



Photo by Ralph Naranjo

Ups and Downs of Mainsail Systems

The rising popularity of the various mainsail handling systems seems less due to technological advances than to demographics and social trends. Older sailors are tired of muscling down mainsails, and younger sailors have less time on the water, and don't want to spend it stowing sails. Coinciding with this shift is a trend toward larger more powerful full-batten mains.

Over the course of three decades, *Practical Sailor* has been tracing the evolution of these sail-handling systems, and in our view, this is a nut that has yet to be cracked. The introduction of better materials, such as high-tech fibers or composites have brought incremental improvements, but we've seen no revolutionary advances in the art of handling mainsails, and certainly no perfect system.

Tartan Yachts recently capitalized on materials advances to refine "the Park Avenue boom" for the average sailor. Its carbon-fiber Stow-Boom (above, top) neatly catches a fully battened sail. Martin Van Breems' Dutchman (lower left) has similarly been improved, but the concept has been the same for years. Meanwhile, in-boom furlers like Forespar's Leisure Furl (in carbon-fiber, lower right) have also begun employing new materials and design technology to better manage modern mains.

We'll be digging deeper into the topic of mainsail handling systems in 2008. Meanwhile, we've posted online two articles from *PS* back issues that cover related topics: Feb. 1, 2005 ("Mainsail Track Hardware") and Oct. 1, 2001 ("In Boom Furling"). See "Tools and Techniques" at www.practical-sailor.com.