

Kicking straps in the IOM class – Graham Bantock, 23rd October 2025

The Equipment Rules of Sailing

Kicking strap was not a defined item because even back in the early development of the ERS and Standard Class Rules this item had multiple forms ranging from a simple adjustable line to hydraulically operated struts. Their form included non-rigging devices to control the vertical angle between main boom and mast including compression struts mounted above the boom.

Omitting any definition from the ERS allowed each class to handle what was permitted in their class rules as they saw fit.

The IOM Class Rules

In the IOM class the kicking strap has always been treated as an item of running rigging. In the 1988 class rules the gooseneck and the mast attachment for the kicking strap were listed as permitted mast fittings. The kicking strap had to be attached to the boom and the mast only and could be adjustable. At that point it was assumed what was understood, under closed class rules, as the kicking strap was an item of running rigging that could only be worked in tension and it was not necessary to prescribe this. Later class rules prescribed that the kicking strap may only work in tension. As the ERS developed to define rigging as something that could only work in tension, it was only necessary to list the kicking strap as an item of running rigging to make this clear and stating the requirement to work only in tension became unnecessary.

The evolution of the gooseneck and kicking strap

From the earliest days it was normal for an IOM kicking strap to be a length of 1.5 mm diameter stainless steel wire with a hook at the upper end to engage in the boom and a length adjustment and attachment to the mast at the lower end.

A gooseneck is truly a relatively small connection between boom and mast. Since as early as 1984 the gooseneck became integrated with the kicking strap attachment, a concept popularised by SAILSetc and now commonplace. At some stage the size of the rotating part of the combined gooseneck and kicking strap fitting became large enough to be considered by some as larger than was necessary to function for its normal purpose alone and a limit to its size was introduced.

More recently one form of the kicking strap itself has developed into a plate of composite material. The first conspicuous use (to me) of this was on the boats of Jelacic and Kovacevic where the shape allowed it to 'bend' around the deck geometry and still attach low down the mast and in the usual place on the boom. The way their kicking strap worked was the same as the 'normal' kicking strap except that the length adjustment was at the upper end. From a technical point of view this device comprised the same elements as all the common forms of kicking strap in the IOM class.

In order that the size of such a kicking strap should be limited, using the approach used for the rotating part of the combined gooseneck and mast kicking strap attachment, a class rule was introduced to limit its transverse dimension(s).

With hindsight

As one of those responsible for the original IOM class rules, it is clear that more attention should have been given to this aspect of the class rules. Looking at the evolution of the class and the class rules with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, many other class rules could and should have been more

prescriptive than they were. This would have been at the expense of several more pages of the class rules which, at the time, many thought were already far too long and too prescriptive anyway. The lesson to learn here is clearly 'take no notice of those who want short class rules and take as much space as necessary to prescribe the type of boat and equipment that you need'. This would still not guarantee success of course – without certain knowledge of what will develop in the future there will still be scope for developments that are unforeseen and, sometimes, un-desirable.

So where are we now?

There has been a development of an item of equipment to solve a specific problem on a specific design of boat. A class rule change has introduced a limit to the size of the item where no previous limit existed. Other responses to the item were possible but no other was proposed. A further variation of the class rule is proposed to impose a tighter limit on size and which appears to continue to permit existing items. Owners can decide to vote for or against it and, if they wish, are free to propose further class rule changes under the procedures that govern class rule changes. That all seems perfectly reasonable.

End

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