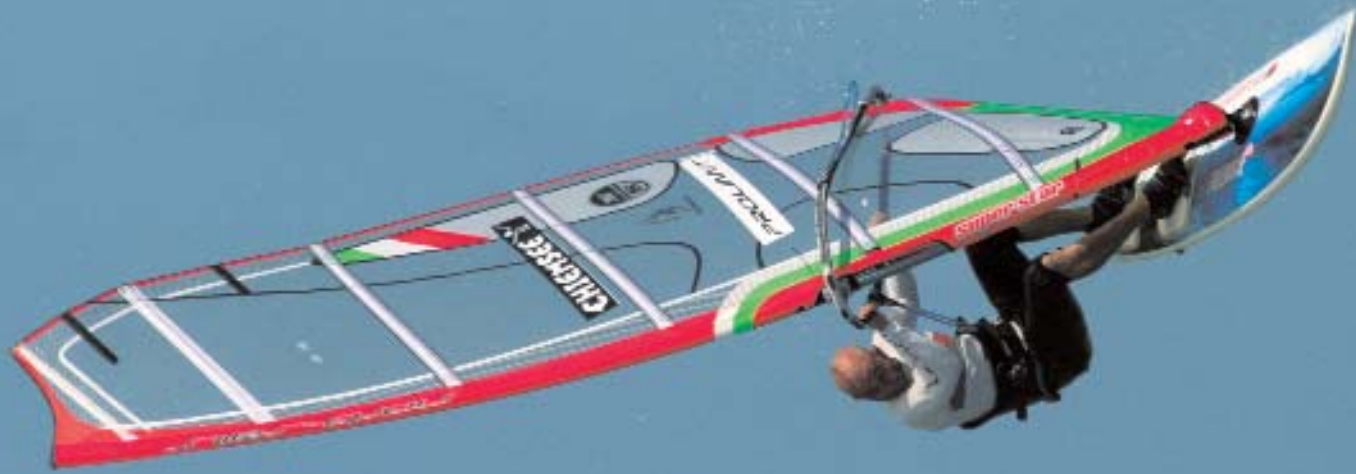


Often touted as windsurfing's hardest manoeuvre (at least the hardest *proper* manoeuvre, we're not counting ridiculous freestyle tricks here), the back loop has taken over to some extent from the forward loop as the move that sets seriously good sailors apart from the rest of us. But you know what? It's all a bit of a con; back loops aren't that scary, and they're actually pretty easy...



You can do the BACK LOOP!

OK, huge back loops in extreme winds *aren't* easy; they're about as dangerous and terrifying a move as windsurfing can offer. But once you've learned the basic technique you can build up to that (if you want). What we're dealing with here is your bog standard jump fairly high, hang in the air for a second or two, come round smoothly through the wind, land nose first and sail away backie. You might have dismissed it long ago as out of your reach, or never even considered it an option to dismiss, but times move on. If you're already a competent jumper then there's no reason why if you really want this move you can't have it – maybe even the next time you go sailing...

Extraordinarily Difficult???

You're not convinced yet, are you? You remember reading that the back loop is the highest scoring move in wavesailing competition. And when you did pluck up the courage to try one you landed on your back with a painful thud. Or indeed, you might not yet

➤ Jem Hall demonstrates how it should be done...



have actually attempted *any* sort of loop, be it forwards or backwards, and assumed that back loops weren't something you should even consider attempting until you'd mastered forwards. But whenever you've thought about trying forwards you've – ahem – not found any suitable waves to jump off, or always been “a bit overpowered”. Or maybe you just know deep down that your waveriding is shaky to say the least, and even your gybes aren't that solid, so back loops shouldn't be appearing on your horizon yet – indeed, chances are that anyone seeing you reading this article may spontaneously confiscate your magazine because it is so inappropriate for you...

So how can we now be saying that you can now bypass all this, collect £200 and proceed directly to back loops? Because you've been conned. Done up like a kipper, ripped off big-style. It's time to reveal the truth – there was a secret plan hatched years ago by top sailors and magazine editors to spread the word that back loops are really hard, thus keeping to themselves a decade's worth of sponsorship, free kit and the best women. But now the truth is out. Readers, it's time to reclaim your share of the glory...

Really Easy, Honest!!!

All you need to land and sail happily away from a towering back loop is to be able to do vertical jumps with some degree of control. That means you have to be able to sail at a steep take-off ramp, be it a wave or a suitably shaped piece of chop, launch yourself and your kit straight up into the air, not let go, float down and land tail first. Think you can manage that? (If you don't think you can, then first read Jem's separate section on getting ready to start trying back loops.) Then read on...

Before we go any further, I know what you're thinking: “Everyone knows that back loops are really hard. I don't actually believe a word of your ‘secret pact’ conspiracy theory – so what



exactly has suddenly changed? How can it possibly be that the average reader could consider doing them?”

Well, the modern kit certainly makes them rather easier. It's lighter and more responsive in the air, and easier to control on the water, which means your take-off and flight is easier on a newer board and rig. But the real truth is that back loops were *never* that hard. It's just that everyone always said they were. Duncan Coombs was the first to do them in the UK and back then they were cutting edge and radical, and yes, by the standards of any other move out there they are pretty ‘hard’. Hardly anyone bothered to try learning them because of this, and slowly but surely an incorrect assertion became set in concrete. The myth became accepted reality.

How do I know all this? Because I learnt to back loop the other day, and it was remarkably easy. Which does rather prompt two questions:

Q1: If back loops are so easy, why didn't I learn them years ago?

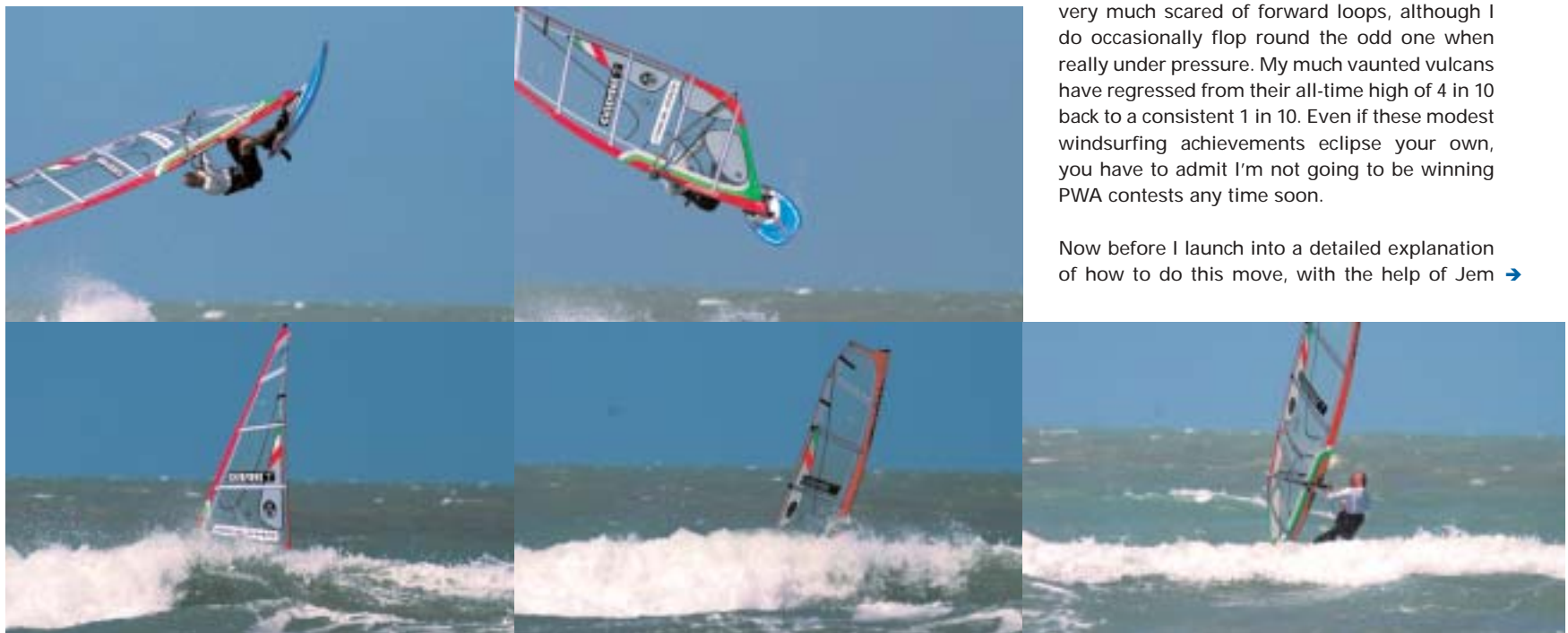
Q2: Doesn't this simply prove what a hotshot sailor I am?

To which I'd answer:

A1: Because no-one told me they were so easy! I believed the myth that they were the most difficult move in windsurfing. Since my standard was always fairly average, I never really (properly) tried one – until the day that I landed two.

A2: Very kind of you to say so, but no. I'm still very much scared of forward loops, although I do occasionally flop round the odd one when really under pressure. My much vaunted vulcans have regressed from their all-time high of 4 in 10 back to a consistent 1 in 10. Even if these modest windsurfing achievements eclipse your own, you have to admit I'm not going to be winning PWA contests any time soon.

Now before I launch into a detailed explanation of how to do this move, with the help of Jem →





Gregg captured in the classic 'learner back loop' sequence with a horizontal rotation through the apex. If he had held on he might have made it, but as it is he gives a nice demonstration of the safe way to bale out!

Hall and Mr Back Loop himself Andy King, I do have two important caveats to add to all this.

First of all, it might just be me. It's possible that I'm wrong and back loops are really really difficult. It could just be that the type of jump I naturally tended to do really suited back loops, so all I ever had to do was hold on and around I'd go. Do I think this is the case? Yes and no. 'Yes' because the reason I actually went for back loops in the first place was because after a sailing session with Andy King, he asked me why I kept doing the first part of a back loop and then 'undoing' it, to land as a normal jump? I had no idea I'd been doing this and accept that this does suggest I was rather naturally inclined – quite by chance and I really don't mean naturally gifted – to do back loops. 'No', because I don't really jump any differently to anyone else as far as I can tell. It's just on this occasion, because it was very windy, I was jumping a little more into the wind than normal.

Secondly, I feel duty-bound to point out the drawback of back loops over forwards. Because they're nowhere near as scary to go for, it's easy to get cocky after you've landed a few and go for them off the biggest waves you can find. But if you get them wrong there is undoubtedly a *significant* risk of injuring yourself. I've so far only

actually landed about 15 back loops, all on starboard, and I remember the last one particularly well as it's the last time I can remember not feeling pain in my left foot. With confidence and altitude at an all-time high I mistimed the landing and over-rotated at the last minute, the tail of the board hit the water really hard and BANG, one knackered foot (technically a compressed *calcaneum*) that doesn't seem to want to get better and is currently resisting the efforts of my chiropractor. So this is a warning. There is no question that attempting back loops is considerably less scary than attempting forward loops, but there is also definite potential for injury with the move, so treat it with respect. However, if you build up to the huge backies gradually, and learn when to hold on and when to let go, you shouldn't find yourself in traction any time soon.

So how do you do them? With any move it is easier to break it down into several parts to analyse and comprehend it. With the back loop you can divide it into the *Approach*, the *Take-Off*, the *Ascent*, the *Apex*, the *Descent* and the *Landing*. For a perfect loop you simply need to get each stage right, and then the next stage just follows on quite naturally, resulting in a graceful flowing loop. Easy...



A nice sequence of Captain Crash going for it in Brazil, demonstrating a number of good technique points. The take-off could have been a bit more vertical, but he achieves excellent rotation nevertheless. On the way down a bit more looking over the front shoulder would have helped him spot the landing better. As it is, the back leg has straightened which makes for a flat (and probably painful) crash – keep that back leg bent!

THE SOFA BACK LOOP

Where you are sitting right now is an excellent place to actually 'learn' the back loop, or at least the body positions you need to get into when you're out there. The *sofa back loop* isn't quite as spectacular or exhilarating as the real thing, but by getting a feel for it you'll need less attempts on the water before you're landing them for real.

Top Tip: Try them on one of those swivelling executive office chairs where you can lean right back for extra authenticity.

To turn your sofa into a realistic windsurf board you'll need one copy of *BOARDS Magazine* – this one is fine – and a small dose of imagination. Decide which tack you'll most likely be sailing for real and adopt a comfortable sitting-in-the-harness slouch with your hands gripping the top of the mag as if it were the boom (overhand grip only please) for that tack.

As you're going up you leave the rig very slightly behind you, and look up to where you're going, leaning back slightly. At the apex you roll the rig over so that from the boom pointing upwards and everything going up, you smoothly pull down on the front hand so that the boom is pointing down. For the descent you hold it in this position, looking back down towards the water and finally in the landing you follow right through, looking all the way round toward the direction you were first going and pulling the rig with you. I can sail away from them every time on the sofa.



“ ...get up there and
 have a little look and
 feel what it's all about...”

Approach

Picking the correct type of wave is absolutely vital. Back loops are incredibly difficult off the wrong type of wave, but really rather easy off the right ones. You're looking for a wave or (a lot harder to find) a steep piece of chop that has an open, unbroken face offering you a near-vertical take-off ramp. Ideally it will be rolling in just upwind of your beam reaching direction, meaning that to hit it fully square on you will have to carve up into the wind as you take off. And this is the really important bit: When you take off from the wave it should kill all or nearly all of your forward speed. So you've got to be going straight up in the air; don't even think



about a backie if you're not. You'll never learn to back loop if you don't take this point on board, and you might hurt yourself too. The next very important thing is to have **plenty** of speed. Watch a pro sailor going for a back loop and they'll bear away like crazy before they head up and go for it, to get as much speed as possible. Speed equals height equals more points for them, but it also give you more *time*. You don't want your first back loop attempts to be the highest jumps you've ever done, but you do want them to be good, high jumps – so when you see the right type of wave, bear away and get some good speed, and then start to carve firmly upwind to hit it head on.

Top Tip: *Although you'll probably unhook naturally, don't make a point of unhooking from the harness, because you might want to build up to one-handed back loops, for which you need to be hooked in the whole way round.*

Take-Off

With a forward loop you need to do several distinct things at take-off; sheet in hard, tuck your legs underneath you, look behind you and so on. Whereas with the back loop, apart from moving your hand further down towards the clew of the boom like in a forward, you don't really need to do anything else. Or at least nothing else that can be clearly defined, because you still do need to set the rotation moving. This is done by simply carving upwind as you go up the wave. How hard you carve depends on how high you're going. If it's going to be a low back

loop you need to carve hard to rotate fast, if it's a high loop carve slowly to rotate slowly. In each case you want the apex of the jump to be the midpoint of the loop. I'll say that again as it's important: **You want the point where you stop going up, hang for a fraction of a second and start to fall back down to also be the exact point where you pass through the eye of the wind.** If you don't quite make this then all is not lost, there are a few little tricks that an experienced back looper can pull out of the bag to rescue things, but for a perfect, classic back loop you need to time the speed of your rotation to match the height of your jump so that the midpoint of

the jump is also the midpoint of the loop.

If that sounds difficult, that's just because it is. It's this element that has given the back loop its reputation as a difficult manoeuvre, and to get it right every time you need to do hundreds of them and build up a base of experience in your mind. But who cares about getting them right every time? Let's face it, we're not pro sailors competing for our livelihoods – you'd be happy right now if you landed one for every ten you tried, right? So the key to success in the early days is to try and pick about the same sized ramp every time. If you keep your speed about constant as well you'll go up a similar height for each attempt, which keeps things a lot more simple. For your first few attempts go up, wind

HAVE A LITTLE FEEL...

If the idea of rotating all the way round is a little daunting right now, then to ensure you get excellent back loops in the future, the first thing to do is make sure you are getting your vertical jumps right. Take off with speed on a vertical ramp, and with more weight on the back foot look up and project the kit above you.

Once you have got your vertical jumps and are getting some big air and decent hang-time then it's time to go halfway. You'll see pro sailors doing this; they go super-high, have a little feel; look over their front shoulder and then either decide yep big backie coming up, or they look forward again and then just float down without rotating. This is highly recommended as it gets you concentrating on getting high and gives you an excellent starting point from where to initiate your back loop rotation. Ever wonder why they go so high in Pozo; it's because they want to, and from there they can do what they want. Now for mere mortals having height will give you that all important commodity – time! So get up there and have a little look and feel what it's all about.

Jem Hall

backloops

➤ Project the board upwards and go vertical. From here you are ready to start looking and try some rotation, or just float down tail first.





THE FLAT WATER BACK LOOP

Tristan Boxford demonstrates that it is possible to get round even off the tiniest of ripples, if you have enough speed and commitment.

- 1) Get loads of speed up and look for any small windchop or slight ripple upwind and ahead of you – widen your grip on the boom, so that you have good control over the sail for both take-off and landing
- 2) Sheet and carve into the wind and if possible gain extra momentum through launching off a ripple or piece of chop – aim to get airborne as you are already about 45 degrees into the rotation.
- 3) Pull up hard on your straps and as you leave the water, make a conscious effort to look straight over your shoulder into the rotation – this should help you initiate and follow through with the complete loop. It will also help you achieve a clean landing
- 4) As you land, keep your weight back to avoid the nose burying too much and let the wind fill the sail to help push you through the last part of the rotation

The important thing with going for back loops in flat water conditions is to get the speed. Concentrate on that rather than the height – it is the speed which will ultimately get you round!

it up into a back loop jump, then unwind it again to land without going around, that way you can get a feel for how much you need to throw it to rotate at the right rate.

Ascent

This is an easy bit. Assuming you've got your take-off about right, just hold on and enjoy the ride. You'll be soaring up into the air and turning slightly into the wind. (Check the sofa back loop position for going up to see where your arms should be.) Look right up towards the apex of the jump and wait. However, if things aren't going quite to plan at this stage: **Stop looking up and around the loop if you feel you're rotating too fast.** Literally just glance back at the tail of the board and then look into the rotation again. You can also try 'braking' the sail by sheeting it out and straightening your front arm, as this can help to slow down the rotation. If you've really overcooked it then you could be heading into a push loop, in which case don't go for it quite so much next time.

If you're not rotating enough then you can try sheeting the sail in and pulling it towards the back of the board (which makes you head up the same as it does when you tack) and really twisting your head and looking in the direction you want to rotate, but you'll struggle to ever get fully around unless you've actually started the rotation as you've taken off.

Apex

This is the good bit. When you've run out of 'going up' but before the 'going down' has really kicked in, you just hang there for a second totally weightless. Many top sailors describe this as the best feeling there is when windsurfing. Just thought I'd drop that little nugget of extra incentive in there. The standard coaching tip you'll receive here is to "look down and spot your landing", which is absolutely correct, but if like me you don't find it that intuitive then here's what it means: As you go up the jump you're looking up, with your head slightly to one side. In order to look down you need to roll your head forward and over to

TESTING THE THEORY

Before we decided to unleash back loop carnage on the nation, we tested out the theory that the move is easy and can be learnt by just about any average competent waveboard sailor. We gave Ed Frisby, who was a guest tester for our 2006 wave board test in Pozo, just three days to learn the move. He is a very solid sailor from Devon with plenty of experience sailing in waves both at home and abroad, with solid waveriding and fairly impressive freestyle skills too, but his jumping is strictly limited to big, standard, safe jumps. In around 16 years of windsurfing he's never actually tried a back loop, claims to have tried about 10 forwards around 12 years ago (I personally don't believe him) and has never tried a tabletop. So according to our theory he's

perfectly ready for back loops. We spent the first week of the trip gently winding him up, and then we unleashed him. Here's Ed's three day diary of how he got on:

I read the article and watched the move on DVDs over and over. Fully up for learning it, but nervous about injuring myself and having the bottle to go for it at the right moment.

Day 1: *Did not try any back loops. Did however look over my shoulder briefly on a few vertical jumps just to get an idea of what the landing area would look like. This reduced the fear of the unknown, but despite a lot of pressure I couldn't get myself to actually go for it.*

Day 2: *The previous evening's 'buy one get one free' vodka sales policy at Playa del Ingles seemed to have somehow turned off my self-preservation switch. First run out saw a perfect small vertical ramp, no-one was in the way, flat landing area, went up, got to the top of the jump in the normal way, then initiated the back loop by looking over my shoulder – and crashed very softly nose first. Tried a few more with the same result.*

Day 3: *Tried one a little too energetically which resulted in more of a push loop axis of rotation and crashed (not too heavily) on top of the kit. The mistake was that I forced the rotation from the moment I travelled up the ramp.*

Tried another. This time initiated at the top of a



the other side which changes the angle of your shoulders and then your torso, which is just enough to pull the rig gently but firmly through the wind at the top of the loop. So all you need to do is make a clear point of looking down (not down back behind you but down over your front shoulder) and the rest will just happen. As long as you look down you'll automatically roll the rig over with you and start your descent down. Hero status awaits.

Descent

The descent is very much like the ascent: you're still looking where you want to go and you're waiting, this time for the final part; the landing. Just like the ascent there isn't much actual rotating to do as you go down, most of the first half of the loop happens right at the top, and most of the second half happens right at the bottom. The main difference is that while on the way up you were looking up and the nose of the board was pointing up, now it's pointing down and you're looking down as well. You are aiming to land very nose first and on a run or broad reach, and if you haven't timed things quite to perfection you can use the tips in the *Ascent* section for speeding up or slowing down the rotation slightly. If you've really overdone it, this might be a good point to bail out.

vertical jump, went round real nice and landed super-softly, unfortunately I over-balanced on landing and ended up getting wet, but it was basically a proper back loop that I fell in after landing. Witnessed by several people and even captured on camera (revealing eyes tightly closed on landing!) This a real morale booster and hopefully by the time you read this I will be well on the way to making the backie my trademark move.

The biggest hurdle for me to get over was my mental block regarding aerial rotation. Unfortunately I cannot fully explain how I got over this. Bullying / encouragement from friends certainly helped!

As soon as you look over your shoulder you can see your general landing area, which really

helps maintain your spatial awareness. At no moment did I not know where I was in the air. This cannot be said for many of the other wipe-outs I have enjoyed over the years.

My one main piece of extra advice would be to stay calm. You do not have to be fired up as in forward attempts. Just hit a vertical ramp calmly, reach the top of the jump and then start the loop. You must kill the forward movement by going straight up.

Try to understand what is going on in the air. If you do not fully understand the difference between a push loop and a backie then watch some movies. You may well end up doing a few pushies inadvertently. You may crash these straight on top of your kit and as such pushie

rotations should be avoided as much as possible as part of learning to backie.

I didn't let go on any of my attempts and with hindsight this was the right course of action. On some types of crashes (that I am resigned to probably encounter in the future) I do recommend letting go – e.g; full backie over-rotations.

Landing on top of your kit because you've gone into a push loop is not fun. In addition, I have 2 friends who have hurt their ankles badly landing backies over-rotated. But if you want to make an omelette you are going to have to break some eggs and this particular omelette tastes good. Get involved...

Ed 'The Rotater' Frisby

backloops

“All you need to **land** and sail **happily** away from a **towering back loop** is to be able to do **vertical jumps** with **some** degree of **control**.”

Landing

With the nose down and body back you are aiming to touch down nose first, 'spearing' the water so that the nose goes right under, straightens out and then finally resurfaces facing back in the direction you were first sailing. On a good one you may sink right up to your waist, and you do the last part of the loop almost underwater. Straighten your back leg, push down

with your heels (just like you're heading up sharply) and most importantly look around again up over your front shoulder in the direction you want to go. As you touch down there is suddenly a lot of power in the sail, and the looking round bit helps to exhaust it effectively.

A couple of pumps and you should be planing again, shaking your head in total disbelief. You really did just do a back loop... ☺

