

# Steersman

Toby Hodges reports on sail trials with the Steersman, a new prototype headsail sheet to tiller self-steering system



Ever since sails were first hoisted, sailors have been devising self-steering methods to relieve them of the tyranny of the tiller – windvanes, gyroscopic gears and sheet-to-tiller arrangements. We tested the prototype of a new device, the Steersman, using the headsail sheet-to-tiller method, on designer Rob Chicken's 30ft Klipper. Rob has mounted self-tailing primary winches on platforms pivoting on bearings, so the forces in the headsail are converted into course changes by an arm connected to the tiller.

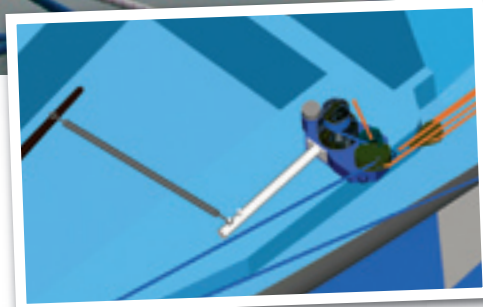
With wind pressure in the jib at its greatest close-hauled, the full purchase (4:1) is used. Simply set the sails, gauge the pressure on the platform, adjust the bungy tension via the cam-cleat and apply the tiller arm. On this point Rob's boat was comfortable enough for him to go below and prepare lunch.

## THE PURCHASE SYSTEM

You must get the boat properly balanced before engaging the Steersman. Three different diameter bungies (from 8mm to 14mm) are used for varying wind strengths. The amount

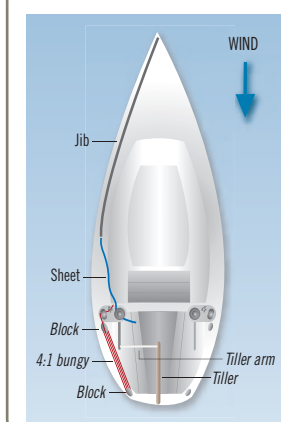
of purchase depends on wind angle, with tension adjusted by a cam-cleat. During our trials we used 4:1 close-hauled, 2:1 close and 1:1 beam reaching. The Steersman is currently only for 20-30ft tiller-steered boats, but a wheel-based version is in design. 'For safety you must set up a course alarm on your GPS and maintain a watch,' says Rob. ▲

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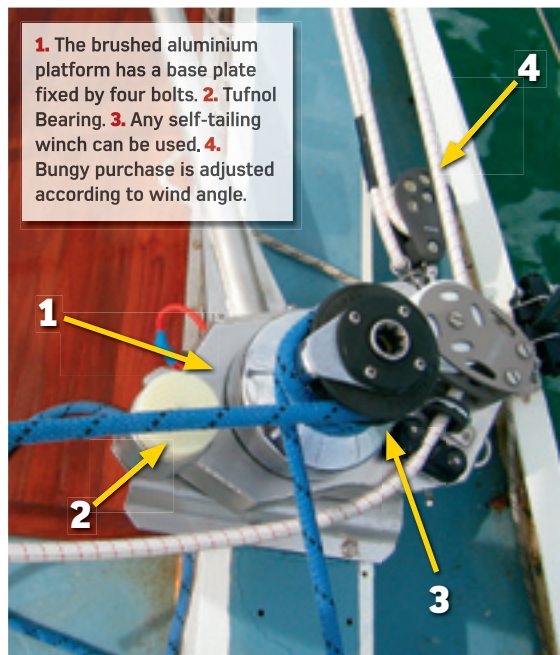


Downwind sailing, shock cord and jib sheet reverse their positions on the winch platform

## » CLOSE HAULED



When the boat luffs up and headsail sheet tension decreases, the winch platform is pulled back, by the bungy, which pushes the tiller to windward and puts the boat back on course.



1. The brushed aluminium platform has a base plate fixed by four bolts. 2. Tufnol Bearing. 3. Any self-tailing winch can be used. 4. Bungy purchase is adjusted according to wind angle.

## » PROS & CONS

### Pros:

- Less obtrusive than a windvane
- No electronics or battery power
- If you get a gust when close-hauled, the boat will automatically luff up

### Cons:

- Expensive
- Ungainly cockpit addition
- Deciding at what angle of wind to change the sheet lead to the quarter
- Temperamental off the wind
- Subject to the same weaknesses of other self-steering – so it won't work in light airs