

MAXIMUM SAIL POWER

CHAPTER 1

A TRIP TO THE SAILMAKER

A hypothetical look at buying sails - Part 1



Local sail lofts are getting replaced by giant sail production facilities in Asia and elsewhere

There was a time not long ago, that buying new sails for your boat included a pleasant visit to your local sailmaker. You called ahead to set up an appointment, and looked forward to an enjoyable few hours discussing the cut of your jib, so to speak. You would wander around the sail loft looking at all the new sails going through production while your sailmaker explained the virtues of the latest fabrics and newest trends in sail engineering. At the end you would write a check for a deposit, shake on the deal and wait for your sail to be delivered to your boat in the spring. Those days are gone - sadly for those who long wistfully for the past - but sailmaking, like most modern industries, is operating firmly in the 21st century. In

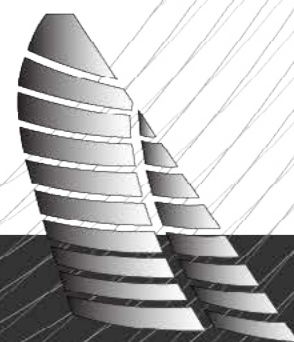
a 2007 article published in Yachting Monthly, Nigel Calder toured a 200,000 square foot production loft in China, and summed up his visit saying he had witnessed the “globalized future of sailmaking” and described sailmaking as having “entered the era of established brand names tied to mass production facilities,....no different than Nike or Sony.”

China Sail Factory, the loft Nigel Calder wrote about, along with North Sails in Sri Lanka and Ullman Sails in South Africa churn out sails by the container load. Customers are none the wiser about where their sails were made, and many don't care. What they care about are sails that are designed well, fit perfectly, and are high quality at a reasonable price. They can get all this and more from an offshore facility at a substantial cost saving over building the sails locally. They still need a knowledgeable sailmaker who can create an excellent design and insure the sail is specified properly. But where the sail is made means little. It wasn't always so, but things have changed and the change started with sail cloth.

In the early days, well the 60s shall we say, fabric used to make sails was not that great. Basic woven Dacron and Nylon were the most common fabrics, but they were not that stable, they stretched, and after time your sails started to “bag out.” That's all changed. Modern sail fabrics are highly engineered using incredible high performance, low stretch fibers and if your sail is used properly it will last a very long time. Add to this the use of sophisticated sail design software and laser cutting machines that take the panel layouts and cut them with pinpoint accuracy, you end up with sails that are almost always perfect. You don't have to be a big Brand Name sail loft like North or Ullman to get your customers great sails.

Offshore production has long been used for cruising sails, but more and more racing sails are also being produced offshore. Now if you are a small, local loft you don't need to invest in expensive equipment to make molded sails; you take advantage of the molds in offshore facilities and sell your customers a Load Path Membrane sail with your logo on it.

So the game has changed and I plan to stay on the cutting edge of this change. My website - Great Circle Sails - is designed to



make you a better consumer of sails, a more educated consumer. It's a confusing world for most sailors looking for new sails. Each sailmaker has their own line of products and their own acronyms for them. They all tout theirs as the best and in many cases they are. There is no denying that the big names like North, UK and Doyle make some stunningly beautiful sails, but you don't have to pay for their overhead and marketing costs. Educate yourself and give me a call, or give me a call and I will educate you. At Great Circle Sails we can get you the sails you need at a price that is reasonable and does not include the built-in cost of those highly paid sailmakers gallivanting the world racing on the latest new design built out of unobtainium, cleverly documented in the full page ads of your favorite sailing magazine, at great expense.

I hope that you enjoyed this blog. There are many more at my website www.greatcirclesails.com. If you need new sails for your boat just click this box and I will send you a no obligation quote.



BRIAN HANCOCK
Owner Great Circle Sails

