



We were asked to include an article on sailing through chop. We thought this was a great idea, so we went to the experts!

Here is what they had to say about it. To put you in the picture, I have listed their qualifications:

Garry Williams: Four times International Champion, four times National Champion, 22 times NSW State Champion. Garry had to develop his skills in chop at regattas, as his home club is the Wagga Wagga Sailing Club, that sits on very small Lake Albert, about five hours drive from the coast!

Ian Marcovitch: 2010 International Champion, two times NSW State Champion. Ian does most of his sailing on coastal lakes, so is an expert in handling chop. This intro is longer than his contribution! No one will believe Ian had so little to say on anything!

Alex Craig: A consistent performer and a regular in the top ten at both National and International level over recent years. He placed 3rd in the 2011 Nationals and 2nd in the 2013 Nationals.

Garry Williams

To start the discussion I would suggest that we define small and large chop. Small chop is a wave pattern that is unavoidable, not able to steer through, chop that is less than say 0.2 metres high and generally consistent. This type of chop requires boat balance, trim and a fairly full sail to punch through the waves.

So, sit back further than normal so the bows do not sink under all but the largest waves. Make sure

you are not pointing too high to slow the boat down and, if possible, keep the windward hull just above the waves or just skipping the top of the waves.

The trick is that on one tack you will be punching nearly directly into the waves and on the other tack you will inevitably be sailing across them, so the technique on the other tack is different. Sailing across the waves requires a flatter sail, with the waves pushing you along rather than providing resistance. This will also allow you to point higher without losing speed and the balance of the boat may allow you to move further forward, towards your normal upwind position.

Larger chop is further between the peaks of the waves and will allow you to steer through them as some are higher than others. Some research suggests that there may be a general pattern of one high wave in seven. This would suggest that there is a benefit in steering through them and I find it part of the rhythm of sailing upwind in waves to steer into and away from the wind as part of negotiating the waves. It is important not to steer too high into the wind, especially when going up the wave, as this will slow you down considerably. Your sail does not



Garry

need to be as full as it does when the chop is small as the boat is not punching through the chop as much, but it is still working to find the energy to move through them so some fullness is required. Trim is still important, as is balance, and these aspects of working a chop are the most important in finding optimum boat speed.

Concentration is paramount and just sitting on the side will not provide the best result.

Sailing through waves is a different thing again and requires a different approach as the wind angle and velocity at the bottom of the wave is different to that at the top.

Garry Williams - PT3085 Characin IV 

Alex Craig

I have quite different styles of sailing for short chop vs. large sloop.

Upwind in short chop:

- Tight mainsheet tension.
- Traveller out about 30cm, then further out if windier to prevent windward hull flying too high.
- Tight outhaul to flatten foot of sail (few cm depth).
- Mast rotation about 45 degrees.
- Bear away slightly to build speed to punch through rougher patches and the odd steep wave.
- Hiking/Sitting over the centreboard.

Upwind in large sloop (greater than 0.5m high):

- Sail with a loose rig - Less mainsheet tension and more mast rotation (about 75-90 degrees) for a full sail.
- More aggressive steering - bear away at top of wave to build speed, point up only with speed.

- Mainsheet tension is adjusted with steering - ease slightly at top of wave, tighten again as speed increases and gain height.
- Traveller same as above.
- Loose outhaul (around 10cm depth at foot).
- Sit over/slightly back of the centreboard as the wind increases.

Tips for those who usually sail on flat water:

- Look further ahead than usual to spot the steep waves and bear away early .
- Set a fuller sail than usual.

Alex Craig - PT3033 Need For Speed 

Ian Marcovitch



Sit back 300mm behind the side stay, and decide after a few minutes sailing if it is better to point high and slow, or go deep and slow. Either way you just have to keep banging away at it.

Ian Marcovitch - PT3039 Mojo 

