

Centreboard Secrets

We hardly ever notice the Centreboard (CB). It sits somewhere underneath and is easily forgotten. What is it? What does it do? What is it for? Do we really need it?

The CB is a 'long narrow plank' that sticks out under the (windsurfing) board, somewhere in the middle and behind the mast. That is **if** you push the handle backward - so it can descend. If you don't, it remains hidden inside the board.

Beginners will find that it helps them get more **stability**, especially on a narrow board.

The main reason for its existence is to prevent the board from side slipping as the wind pressures the sail. This is called **Lateral Resistance**, which is provided by both the Centreboard and the Skeg (= Fin). Without lateral resistance it would be impossible to sail up-wind. To test this you can try to sail up-wind end then raise your CB and try it again.

Some boards will not move up one inch. There are others, however, which are hardly affected unless the wind is very light. Why is that? Long boards with sharp rails will go up-wind without a Centreboard, especially **if** you push down the down-wind rail slightly. That down-wind rail will provide enough lateral resistance to keep the board on-track. This may not work too well when the wind is light.

Why don't we have a Centreboard (CB) on a shortboard?

The main reason is the wind strength. Shortboards are designed for high winds. In high winds most of the board is out of the water and only the last few feet are in. That means that the Skeg will provide all the necessary lateral resistance.

Another good reason is that as the wind gets stronger, we need to **lift the Centerboard up**, because it will cause **driving resistance**, which would slow down the board but also, more importantly, it can **cause the board to flip**. i.e. the CB gets pushed up by the driving force of the water, which makes it act like a wing. When we use a short board we don't want any of that!!!!

We don't need the CB either when we sail **on a run**, except maybe for stability. While on a **broad reach**, we may have it halfway up.

This brings us to **gybing**.

What do you do with your CB when you gybe?

In **light winds**, you will probably have the **CB down** all the time. So when you gybe, you can keep it down. But gybing a long board with a long CB is not easy. You need to step back on your board as much as you can, to **sink the tail**, while leaning your rig backward. Then while you are leaning your mast over to windward to initiate the turn, you can help the board turn by pushing down the windward rail. What does that do to the CB? It puts it on an angle and allows the board to pivot around it, while the CB is on the leeward side.

In **heavier winds**, you may prefer to have your **CB up**. Do this also, if you have trouble turning your long board. You still need to go to the back end of the board and **sink the tail**. But this time, you don't need to sink the windward rail. You can actually sink the leeward rail instead, as you need to do on a short board. That will give your body a bit more stability as it rides through the turn.

Finally, don't forget to pull up your CB occasionally, to free the **weeds** it may catch.

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