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Boating Tip #58: Fairleads

Fairleads are pieces of hardware usually shaped like a chock or ring and located on fairlead tracks on the cabin roof on both the port and starboard sides of the boat. Sheets attached to the headsail clew are led through the fairlead on their way back to the cockpit. Fairleads change the angle of the sheet, therefor changing the percentage of tension between the foot (bottom) and leech (trailing edge) of the sail. They are also used to minimize friction on the sheets from vibration, and keep the lazy sheet (the windward line not in use) from moving around on the deck.

Fairleads can only be adjusted when the line is not under load, and the boat is sailing on the opposite tack.

When sailing to windward in strong winds, move the fairleads aft to put more twist in the top of the sail, reduce tesion on the leech, and spill wind. This will depower the boat and lessen excessive heel.

When sailing to windward in light winds, move the fairleads forward to flatten the sail. This will power up the boat.

When you partially furl the sail in order to reef (reduce size), move the fairleads forward.