



The Learning Curve

Article by [Brian Bissell](#)

Jumping into a new class can be overwhelming. Every boat has its quirks and it takes awhile to learn all the tuning tricks. What I have found to be the best way to make your learning curve steeper, is to ask tons of questions to people already successful in the boat. When you have their



answers and an insight to their individual style of sailing the boat, it is paramount that you go out on the water and try it out for yourself. You may find that what works for them doesn't work for you. It is important to find your own style and how to set up the boat accordingly.

Talking with Pablo Defazio....

It was interesting to talk with Pablo about his sailing style and boat set up because it was different than any other tuning guide I had read. He uses the **North AP-4 main** and **BR-1D+ jib**. He sails

pretty light, rarely above 300 lbs. With the mast step 1" forward of the 60" mark, he then lengthens his spreaders to 44cm and adds more spreader sweep to get a 68 cm tip-to-tip measurement. His rake measurements for light, medium, and heavy air are 655cm, 650cm, and 645cm accordingly. In light air, this puts the mast touching the front of the partners, which seems a little strange when you first see it. Now, for the most unusual difference, he uses the same tension (250 lbs) for all three breeze ranges. The last major change is that he moves his jib leads inboard 3.5 cm inboard on each side from the standard Persson position (75cm lead-to-lead, he moves to 68cm).

I used this boat set up for the 2007 Snipe Midwinters/Pan Am Trials and felt very fast. I sailed at a light combined weight (around 290 lbs) and it was a light air regatta. The boat felt amazing in the 5-9 knot range. You know when a boat is tuned right and it just locks into the groove.... that's how it felt. In the breezier races when it got up to about 15 knots and we changed to our medium setting, the boat didn't feel as good.

However, when the breeze did come up at the Midwinters, I thought the fastest boat became Mikee Anderson, sailing with North Sails rep Dave Hughes, using the same sail inventory but with a slightly different boat set-up. Their combined weight was around 295-300 lbs. Here is what they did according to Dave....

"We basically took some portions of the new Defazio tuning numbers and added our own 470 concepts. The spreader length was the biggest change, but note that we never got into our heavy setting. The spreaders, of course, float, so it's not an exact science. Basically we went as far back as we could, then put on a couple of turns to engage and even the shrouds. We played with plenty of mast ram. This was by far our biggest control. We felt fast in all conditions, and particularly fast on the 'breeze' day (mid teens). We left the mast butt where it was - 60", I think - deciding not to go with the 1"+ that the new guide asks for. That said, it'd be worth re-measuring where (the) mast butt is."

Their spreader measurements were 44cm length and 73cm deflection in light and medium wind and 43 cm length and 71 cm deflection in heavy wind. Note: they never got to their heavy air setting.



They used the same 250 lbs of tension through the full range as well. I found it most interesting that they didn't move the mast butt and used the same rake and spreader set up as Pablo Defazio.

After a light Midwinters and placing 2nd behind Augie Diaz, we felt pretty good about everything. But we had yet to see much breeze over 15 knots so the upper range was a bit of an unknown. The next regatta on the southern circuit was the Don Q in Miami. This was a good test for heavy wind. The practice day was pretty breezy, I would guess about 15-18. I switched crews for the Don Q so my combined weight

became 310 lbs. I set up to Pablo's heavy air setting and every time we lined up with 3 or 4 other boats we would lose our lane in less than a minute. We simply couldn't hang. Everyone we were sailing against was shocked because we went from one of the fastest boats at Midwinters to now one of the slowest on the water. We were stumped and tried just about everything. Finally we tried moving our mast step aft one hole to make it about .5" forward of the 60" mark. We did this because I thought I might have lost something in translation with Pablo and maybe he said 1 hole forward of 60" mark and not 1" (I verified later that he did, in fact, mean a full 1" forward = 2 holes forward). I also new that Mikee and Dave were fast without moving their mast butt forward at all so I thought it was worth a try. Instantly, we felt better. We weren't the fastest boat in the line-ups but we could hang much longer than before. When we got ashore we rechecked all the rakes and tensions with the new mast butt position and found that our shroud positions didn't need any changing, only our jib halyard marks needed to be changed slightly to get the right tension. When the racing started, it was heavy air once again. In the first race, we didn't feel like we were in the ballpark with boat speed and it was beginning to affect our tactics. Very frustrating. We felt overpowered and decided to drop the pins in the shroud even lower than our heavy air setting and add more tension. In the second race we felt much better but still not great. For the third race we decided to drop pins even further and add even more tension since that improved our program the last time, but this time I think it was too much. Now, the boat was very hard to steer and keep in the groove. There was a little bit of chop and it was near impossible to steer the boat through the chop without stalling out. When we got ashore, we remeasured and found that we were near 27 on the loose gauge and raked back about 642cm. It killed us in that race but it was a great learning experience since I now know what the boat feels like in breeze with too much tension and too much rake.....awful.

As you can imagine, the regatta didn't go very well for us because we weren't doing something right and we couldn't figure out what it was. Back to the drawing board I went. I called up Pablo Defazio, with my tail between my legs, and asked him if he could help me figure out what I was doing wrong and, after a little discussion, he sent me a picture of himself sailing the Western Hemisphere's (which he won, see photo on the right). He said "take a look at my trim....look how far out I trim my sails in the breeze." I was amazed because it looked like the main and jib were just about trimmed for a tight reach. He confirmed that to keep the boat flat he vang sheets the main hard and eases it out



[click on photo to enlarge](#)



just past the corner of the boat and the jib was eased way out to keep the slot open. My immediate question was "do you have trouble pointing off the starting line when you are trimmed like this?". He said he trims a little tighter off the line but as soon as he's in the open and has a bigger lane, he reverts back to the eased out style. This information shed a lot of light on why I was so slow in the breeze at the Don Q. I couldn't point so I was trimming tighter to remedy the situation and it ended up having an adverse affect. It can be a

slippery slope when you think you are having "pointing" problems because it can cause you to try and force it which will kill your boat speed and then your pointing. Pablo's eased out style is a fast forward mode that you actually end up gaining height by just going fast. I was excited to give it a try at the next regatta.

It definitely worked. On the practice day in breeze we went with the eased out mode, kept the boat very flat and didn't even try to point. All of sudden, we were elevator up and gaining height while going fast forward. It was the first time for me that the boat felt really good in the breeze. However, I was on the light side at 290 lbs and I felt that the heavier teams had an advantage. Namely Ernesto Rodriguez and Enrique Quintero who were about 330 lbs. They tuned to what my light air setting would be with wider spreader deflection (about 77cm to my 68cm) and about 655cm rake and they were by far the fastest boat upwind in the breeze. I think you give up more by being light upwind than you do by being heavy downwind.

For my next regatta, I am going to try a few different things. If it's a light to medium forecast, I am going to set my boat up similar to how I had it at Midwinters but with a wider spreader deflection (probably 75cm tip-to-tip) since I will be sailing heavy around 320 lbs. If it is a medium to breezy forecast, I am going to move the mast butt aft to the 60" mark and set the boat up close to where Mikee and Dave were for Midwinters. We'll see how it goes.