



**SHEETS AND SAILS:** Testers were able to coax the drifter through the gap ahead of the forestay (far left). Furling and resetting the sail on the new jibe also worked well. For sheets, we used New England Ropes Flightline (left), a lightweight Dyneema-core line that floats and sheds water like a duck. Colligo offers a line of two-piece guides (below, left) designed for continuous-line furlers. A furled asymmetrical (below) makes for a compact package to stow.



## Light-air Furlers Offer a New Take on Sailhandling

**O**ur test sail, a 750-square-foot gennoa, proved to be valuable both in light-air, close-reaching conditions, and when the apparent wind was abaft the beam in 10- to 15-knot conditions.

The sail unfurled flawlessly on a beam reach, but it is best not to wait too long to begin furling when the breeze picks up. As with all light-air sails, there's a window of optimum use defined by apparent wind angle and velocity, and the closer you sail to windward, the lower the upper limit to wind speed becomes. We found that bearing off and blanketing the spritsail with the main made for relatively easy furling. If a snafu does occur, simply release the halyard to drop the sail conventionally.

Nylon asymmetrical spinnakers, especially deeper-reaching designs with significant draft, are harder to furl, and that's where the Bamar Roll-Gen and CDI Spinnaker Furler have an advantage. These units actually twist from the top-down, causing the sail to furl from head to foot. Even so, it's very important to work with a sailmaker on configuring the head of these sails. If

there's too much stiff reinforcement built in at the head, it may be difficult or impossible to properly furl the sail. These two units function by allowing the tack to remain immobile while the torsion rope sends the torque of the drum aloft to the head swivel, thus inducing the top down furling action. The result is a tight furl aloft that defies bulging nylon bubbles. The Roll-Gen incorporates a foam-covered torsion line that helps keep the furl compact and eliminates air bubbles. Uneven furling tension can pinch sections of nylon, causing furling problems that may require dousing the sail to remedy. Careful operation is essential.

When set up correctly, with enough spinnaker crane forward projection, the right amount of luff length and good halyard tension, these furlers make an easy job of controlling lots of sail area. The sailmakers we caucused were split on whether they favored a sock or furler system for asymmetric spinnakers. All liked the swivel and drum units for flatter-cut gennakers, drifter/reachers, and code sails.

In heavier wind, you clearly will want

to lower the tightly wound sail, bag it, and put it below. It also makes sense to lower and stow the sail when you're away from the boat, thus providing the best UV protection and eliminating the potential for a squall to peel open an upper portion of the leech.

We were surprised to find that in light air, a crew member could actually coax the big drifter through the two-foot slot between the headstay and the spritsail's tensioned luff. It was also a snap to furl the sail, tack the boat, and unfurl it on the other side. We considered setting the leads up to jibe these sprit furlers with the clew-forward approach used to handle asymmetric spinnakers, but quickly found that such complication was unnecessary.