

# New-Style Self Steering Gear

**I**NVENTOR Rob Chicken has developed a revolutionary mechanical self-steering system for sailing boats using the genoa or foresail as a wind vane to steer the boat.

The Steersman system consists of two units, each positioned on the cockpit coamings just astern of the jib sheet winches. These units are allowed to swing fore and

aft about a pivot point built in to the cockpit side of the unit. A turning block on the front of each unit guides the genoa sheet to the winch, and shock-cord spring is stretched between the stern end of the unit and some point at the stern of the boat.

When sailing, the jib sheet on the leeward side of the boat is tensioned up as normal,

then the spring is tensioned up to balance the pull. When roughly balanced, the lock is released, and the spring is then finely tuned.

At the stern of the unit is a short pole, with a simple fitting at the end. To complete the set-up, the steering pole is dropped into place, to connect from the end of the short pole to a similar fitting attached to a spoke on the wheel.

The spring consists of a length of shock cord fed through a double block at the stern end (usually attached to the pushpit), and a single block at the forward end which together with the 'cord-fixed-end', and the 'cord-free-end' are attached to the unit.

## WIND ON THE QUARTER

Interestingly from beam reach to broad reach, the relationship between the wind pressure in the sails and the helm reverses. A gust steers the boat up wind, and a dip steers the boat downwind. To

make The Steersman work on this quadrant, the spring and jib sheet are reversed for tiller steered boats, but for wheel steered boats, the steering pole is simply moved from the lower half of the wheel to the upper half.

The Steersman reacts instantly to the slightest change in wind pressure ensuring the boat is always kept on course, and is always sailing at its best speed, said Rob Chicken.

'It works from close hauled down to about 160° off the wind and unlike wind vane systems the whole assembly is within the cockpit area so there is no vulnerable framework outside the hull. The stern is also left clear so that boarding ladders, davits etc can be fitted.

'It is eco-friendly – no battery power needed, ruggedly built, needs minimal maintenance, and should last a lifetime. It can be used on tiller steered or wheel steered yachts, from 20 to 55ft, using any one of four appropriate models.'

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