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How to repair a sail

Knowing how to patch up a sail can get you home safely, extend your cruise and save you money.

Rob Kemp of Kemp Sails talks Rubicon 3's Rachael Sprot through sail repair essentials

FIXING A TEAR

1 A big tear in the body of the sail looks dramatic but is easy to fix. Don't use sail repair tape – PSA adhesive-backed sailcloth is much better than standard sail repair tape and it comes in large areas.



Clean off any salt and dry the sail, then put it on a flat surface – the deck, pontoon, or a wooden board. Cut a large patch with a generous surround as this is where the strength will come from. Round off the corners to prevent peeling. Don't sew the patch, as this adds a line of perforations which can weaken an older sail. Only stitch or use other glues as a last resort.

To stick on the patch, peel the backing off one edge, then gradually work the rest of the patch on to the sail, being careful not to introduce any creases.

Glue works with heat and pressure, so give it a good hard rub once you're done and this will help it to adhere. Repeat the process on the other side too. This technique will work on laminate sails as well as Dacron ones.

FIXING MAST SLIDERS

2 It's easy to break mast sliders, particularly if the kicker gets left on during reefing. Some boats attach the slider above a reef point with bungee, which can snap rather than damaging the sail or slider.



It's good to have spare sliders on board. These can be snapped on with a pair of pliers, or shackled. Failing that, use some loops of 12mm webbing to sew it on. Make sure the slider has the same stand off the mainsail as the other sliders so it takes an even amount of load. Stitch along the side of the loop, not across the middle, so that the slide can articulate fully to stop it jamming. To finish, tie a loose knot in the thread, then split the end of the thread and pull apart to slide the knot tight.

REEFING POINTS

3 Reefing spectacles can make reefing a lot easier, looping over the ram's horn without distorting the sail. Pass some 25mm webbing through the hole in the sail, through an O-ring and back through the sail to loop on another O-ring. Loop two or three more times. Set your

length at this point – longer for higher up the sail to get past the sail stack. Sew securely on the sides, at each end and in the middle.



OTHER QUICK FIXES

4 Cover areas of chafe with adhesive

patches, particularly where battens touch the rig. Battens can wear through pocket ends; a plastic pocket end can be bolted through the sail to secure. Leech line cleats also need replacing occasionally, so carry spares, and bolt rather than rivet them on. A Velcro clew strap can also help take leech loads and prevent tearing.



SAIL REPAIR TOOL KIT

- PSA sticky back fabric
- Adhesive fabric discs
- Sailmaker's palm – a good quality one will stop the needle slipping and stabbing you
- Scissors – cloth shears and splicer's scissors for cutting Dyneema
- Wax hand sewing thread and needles
- Webbing reels in widths of 12mm and 25mm
- Leech line cleats
- Spare sail slides and shackles
- Fid and bradawl – to make holes for heavy stitching
- A good pair of pliers to help pull the needle through
- Cigarette lighter for sealing threads
- Double-sided sticky tape to hold pieces in place rather than pinning
- Batten pocket ends
- M4 stainless nuts and bolts for sail fittings
- Vertical battens for furling sails, and batten joining kits
- Velcro webbing
- Dyneema line for lashings.



Watch the video online at yachtingmonthly.com/sailrepair