

Lessons Learned

This test taught us a few things about hats we hadn't previously considered. First, beyond a certain age—and we admit, sadly, we're past it—for purposes of pride and/or aesthetics, one should never wear a ball cap backward. That said, on a sailboat, particularly when sighting mastheads or sail trim, it's sometimes unavoidable. If you do wear one reversed, however, and it comes with an adjustable strap, beware of a sunburned forehead in the shape of a half circle that will mark you as more of an idiot than when your hat was on backward. Apply sunscreen liberally.

Hats that come advertised as "one size fits all" rarely fit all, particularly if your hat size is 7¼ or larger. If you wear a big hat, it's unwise to ever buy one via mailorder. Make sure you can actually try it on before purchasing. Sometimes, a hat that looks great on a model in a catalog appears less so when viewed in a

mirror—especially for those with good-sized noggins.

White hats are cooler than dark ones. They're also impossible to keep clean, and little things like constant adjustments to the brim will make them appear old and tired in a hurry. Black or dark-blue hats hide fingerprints, but not salt or sweat stains, and they get warm fast on a hot day. A well-built hat in a neutral color, like khaki or light green, that can be washed frequently is best.

While we can truly understand and relate to the benefits of the Aussie-style hat, for some of us, they take a while to get used to, particularly on windy days (when the value of the ear and neck flap can sometimes be compromised anyway).

Finally, like a favorite pair of deck shoes, a ball cap is a fairly personal thing. When you find one you like, hang on to it. The day will come when it's too frayed or shrunken to wear any longer. When that happens, consider the choices reviewed here.