

## **MAXIMUM SAIL POWER**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **KNOW WHAT KIND OF SAILS YOU WANT**

##### **A hypothetical look at buying sails - Part 2**



I realize that this may sound elemental but it's an important part of the sailmaking process. You need to ask your sailmaker a lot of questions, and your sailmaker needs to ask you a lot of questions. You also need to ask yourself some hard questions like, "what kind of sailing will I be doing over the next couple of years," and "do I

really need the latest molded sail from the most expensive fabric available when the experience level of my crew is questionable?” Remember, a sail is an expensive purchase and you need to be clear about what it is you are buying. If, for example, you are thinking about entering your boat in the Newport to Bermuda Race in two year’s time, does it make sense to save a few dollars buying a new Dacron headsail because it’s all you can afford when you know that an investment in fabric and engineering will pay long-term dividends? Perhaps instead of the Dacron sail you could have your current sail recut, and in a year’s time buy the laminated sail, which will still be fairly new when the race starts.



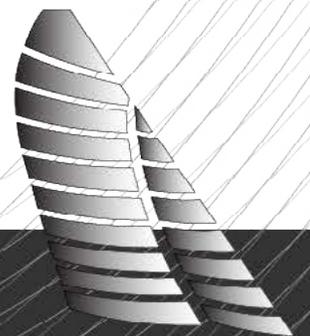
It is also important to articulate to your sailmaker what it is you expect from your sails. For instance, is out-and-out performance your goal, or are you willing to trade some performance for durability? Maybe sail handling is more important than sail shape.



For a cruising sailor used to physically changing sails, the feel of the fabric might be more important than the cut of the jib, and a soft, tightly woven Dacron may be a better choice than a stiff, highly resinated one. Whatever the choice, the process starts by asking good questions. Sails are tailor-made items, and just like ordering a new suit, you should not decide on the first color you see. Do your homework and you will be more pleased with the results. And your sailmaker will be happy to know that he has satisfied a customer.

An educated customer is a sailmaker's best customer, which is where these series of blogs come in. By the time you have finished reading them you will have an understanding of what it takes to design and build modern racing and cruising sails. If you have an understanding of the different fibers, fabrics, and engineering details like the number of reefs you need or whether or not you want a cunningham in your headsail, it will be a lot easier for your sailmaker to make you the sail you want. You should also talk to other sailors with similar boats, sailors with different boats, and a number of other sailmakers, since it's not only their job to sell you their product, but to make sure that you get what you want and not what they want you to have. Throughout this process remember this very important point: There are any number of ways to make the same sail, and in most cases they will all be good. There are, for example, various styles of fabric made by different fabric makers that will all do an equally good job, so don't get too concerned if two different sailmakers recommend two different types of cloth. Ask about the merits of each kind, but don't assume that one has to be "bad" and the other "good." By the same token, brand loyalty is good, and if you've had a good experience with a certain fabric maker then that's a good reason to ask for its product again. Sailmakers, fabric makers, and hardware makers appreciate loyalty, and the result will be a better sail for you. And don't forget the sailmaker that took the time to write the book and produce these blogs. If you gain some knowledge through reading these posts you should have some loyalty to the author...:)

Sailmakers need lots of important information from you if they are to do their job, so be sure that you are ready to provide it. They



need to know, for example, if you plan to mostly race or cruise. They also need to know if you are daysailing or heading offshore, and in what region of the country you will be sailing. These days a lot of sail buying is done over the phone and a sailmaker located on Long Island Sound, where the summertime winds are light and variable, might not know that San Francisco has a blustery afternoon breeze that kicks up a short chop. This would be a valuable piece of information if you are a West Coast sailor and want your sail to be designed and engineered to suit the local conditions. A sail designed for use in choppy inshore waters will have a different shape than one used in long ocean swells.

I hope that you enjoyed this article. There are many more at my website [www.greatcirclesails.com](http://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

