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3 REASONS (+1) WHY I HATE THE MAINSAIL FURLER

ACCESSORIES, BOATANDBOATS SAIL / BY [MAGAZINE](#) / OCT 24, 2016[PRINT THE ARTICLE](#)

I hate the mainsail furler - certainly that fixed to the mast, a little less that one housed in the boom - for different reasons. The first one, although less important, concerns aesthetic. That's coming from a man who sails with the fenders placed on the deck and doesn't care about elegance rules. But seeing a sort of **shapeless pair of knickers** instead of a beautiful mainsail rends my heart.

The first real reason concerns **the reliability of the mechanism**. And I'm willing to admit that my aversion is partially due to my age: I started to work as a journalist at the time of typewriters and to sail when the jib furler was regarded with suspicion. But even though **modern mechanism ensure an almost total reliability**, the risk that **something can get stuck because of a sudden gust of wind is not excluded**.

The second reason concerns **the shape and surface of the sail**: in a word, its performances. The mainsail has not only no battens (although the vertical ones can be added) but the final cut is such that it defines a **carved** leech which can, in its turn, wrap itself inside the mast. The result

is a small **unroached mainsail** subject to the shadow created by a mast with an exaggerated diameter.

The third reason lies in the manoeuvre which must be precise. As already seen in the [article published last May](#), it's nothing



overwhelming but it's not unusual to hear about troubles faced by crews who are convinced that using a mainsail furler simply means to haul and cast two ropes. **A correct tension of the leech, the basis and the leech line, a right position of the boom** (a rigid vang is almost compulsory) and **correct tacks** (port tacks if the head-rope is on the right and vice versa) are the necessary measures to adopt for a safe manoeuvre. This is far from easy to the point I can really doubt about the much vaunted greater convenience and advantages of the mainsail furler compared to a classic rig.

But there's also an additional reason. **A mast** which has to house the mainsail furler mechanism and the mainsail furled is larger and **heavier than a standard one**, which translates into the need for a heavier keel to compensate the greater list.

According to **Bertrand Cheret**, the author of *Les voiles. Comprendre, régler, optimiser*, on a 15-metre boat, a classic mast is about 11 kg a yard while, with a mainsail furler, it can reach 15 kg a yard. " If the mast was 18 m long – says Cheret – the weight would increase by 72 Kg and this mass would have a resultant placed at 9-10 m from the waterline. In order to compensate that, a ballast of 500 or 600 kg should be placed at little more than one metre under the waterline."

Of course, a boat equipped with a mast specifically designed to support a mainsail furler will have an appropriate ballast. If, on the contrary, we modify the mast at a later stage, the problem related to excessive list, rolling and pitching must be taken into account.

