

WINDSURFING EQUIPMENT & ESSENTIALS: TAKING THE RIGHT STUFF!

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WINDSURFING IN A NEW OR REGULAR LOCATION IS AWESOME AND CAN CLEANSE THE SOUL IN SO MANY WAYS BUT, AS WITH ANY ACTION SPORTS, THERE'S PLENTY OF KIT-RELATED THINGS THAT CAN GO WRONG IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL. CREATING YOUR OWN EPIC FAIL MOMENTS WITH KIT COULD CAUSE YOU – EVEN AS A GROWN ADULT – TO SHED TEARS OF RAGE, PAIN OR IMMEASURABLE SADNESS – AND CRYING ON THE BEACH (APPARENTLY) IS NOT A MECHANISM TO IMPRESS FELLOW WINDSURFERS. So throughout this article I humbly offer tips and hints to get you to the water with all the kit and essentials you need for a safe, productive and stress-free session at any time of year.

Focusing on the kit

Whilst some people live quite close to their local spot – and windsurf there on a regular basis – not many of us could actually claim to be able to rig on our lawn, open the garden gate and step smugly onto the beach suited and booted with kit in hand. So it's pretty likely that a journey will need to be made. The good news is that nowhere in the UK is more than 70 miles from the coast and there are splendid inland locations aplenty. Currently based on the Surrey/Kent border, my local spot for an inland blast is the excellent, windsurf-friendly Queen Mary Sailing Club with elevated water and one-mile reaches. Whenever I can, however, I like to escape to the coast with a 45-minute drive to the nearest spot – the same time as it takes to get to QM.

I think just about everyone I know who windsurfs has, at some point or other, forgotten a piece of kit. And guess what? The thought of driving all the way home to pick up the (delete as applicable) sail, mast, extension, boom, UJ, fin, finbolt, screwdriver, wetsuit, harness etc. that you recklessly abandoned on your garage floor – and back again – is a situation (for most) that is fraught with panic and despair as you stand on the beach

watching other (more organised) windsurfers zipping back and forth in solid conditions. A desperate plea to others might sort you out yet there's no guarantee of blagging it. A friend of mine once sailed a session in 25 knots at Hayling Island having left his harness at home and couldn't feel his arms for about a week afterwards. He never did that again.

You might be lucky and have all your kit stored permanently in a well-racked-out van which you can park in a secure location. If your only option however is to store kit somewhere safer and load your vehicle every time it's windy then perhaps some sort of military regime of kit storage and packing is needed to ensure that you have what you need and that you don't end up with a garden trowel in your kit box instead of that essential freewave fin. Having a laminated checklist taped to your kit box or pinned to your garage/shed wall could help. As a minimum – pack your car/van and then, before committing to leaving for your chosen spot, work from the bottom upwards to do a visualization/recall of each piece of your windsurfing hardware and personal kit to check if you have forgotten anything.

OVER THE YEARS I HAVE OWNED LOADS OF KIT OF ALL BRANDS, AGES AND CONDITIONS FROM HALF-BUSTED SCRAP-HEAP STUFF TO BRAND NEW GEAR. CHOOSE YOUR KIT WISELY AND GET THE BEST ADVICE YOU CAN FROM FRIENDS, WEBSITES, FORUMS AND TRUSTED SHOPS. MY FIRST EVER SAILS WERE END-OF-SEASON TUSHINGHAM SELL-OFFS FROM A HOLIDAY COMPANY AND THEY WERE PERFECT. Then I foolishly bought a slippery 106-litre Bic Adagio slalom board for £100 from a rogue trader. I should have been enjoying loads of healthy progression at that stage on a 150-litre board. Instead I spent a month falling in and nearly went mad before getting rid of it. Avoid impulse buys, try before you buy wherever possible and make sure that the kit will serve you well.

Right now I am very lucky to have access to an incredible range of equipment yet – not being the sort of person who takes things for granted, it gets looked after meticulously (in use and in storage) and, consequently, is sold on later in first-rate condition. Whatever kit you have it needs to be relied upon when you need it – so it needs plenty of TLC. Ensure that it is always rinsed off after a dunking in the sea

and dried as soon as possible before checking for damage then storing it with care. A seized boom, for example, is no fun at all on the day when you know that you meant to rinse out the salt water last time yet never got around to it. Or that sail with a small tear in it? Get it fixed before it goes out of control and the whole panel needs replacing.



Suggested personal gear from essentials to recommended extras

- 1. Wetsuit:** a modern, warm, stretchy one like the O'Neill Psycotech offers a far greater warmth and flexibility than older suits.
- 2. Wetsuit boots (or shoes):** depending on location and season.
- 3. Rash vest:** Not really needed beneath a top-spec modern wetsuit as the inner materials are already soft and smooth. For hot, overseas windsurfing or can be used over a shorty wetsuit to give warmth and protection with the boardies and rash vest look!
- 4. Boardshorts:** for hot, overseas windsurfing or can be used over a shorty wetsuit to give extra warmth and protection with the boardies and rash vest look!
- 5. Harness:** Try loads on at your local shop before buying. This Severne Air is light, supportive, super-comfortable, looks good, has a great spreader bar and stays down!
- 6. Rigging jacket:** my choice is the Ion Neo Shelter Jacket and every windsurfer I meet either has or wants one of these. All body and arm panels are cut and bonded in a pre-bent shape to allow natural movement. Whilst I would not use this for a personal full-power session I sometimes coach basic planing skills from a board in the winter whilst wearing it and I still maintain full body movement. On the beach it's a cocoon. The hook-hole allows a harness to be worn underneath and the hood is very welcome on winter beaches and even better with a beanie underneath. This item completely transformed my winter windsurfing from the moment I got it.
- 7. Changing robe/towel:** to get changed in the car park without offending the locals choose the Ion Poncho or, for the feeling of a full survival shelter, a dryrobe.
- 8. Small towel:** it's always nice to dry yourself off and get the sand off your feet before driving home. Older spare towels can also be used to remove sand and water from kit before taking it home.
- 9. Changing mat/wetbag:** to stand on outside (or inside your van) and to let your damp wetsuit fall into before zipping it around to stop the water leaking everywhere.
- 10. Personal flotation device (PFD):** not for everyone but can be especially reassuring when pushing harder, trying new skills like waterstarts, sailing in bigger conditions or in an unfamiliar location. I use the Spinlock Aero Pro when teaching foiling which is awesome to say the least. It gives significant front and back protection (even more so with the optional D30 Impact Protection back protector) with 50N of buoyancy. It is soft, supple and comfortable, has a reinforced hole for a harness hook and allows full maneuverability.
- 11. Helmet:** can help in the same ways as with the PFD (not shown).
- 12. Mitts:** I try not to use them to avoid forearm cramp but palm-less ones can work well by taking the cold sting off your fingertips whilst reducing the chance of cramp. I like to put gloves on in the winter when I am back on the beach to regenerate my hands before removing them and heading out again.
- 13. Headwear:** a neoprene hood (not shown) can be the one thing that keeps you out longer in the winter. Just remember to take it off before you walk into the petrol station or bank on the way home...
- 14. Headwear:** a warm beanie is another lifesaver during beach breaks/rigging time etc.
- 15. Suncream:** easy to omit for a UK trip but, what's good for Baz Luhrmann...
- 16. Sunglasses:** having sensitive eyes I need great sunnies to use afloat in fast summer freeride conditions but I don't like to use a retainer. The King range from Bollé do the best job and never fall off my face.
- 17. First aid kit:** something basic to deal with the unexpected (especially in a remote location) and to stop bleeding – for example from the dreaded finjury.
- 18. Basic storage like robust plastic boxes:** used Eurocrates purchased online are best - or flexi-buckets to keep gear in and to easily switch it all from garage/shed to car/van without the risk of leaving something behind. These items are durable, inexpensive and stop salt water soaking the inside of your vehicle after a session.



A typical freewave setup:

With this typical freewave setup I run through all the parts in my mind from bottom to top to check nothing has been missed: 103 litre board, single fin, set of tri fins, UJ, toe protector, 30cm mast extension, 400 mast, 5.3 sail, 140-190 boom.



Suggested basic tools of the trade

- 1. Screwdriver:** get this wrong and ruin the heads of your fixings to make later adjustments traumatic. Typically size 3 Philips for foot strap screws, and either large flathead or size 3 Philips for fin bolts and vent screws. Buy quality brands to last.
- 2. Long-nosed pliers or multi-tool:** a Leatherman Wave will serve you forever if looked after well. A Gerber Suspension is half a the price yet still very good.
- 3. Rig puller:** various types – or use a marlinspike hitch on one of your big screwdrivers – or use a rig winch for easy downhauling with zero back strain, never use your harness hook as I have witnessed 2 snap on the weld when downhauling and that certainly can lead to tears!
- 4. Batten key:** should be present in the sail bag pocket. Sizes vary between brands.



Suggested spares

- 1. Spare fin bolts:** I have lost many so I always have a good selection of bolts to fit my current kit as well as having the chance to get someone else out of trouble if I can.
- 2. Spare rope:** lengths: downhaul 2m; outhaul 1m, inhaul (or boom clamp rope) 0.5m. Thickness: 4mm. I only use Marlow Formuline 3.8mm Dyneema rope. It's a bit more expensive but specifically designed for windsurfing with no outer sheath to split, staggeringly strong, nice to handle and lasts better than anything else under strain in metal cleats.
- 3. Spare uphaul.**
- 4. Spare mast extensions.**
- 5. Spare RDM boom adaptor:** for using a standard diameter boom clamp with a skinny mast.
- 6. Mylar sail repair tape** (not shown).
- 7. Epoxy repair stick and disposable gloves:** for hand-mixing epoxy putty to give a temporary fix to board dings (not shown).
- 8. Spare UJ or replacement tendon.**

- 9. Spare vent screw and rubber washer:** Check regularly as the washer can perish over a relatively short time and getting water permanently trapped inside your board is the stuff of nightmares.
- 10. Spare harness lines.**

Other suggested essentials and extras (photo overleaf)

- 1. GoPro (in Super Suit) with Flymount mast/boom mount:** and Rainex for smearing over the front of the housing to stop water droplets sticking to the front which ruins the photos/video. Take spare memory cards and battery.
- 2. Mobile phone in a soft waterproof case:** to (maybe) take out with you as an emergency option around your neck and inside your wetsuit. This is not something I would tend to do myself yet, whilst windsurfing solo is never a good idea, some do it. As some paddle boarders now set off with a VHF radio to call the coastguard direct if they get into trouble I thought it worthy of a mention here as a possibility for solo windsurfers. Carrying it is

Suggested roof bar kit for cars or vans

- 1. Roofbars:** ideally adjustable with thick pads.
- 2. Buckle straps:** good quality surf branded ones like DaKine in sound condition.
- 3. Board bags:** to protect roof-racked boards (shown in large kit shot).
- 4. Yoga bricks:** good for placing between stacked boards on roof bars to prevent crushing of boards. Watch them for blowing away on a windy day when you unload the boards.
- 5. Cables and locks:** as a theft deterrent.





Other suggested essentials and extras

another matter though...1980s/1990s bum bag anyone? Sticking your car/van key in a soft waterproof case around your neck and inside your wetsuit is something I would recommend to avoid the classic 'leaving the key on top of a wheel'. A coded keysafe securely attached to your vehicle is another option for vehicle security when afloat

3. **Healthy packed lunch:** containing carbohydrates (to fuel muscles and brain and to keep you going for longer), low in fat and with an easy-to-digest snack like a banana...unless you're lucky enough to have a lovely café by the beach. Not forgetting to take a little bag of Scooby Snacks to keep you going and to share with grateful friends...
4. **Hot/cold drinks:** to keep warm/hydrated
5. **Backpack:** to chuck it all in the car/van

History repeating itself

Essentially think about taking as much kit as you can without being silly! You can always return it home unused but you can't use it if it's not there on the day.

Confession time. As I write this I am on the road on a 20-day coaching trip including South Wales, Weymouth and a number of inland locations. It was the middle of the no-wind heatwave of the decade when I left home and it still is. The long and short term forecast was for such little wind that, whilst I took kit as small as 4.7 and 103 I purposely ignored the advice I have just given above and left home without my 4.0 sail, 370 mast and 86l board on the basis that there was no way it would remotely be needed (probably at least until the late autumn). Then what happened? Over the last three days the forecast for the Weymouth area this coming Sunday has gone from 13 knots to 45 knots, the coaching is cancelled (giving me a day to play) and I'm despairing at my decision to leave the small kit at home just to save a little space. It's not the first time this has happened. Will it be the last?

Rip the seats out of the car and take it all.

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Sponsors: Starboard, Severne, Bray Lake Watersports, Spinlock and Flymount.

2019 Coaching Weeks:

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