

NFIA Rules for Sails

This technical bulletin has been written to aid the understanding of the NFIA rules around sails and how they are written and work within our One Design Class.

In the NFIA rules, sails are covered within rule 9 with the Main Sail covered in 9.2-9.25 and the Headsail covered in 9.3- 9.36.

The rules are written to allow multiple sail makers to make and supply designs to the class. In the UK we are lucky as we have 2 main suppliers, Sanders Sails and North Sails. In Europe there are others like Elvstrom, One Sail as well as North Sails and others.

If we think about sails as the engine of the boat, we have a similar rule environment as Formula 1 where there is a rule on the engine used in the car and each manufacturer designs and manufactures their design within the parameters of the rules. It is the same with their Aerodynamic solutions. This is why all F1 cars are different, but they all meet the rules that govern their sport.

If you look at the ILCA dinghy they have a single supplier of the sails (a monopoly) and each sail is manufactured to strict pattern. This way every sail is meant to be identical. One reason for this type of one design class is and all the equipment is identical, particularly the mast. In the Folkboat class each boat traditionally has a different mast as they are made of wood and therefore there is variation on both their stiffness and bend characteristics. Today with the introduction of metal masts there are still differences from manufacturer to manufacturer and even taper from mast to mast due to manufacturing tolerances.

Therefore, the One Design Nordic Folkboat class and most other one design classes have rules written around a series of measurement points on the sails which determine the outline of the sail. This then allows each manufacturer to design and build a sail that fits within these measurement points but performs to the requirements of the mast stiffness and bend, the local conditions, the sailor's skill and/or technique of setting the rig and trimming the sails.

Over time different sailors and sail makers have developed different ideas on what works best for their customers and market environment.

Each Manufacturer develops their sails differently, some develop sail designs on request from a specific customer and some have a stricter development process. Neither is right or wrong they are determined by the structure of their business and customer base.

In the past, and to this day, if you purchased a mainsail from Sanders Sails you could then have it tweaked by recutting it to meet the characteristics of your specific mast. Whereas North Sails have two Mainsail designs, one for a wooden mast and one for a metal mast.

These two different approaches are just different ways of delivering sail solutions to their clients.

Headsails

Today, we have two active and committed sail makers that are pushing developments in designs to help the class develop and maintain its strong following as one of the best three-person keel boats for racing.

Since Simon Osgood and then Ed Donald pushed out into Europe, we have learnt many things about how our European counterparts set their rigs up and how they trim sails on different points of sailing.

When the Sessan and Walcon Cup's were held in 2022 at Lymington we saw first-hand that we needed to learn more about how best to set up a Nordic Folkboat. The learnings gained by Simon and Ed have helped us all improve as a fleet.

Today both UK sail makers have been developing new designs for headsails with all that has been learnt over the past few years.

Both sail makers can offer you these new designs, so I'd encourage you speak to them to find out more.

North Sails have given the Class Association a prototype headsail of their latest development and Sanders Sails are also in the process of giving the Class Association their latest developed headsail. I'd like to thank them both for their commitment to the ongoing development of the Class.

Both these Headsails are available for you to try so you can see which design works best for your rig set up and style of sailing. Currently the North Headsail is moving around the Yarmouth Fleet but should come to Lymington soon. The Sanders headsail should be with the Class Association shortly so will be available for you to try also.

All designs however, fit within the NFIA rules (9.3 to 9.36) and are therefore ok to be used for all competition.

Hopefully this has helped you to understand the way the NFIA rules on Sails work but if you wish to discuss further or have any questions, please feel free to make contact.

Kind regards

Cy Grisley
Technical Chair