

The Beginners guide to buying a board

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This information sheet is intended to be a guide for those of you looking to buy your first board and are not sure what you are really looking for. This is only a guide but will give you some guidance to help you get the right board.

- The first point is, never buy a board because of the colour or fantastic graphics! If you get a good board and this as well, that is a bonus.
- Buying 2nd hand, or should I say pre owned, is often a good way to get some cheap kit. There are pitfalls however. Be aware of the “windsurfer for sale only £100 advert”. Much of the older kit for sale really should be in a recycle bin, but there are good bargains to be had. You should always ask for advice from someone who knows about more modern kit. You should definitely avoid heavy, old, long plastic boards with enormous tie-on booms, no matter if the seller says that he/she learned on it and the whole family use it. I have to confess, however, I have an old F2 Sunset Slalom, my first short board and I still sail it as it is a classic and still performs well.
- Always try to sail a board before you buy it. With some sellers looking to move their 2nd hand kit there may be an opportunity to try it out first. There are also days when local shops or manufacturers have open days at sailing venues around the country where you can go along and try for free. The Alton Water Windsurfing action group are looking to get these up and going at the lake this year with support from a local retailer and some manufacturers.
- Visit a reputable shop that offers impartial advice. The nearest to Alton is Fluid Lines (01206 545533) in Colchester where you will receive a warm welcome and friendly advice without feeling pressured. Shops often have some kit for sale at the end of the year at good prices as they wish to clear out the shop to put in new lines for the season. Speak to Dave or Judy and mention you are a member of Alton Water.
- Sponsored sailors often have kit to sell as they usually have to sail their sponsors latest equipment and their ‘old’ kit gets sold on. Just be aware that the kit is sometimes well used and ensure that the price you are being asked to pay reflects good 2nd hand value compared with the new price, which shouldn’t be hard to find as the kit is seldom older than a couple of years.
- Look at the test write ups in magazines, but don’t get hung up on every fine detail in the report. Remember, the test sailors are professionals and as such are looking for the smallest details of differences between boards. Many mere mortals would not be able to judge the differences reported in the magazine write ups. If, however, they really slate a board and it is destroyed in the write up perhaps it is worth keeping that in mind.
- Most manufactures offer an all inclusive kit with board mast, sail and boom. These can be good value as it gets you on the water quicker but care needs to be taken to ensure the rig that comes with the kit is made by a well known manufacturer and is a good quality rather than a mass produced badly made sail that will look ok on day one but deteriorate rapidly and not give the enjoyment of a better sail purchased separately for a little more money. Board complete packages are, however, a good way to get started as it means that you don’t have to have detailed knowledge of boards, masts and sails separately.
- Each component of kit will have a full range of prices depending on material used, stiffness required, lightness etc. Much is written about these and obviously if you are buying a sail

the manufacture will recommend a mast to set the sail on. This is not always a sales pitch as sails are cut according to the way they are designed to sail under tension. This means a mast must have the right bend characteristics for the sail to perform at its best. It is possible, however, to have a mast or two that compromise between a range of sails you have in your quiver.

- When buying a board decide first on what type of sailing you want to do. This is perhaps the most important advice. I have known people buy wave boards and small sails then try to sail on inland waters where the conditions are not suitable for this kit. They often end up sitting around moaning at the wind and the venue. If you are a beginner, I would advise you to look for a board that will allow you to develop your skills and allow you to progress. Beginner boards, the type you probably learnt on, are not really suitable if you want to progress into higher wind sailing. This said, they can make good boards for family use and teaching friends but are limiting for someone looking to develop their skills.
- Modern windsurfing kit comes in a bewildering range of materials. Development is always happening and keeping up with these is a full time job. Modern boards are made in a range of materials and construction methods from polyethylene type (plastic) through to sandwich type board, ie. a polyester or epoxy resin covering what is usually a foam interior. Both are good for different functions and have different characteristics. Generally, polyethylene boards are heavier than their equivalent sandwich construction counterpart but are usually fairly bomb proof and take some rough handling. Sandwich construction boards are usually lighter but don't take well to being dropped on their nose! But in being lighter they tend to get going faster. Polyethylene boards are really for beginners and anyone looking to improve will want to move to a higher technical specification board that generally will perform better.
- The volume of board you buy also will determine how often you sail. If you buy a 95 ltr. wave board you will not sail often at Alton Water. If you buy a 135-150 ltr. freeride board then you will be able to sail more often. Unfortunately, this is also too simple a statement because the board you buy should also be considered according to your weight. So how do you determine volume? Basically a ltr. of board volume will support a kilo of weight on it. If you weigh 70 kilos, your rig is 10 kilos and the board's weight is 8 kilos then for the board to float the minimum buoyancy you require will be 88ltrs. If you bought this board and tried to sail it in a lull you would be standing on a submarine. To overcome this we allow for what is known as reserve volume. It is usual to add a bit onto the volume of the board to be safe and more comfortable in your sailing. Note negative reserve buoyancy means it will sink at stand still or slow speeds.

| To calculate volume | Weight in Kg. |
|--|----------------------|
| Sailors weight In wetsuit/drysuit inc. harness etc | 80 |
| Weight of Rig | 12 |
| Weight of board | 10 |
| Total | 102 |
| Volume of board | 180 |
| Reserve buoyancy + or - | +78 |

- The shape and design of the board also determines how it sails. Again, shapers spend years on looking at design. Over the years boards have developed from long narrow boards that were a bit unidirectional to shorter “fatter” designs that are more responsive. Another generalisation I know! Board shape is complex but board manufacturers do give you an indication of the designed use for most boards. If a manufacturer says that the board is a wave board it is likely to be quite low volume and designed to turn quickly on waves. It will not be designed to be the fastest board in a straight line. If a board is defined as a freestyle board then it is suitable for small waves/chop and flat water. Then there are race orientated boards which do what they say on the tin, they go fast. To make a commitment to modern spec. race boards you really need to want to race.
- Wider boards are more stable, plane more easily, carry larger fins and sails and can be more suitable for heavier sailors and beginners. They are more difficult to control in higher winds and chop. Narrower boards are slower to plane, carry smaller fins and sails, but are more stable in chop and suited to higher winds.
- Beginner/improver volume boards tend to be around 170-220ltrs. and often have a retractable dagger board. The length is usually between 260-290 cm and 80-90 cm width at widest point. Free ride boards suitable for intermediates and advanced sailors depending on sailing areas and conditions are 135-170ltrs, 250-270cm in length and 65-80cm in width.

Please remember at Alton Water there are many windsurfers who can give you advice and all you need do is ask. The club action group for windsurfing are happy to advise, if they can't help you they probably know someone who can.

These notes are a guide only and are not the definitive guide to buying kit but I hope they give you some guidance. They have been produced as one of the recommendations from the windsurfing action group. If you have any other suggestions to improve windsurfing at the club please let us know via the feedback page or, better still, come and join the action group.

Good windsurfing

Philip