

By Tom Tursi, Maryland School of Seamanship

n accidental gybe can have disastrous results including serious injury or death of a crew member struck by the boom, ripping out of mast stays or breaking of the boom. It is essential to secure a boom preventer line anytime the wind is aft of the beam by one degree or more, since the pitching and rolling of a small boat at sea can produce an accidental gybe when least suspected when off the wind by even this small amount.

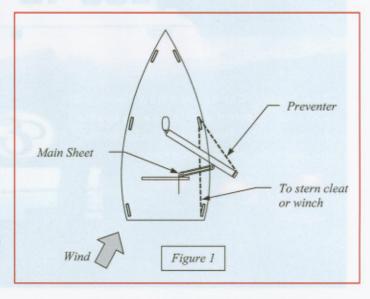
An accidental gybe can occur when sailing off the wind as the boat rolls and points down allowing the wind to get in back of the mainsail and slam it across the boat to the other side. To avoid this, a preventer line should be attached to the end of the boom and fastened to a cleat to hold the boom against the force of the gybe wind. There

are several ways to rig a preventer, and many boats are fitted with specially located blocks and fairleads for optimal routing of the lines for quickly rigging and de-rigging the preventer when needed.

However, a preventer can be

rigged on most boats using the midship cleat as a fairlead as shown in Figure 1. Use a braided line of bright color and the diameter of the mainsheet. and attach it to the boom. Then run it outboard of the lifelines and in through the center of the midship cleat, and back to a

cockpit cleat or secondary winch. Ease the mainsheet until the sail just touches the shrouds, then pull the preventer tight and secure it to the cockpit cleat or winch, and crank in the mainsheet to move the sail off the shrouds and tighten the entire system.



## plan ahead, set up, practice...

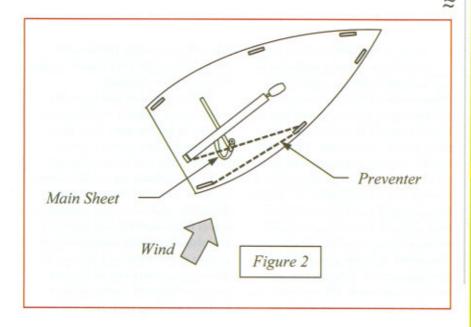
As an alternative, the preventer can be run to a bow cleat, but this is less desirable than the midship cleat since this longer line tends to get tangled in deck hardware or can be dragged under the boat. On larger boats, the main boom vang should never be used as a preventer as this is a sure way of breaking the boom when the boom digs into a wave on a leeward roll. For this same reason the preventer should always be rigged to the end on the boom where it will resist the forces generated by the boom digging in.

If an accidental gybe occurs with this setup, the boom will swing back toward the boat's centerline before being stopped by the preventer. The mainsheet will now be loosely slack due to the inward movement of the boom. The preventer will be pulled tight over the lifelines and probably cause bending of some lifeline stanchions, but this is preferable to the alternative damage or injuries previously discussed. And the boat will be trying to head up on its new tack as shown in Figure 2.

To get out of this bind, either gybe back to the original port tack, or proceed as follows to continue on the new starboard tack:

- Do not release the preventer as this will release the boom under wind pressure thus completing the accidental gybe, and could cause the severe damages previously noted.
- First quickly crank in the mainsheet tight in its winch
- Then ease the preventer slowly to the new tack, while keeping positive control of the preventer on its cockpit cleat or winch, and further tension the mainsheet as slack is produced by movement of the boom.
- After the boom passes centerline to the new tack, ease the mainsheet and traveler, shift the preventer to the other side and trim the rig as previously discussed.

And always remember that accidental gybes can be deadly, so plan ahead, set up and practice with your preventer line, and train your crew... it will pay off in the long run.





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