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MAST and BOOM

The kicking strap is now attached to the mast and boom via webbing straps that are intended to spread the load but also only require one rivet to attach them. This is intended to minimise breakages and as far as I can judge does seem to be working. Certainly it is hard to see that Topper International could reasonably be asked to do more and it's now up to us to treat them as well as we can.

However with improving racing techniques being applied, especially, in stronger winds and particularly with the improved downhaul, the forces being applied to the spars of our 'beach boat' is amazing and well beyond their originally intended use! It is fantastic how well they last and we will want to do what we can to make that even better.

Ok so how should we treat our mast and boom to get the best use and longest life out of them?

It is useful to understand that Aluminium has a life cycle. It starts life as quite a soft metal that only becomes harder with use. It is said to 'work harden' so that as it flexes it becomes springier over time and the springier your mast and boom become the better they perform (You may have heard that Laser sailors used to strap their upper mast to the roof of their cars and drive around for a week or so to speed up this process!). Less useful to know is that they also 'age harden' so if you buy a new mast now and leave it for 20 years or so it will be excellent! This hardening process continues over time and use and becomes better and better until eventually the metal becomes too brittle, develops hairline cracks and in due course will break (usually at high stress areas like around rivets).

So new spars need 'running in'. A few sessions in medium conditions would be ideal. If you are forced to take brand new spars out in strong winds then try not to put too much force on them until they become more springy. Put too much force on them too early and they will bend and stay bent. You have been warned!

Dave Cockerill