



## Steering for Speed

By Tom Tursi,  
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**MOST** of us have been taught to sail close hauled to the wind by using telltales on the jib as a guide. However, the telltales are often obscured by the mainsail, the dodger or other crewmembers. This requires the helmsman to hike out on leeward side and either strain to reach the wheel/tiller or use a hiking stick neither of which retains complete sensitivity to tactile feedback of rudder action. Also, by the time telltales break from their smooth flow position the boat is significantly off course and considerably slowed.

A better option than telltales is to steer the boat for optimum speed once you're on your desired heading. Racing sailors do this

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with their onboard computers and polar diagrams, but cruisers can do it with simpler tools: Get the boat on your best close hauled course by trimming sails to give good speed, heel and telltale flow. Observe the boat speed instrument for a few minutes noting the range of speed variations as you maintain good telltale flow, and mentally note what you consider to be the optimum speed for the current wind and sea conditions. Optimum speed is not maximum speed as you would then be heading on a reach and away from your upwind destination. Conversely, pinching

the wind too closely slows the boat below optimum speed.

Once you've established optimum speed for the prevailing conditions, forget the telltales and steer to maintain optimum speed plus or minus two-tenths of a knot. You'll find that the boat remains at a steadier speed without losing momentum, and, anytime you happen to glance at the telltales, you'll find them steaming just as pretty as you like. And this is oh, so much easier than straining to constantly see the telltales. Try it... You'll like it! And, by the way, you can also use this technique off the wind... ≈



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