

Foil Gybing for Dummies

by Dan Vincent 22/01/2014

Intro

I started Moth sailing this time last year and while the learning process is still fresh in my mind, I thought I would write a short article to try and help other beginners. The idea is that this article will provide some guidance for those who have just bought their boat and are trying to master the art of foil gybing. Foil gybes are not particularly difficult, but to be successful they have to be done smoothly and with commitment, which is why they prove a tricky hurdle for beginners, who are both trying to work out the dance steps, while trying to performing them seamlessly. Hopefully once you understand the choreography then half the battle is won. And it is a battle worth winning because once you have got the knack of foil gybing you will find them both satisfying and addictive.

Step 1 – Pre-Gybe

While sailing smoothly in a straight line, you should be foiling high and fast, and looking for flatter water and steady wind in which to gybe. At this stage you are should look rakish and confident, your hair may even be dry.



Photo 1. Phil Oligario in GBR 3764 looking awesome with a natty dry baseball cap.

Step 2 –Prepare to Gybe

Change position smoothly, put your back foot on or near the centreline of the boat with and tuck your front foot tucked underneath you, so in your next move you can kneel (see Photo 2 below). Flick the tiller extension over, so it is underneath the

boom and pointing to the leeward side (you might even rest it on the leeward wing bar). During this stage steer smoothly, for balance (i.e. keep boat upright by bearing away slightly as you move weight towards centreline). You should now be ready to move, but don't panic you can hold this position steering a steady and fast course and foiling high, there is no hurry. Note: At this point do not be tempted to sheet out, life gets harder if you do.



Photo 2 . Phil has moved his weight closer to the centre and his back foot is on the centreline, front foot tucked underneath him. The boat is level and flying high and could continue indefinitely in a straight line. Note: The boom is close to the centreline. His next step will be to flip the tiller extension across (without steering). He is not yet committed and could easily go back to Step 1.



Photo 3. Mike Cooke in light winds in the 'About to Gybe' Position, kneeling on the front leg and with the back foot placed on the hull.

Step 3 –Start the Turn

Steer through the gybe. Lead with your head and with your front hand reach for the mainsheet falls. Your feet hardly have to move you just shift weight from one knee to the other. The first movement is to lead with the head and duck underneath the boom. Keep looking forward (some people find it helps their orientation/ judge of heel to keep their eyes on the horizon). Steer with smooth pressure to guide the boat through gybe (jerkiness=swimminess). A little bit of heel into the turn can help (leaning away from the turn is generally bad). Move across the boat while steering for balance, matching the rate of turn to the heel of the boat and your position in the boat (If you move quickly you have to steer quickly and vice versa). At this stage you are moving across the boat far earlier than you would in a conventional singlehander and this often feels alien to Moth newbies (it did to me anyway).



Photo 4. Simon Payne steering through the gybe. His weight is central, head leading the movement, looking for the photographer.



Photo 5. Jason Russell gets his head down, and weight central, while looking forward with his front hand on the mainsheet falls.



Photo 6. Beautifully synchronised Ninja gybes from Alex Koukarakis and Leigh Albrecht. Both have got their weight low and their boats heeling into the turn,

perfect form. Note: The boats are still on Starboard, but the helms are most of the way across the boat.



Photo 7 . Phil Oligario mid-gybe, the sail is still filling on old side and while the sailor's weight is central, his head is firmly on the new tack.

Step 4 – Exiting the Gybe

There is more than one way to skin a cat, and there are many different effective variations on gybing a moth. Some sailors advocate a sharp tug on the mainsheet to pop the battens as early as possible. Others allow the mainsail float over to the other side and let the battens pop of their own accord. Many will change their technique depending on the wind strength. Try both styles, in my experience, trying to jerk the mainsheet while at a critical point of the gybe, can upset the delicate balance, particularly for beginners, but in marginal foiling conditions it is necessary to get the power back on quickly. If you can pop the battens it does power up the sail earlier and give you something to lean against. In the final stages don't rush to change the tiller and mainsheet hand, get the boat sailing and flying on the new gybe before swapping hands. Once sorted get your feet into the toestraps and 'send it'.



Photo 8 – Mike Lennon, exiting a gybe, he has moved his trailing foot onto the new windward side of the boat and is now able to push off on that foot to get his weight (e.g. arse) outboard and sitting on the wing, after which he will settle the boat on its new course and change hands.

When you complete your first foiling gybe you will feel like a sailing God, and indeed you have joined a fairly small proportion of the world's population who have foil gybed (less than have climbed up Everest – FACT!). Now look around for cameras and applauding crowds or find someone to show off your second foiling gybe to.

Next Steps

Once you have nailed the first foiling gybe, it is just a case of practice, practice, practice and developing your own technique. Some ideas...

- Seek out flat water venues for the early stages of learning, foiling gybes don't seem to get much harder with increasing windstrength, but waves and chop make life more difficult.
- Get out sailing in as many conditions as possible from sub and marginal foiling through to your upper wind strength limit.
- Put yourself under increasing pressure by doing one gybe straight after another in quick succession. Try to speed up until your technique starts to fail.
- Try beam reach to beam reach gybing as well as broad reach to broad reach.
- Watch moth gybing videos on Youtube and break down the techniques of the best sailors¹.
- Practice the moves on the living room floor.
- Visualise yourself doing the manoeuvre.

¹ Mottenfieber videos on Youtube from the 2012 Garda Worlds are highly recommended.



Photo 9. International Moth Mime artiste, Pete Barton performs an avant-garde Shadow Play on the subject of foil gybing (or something).