

Companionway Spinnaker Pouch

By Dave Grover #138

A popular method of handling a spinnaker during racing is to launch from and retrieve into a pouch which is hung across the companionway. It makes for fast launches and take-downs, keeps crew off the front of the boat for some of the launch preparation and eliminates the traditional spinnaker bag repacking. This method also requires weather side takedowns which takes some getting used to. One drawback is having to relead sheets and guys if the spinnaker has to go up on the other side from what it has been set up for. We attach the sheet and guy to the halyard shackle and pull the whole group around when changing sides.

The pouch can be purchased from some sailmakers or you can make one yourself. It is an easy project for most anyone (see sketch below). The particular one we made is 24 inches wide (side-to-side), 20 inches front-to-back, and 18 inches deep. It is made of a heavy synthetic mesh or open weave material that sailmakers have used for the bottom of sail bags to allow water drainage and air to dry wet sails out. It can be purchased from most sailmakers. The top edges are hemmed and reinforced with a sewing tape material. Grommets are set at the sides of each top corner for clips to attach the pouch just under the deck each side of the companionway opening. We added a clear plastic pocket on the back side which can be seen from the cockpit which makes a handy spot for race instructions, courses, etc.

In use the pouch clips slide on two lines which run each side of the companionway opening fore and aft, extending under the deck forward toward the bulkhead so that the pouch can be pushed forward, out the way, so crew can get down below. We support the track lines in the middle for better support and clip the front of the pouch ahead of the middle. It will then slide forward until the back clips reach the middle support.

One of the secrets to launching from this location is to get the guy (pole) line and as much of the tack of the sail out of the pouch as far as you can as you prepare for the launch. When the spinnaker goes back in the pouch, the head and the tack/guy should be the last into the pouch so that they are ready for the next launch.

