

RYA Dinghy Sailing – Sailing with Spinnakers

Course Duration: 2 days (approximately 16 hours)

Pre-course requirements: RYA Level 2 – Basic Skills (recommended RYA Seamanship Skills or equivalent experience)

Minimum age: Centre dependent (usually 14+)

Assumed knowledge: Confident dinghy sailor with good boat handling and awareness of wind and sail trim

Course ratio: 1 instructor to 3 students (maximum 6 per instructor in double-handers)

Course Aim

To introduce sailors to the use of both symmetric and asymmetric spinnakers, developing the techniques required for hoisting, gybing, and dropping the sail efficiently and safely.

By the end of the course, participants will be able to use a spinnaker confidently, control the boat under spinnaker power, and understand how to sail effective downwind legs.

Course Outline / Programme

Day 1 – Introduction to Spinnakers & Basic Handling

Morning Session

- **Course Introduction & Safety Briefing**
 - Aims of the course and required outcomes
 - Review of personal equipment and boat checks
 - Wind awareness, points of sail, and downwind sailing principles
 - Introduction to symmetric and asymmetric spinnaker types and rigging
- **Shore-Based Session: Spinnaker Systems & Controls**
 - Parts of the spinnaker and key control lines (halyard, sheets, pole/ bowsprit, guy)
 - Rigging and de-rigging practice on shore
 - Crew roles and coordination during hoist, trim, and drop
 - Safety considerations – avoiding twists and wraps

Afternoon Session

- **On-Water Session 1: Hoisting & Dropping Practice**
 - Hoisting and setting the spinnaker on a reach and run
 - Basic trimming for power and stability
 - Dropping and packing the spinnaker efficiently
 - Steering and balance under spinnaker

- Short downwind runs with coaching support
 - **Debrief & Discussion**
 - Review of first handling experience
 - Identifying and solving common rigging and handling issues
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Day 2 – Refining Technique & Sailing with Confidence

Morning Session

- **On-Water Session 2: Gybing with the Spinnaker**
 - Smooth coordination of helm and crew during gybes
 - Pole handling (symmetric) / bowsprit operation (asymmetric)
 - Maintaining control and speed through the manoeuvre
 - Practising course shaping and angles downwind
 - Recovery from minor tangles or twists
- **Shore-Based Session: Theory & Tactics**
 - When to use a spinnaker and choosing downwind angles
 - Apparent wind and effective sail trim
 - Weight distribution and boat balance
 - Introduction to downwind tactics and racing applications

Afternoon Session

- **On-Water Session 3: Performance Sailing & Mini Races**
 - Using the spinnaker effectively on triangular and sausage courses
 - Efficient hoists and drops under pressure
 - Combining tacks, gybes, and trim for performance
 - Short course races and downwind challenges
 - **Course Completion & Debrief**
 - Personal feedback and performance review
 - Discussion of next progression routes (Performance Sailing, Racing, Instructor pathways)
 - Certificate presentation
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Assessment

Continuous practical assessment by the instructor. Students must demonstrate:

- Safe and effective hoisting, trimming, gybing, and dropping of the spinnaker
- Understanding of apparent wind and course choice
- Good coordination and communication between helm and crew
- Control of the boat under spinnaker power in a variety of conditions

Outcome

By the end of the course, students will:

- Safely and confidently handle both symmetric and asymmetric spinnakers
- Demonstrate good teamwork and coordination during all manoeuvres
- Understand downwind tactics, apparent wind, and trim
- Be able to use the spinnaker effectively for both cruising and racing
- Be ready to progress to **RYA Performance Sailing** or **Racing** courses