunately, Gordon suffered no lasting injuries, but he has a good bit of advice on how to handle lightning. "First off, don't put yourself in that situation," says Gordon. "But if it's out of your control, get in the water and away from your board. That mast is a giant lightning conductor!"

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): JOSH SAMPIERO, RICHARD HALLMAN, JEAN SOUVILLE, COURTESY GORDON EATMAN



## OFFER A TOW

Sometimes you're not the rescuee but the rescuer. It's possible to use your windsurfer to give someone a lift – be it a kiteboarder, a fellow windsurfer or just a swimmer at the beach. The bigger your board is, the easier it's going to be, so if you're on the beach and need to go out and help somebody, grab the biggest board you've got. If it's a big enough board, it's possible that another person can sit cross-legged in front of the mast base – just be careful with the rig. If a shortboard is your only option, have the person grab onto your back foot strap for a tow in – but it's slow going, and it will take some serious strength for you to keep everything in position to keep moving forward. Have his legs drag behind for minimal resistance. If he's got gear, it's best if it's rolled up on his board.

## AVOID BIG BOATS

Sounds simple, right? Larger objects get the right of way. After all, you wouldn't hold ground against a charging elephant, and that's only 50 times your size. A river barge is thousands. But collisions between windsurfers and big boats have happened, and remain a possibility – especially in narrow bodies of water with a high volume of sailors and constant traffic (you know,

like the Gorge). Sailworks rider Dale Cook remembers rescuing a sailor who he watched get hit by a barge. "He got plowed over by the front of the barge – he had no idea it was there. Folded his rig in half like a toothpick. He popped out in the white water behind the barge." How can you increase your safety? Brian Fletcher, a vessel operator for 16 years with

Tidewater Barge Lines, offers some advice: "Stay alert – you might not hear a horn if you're upwind. If you can't see the wheelhouse, the pilot can't see you – and just because you avoided one barge doesn't mean another isn't coming from the opposite or even the same direction. If you go under the front, go with the flow of water – it's pushing to the side." ✕

