

OK, it's old hat – people have been doing it for the past decade. But it is still a major milestone for any windsurfer. The common preconception about looping is that it is only for the young and brainless. But, having just pulled off his own very first forward rotations, our 43 year-old Test Editor would beg to differ. So this month, as well as dazzling you with a *Move of the Month* that you can admire but never hope to emulate, **Ian Leonard** attempts to spur into action anyone of a competent sailing standard who is yet to sheet in and peer over the front. Pix by **Mark Mills**...

LOAD – AIM – LOOP

All the articles that I have ever read and most of the advice that I have ever been given have glossed over the one great truth about learning to loop. It comes down to a split second. You either do it or you don't – and everything else is talk and prevarication.

If that sounds uncompromising, well it is. There will always be a million reasons not to pull the trigger. I've travelled with my looping gun loaded for some ten years. I've been a good enough sailor, I've had the motivation, rehearsed the techniques in my mind and had the opportunity twenty or thirty times a year, maybe more. But I hadn't pulled the trigger.

Until today.

30th Nov 2001, at about 2.00pm. Not that I'm proud of it or anything... And that's why I'm writing this article. There's no better (or more annoying) teacher than someone who has only just learnt the manoeuvre. And I am now in a position to tell you that finally, the only technique tips which really count are to go for it as committed as if you had been doing it all your life – and do it the *very next time* that you've got a small wave in front of you!

THE INTENTION TO LOOP

OK, so now it's time to be a bit easier on you. The wave isn't there right now and you need to make sure you've got a few things in order first. It is a manoeuvre that requires preparation; technical, physical and psychological. It's not *difficult* though – don't let that be an excuse. If you can jump high off a wave and land OK then you're there on skill level.

The psychological preparation is important. Not just because it saves you from having to simply pluck up courage and do it when the time comes, but because if done right it can lead you to that moment, clearing away all the fears, distractions and excuses and driving you towards the objective.

The first thing is to be honest about your intention. Do you *want* to do it? Have you got it in you? If the answer is yes then be up front about it. State that intent; to others if you like, but most importantly to yourself.

The next thing is to know that you understand the move, basically how it's done and how to avoid any pitfalls. Thus you will feel ready to take it on.

The final preparation is to state clearly the place, conditions and equipment that you will do it on, so that when they come together the moment has irrevocably arrived.

To help you with this we have put together an 'intention to loop form'. The next two sections will explain it and help you to fill it in. The rest is up to you.

LOADING YOUR LOOPING GUN

You'll need to know a few techniques and take a few precautions – for sure you'll know most of them already.

Techniques

I'll deal with these first as they are the easiest to get dialled long before you do your first attempt. And you'd be mad not to. Watch videos! Look at pics! Visualise. It works. Anyway, in the 'loop according to me' there are just two basic techniques. If it's the full sequence you want, look elsewhere. I'm only going to tell you what makes the difference between it working and not. You'll have heard both these techniques before, but please study the small print.

1) Sheet in hard: The most understated piece of advice ever! If you sheet in like you are trying to squeeze a bit more power out of a dying wind you probably won't even get far enough round to give yourself an earache. Sheet in like you have never sheeted in before. You will have heard that you should place your back hand down the boom, so do just that as you run in to the wave. As you take off thrust the sail forward vigorously with the front hand and sheet in hard with the back hand. Look at those pix of the good guys doing it – they have their knees scrunched up against the sail under the boom – that's how well sheeted in they are.

Sheeting in is the key to getting the rotation going – and I can assure you that as you are hanging in the air looking straight down at the sea you're going to be wishing that you had sheeted in with *even more* conviction a little earlier in the manoeuvre. Don't be scared of over-rotation – it just won't happen in your first attempts. Think of it as trying to pull the clew into your nipple.

2) Pull your back leg up under your bum: As you do this, twist around and look back over your shoulder. OK, so actually this is three techniques masquerading as one. I just didn't want to make it seem complicated 'cos it isn't. The best way to explain this is to talk you through it as though you are doing it.

Let's say that you expect to do your first loop on port (heading out into the waves with the wind coming from the left). Stand up as you read this. Stand on your left foot. Pull your right heel under your bum at the same time as spinning clockwise (to the right), rotating your shoulders and looking round as far as you can in the direction of spin.

Great. Now if you aren't too put off by people laughing, add in the sheeting in back hand and pushing forward front hand and practice this ridiculous movement until it becomes so natural that you find yourself doing it in Tesco's. See if you can get round 360 degrees without falling over or going dizzy! Tomorrow, make yourself do it every now and then as you are walking along. If you can get right round in a split second without having to think about it you have developed the muscle memory that you will need to make your life considerably easier when the time comes.

If you are having trouble visualising the movement, have a look at the picture sequence – just don't ignore it thinking it's silly. Silly it may be, but it's also vital.

PRECAUTIONS

Your gun will never be properly loaded until you are basically confident of the 'risk

It's all in the Visuo-Motor-Behaviour-Rehearsal... That's practice to you and me. You've got to expect to suffer for your gains and unless you're committed enough to throw yourself into silly contortions wherever you happen to be, maybe you don't want it badly enough! You've got to groove those actions until they're the most natural thing in the world to do when you've just hit a wave on a windsurfer. If you scare a few innocent members of the public in the process – that's just inevitable collateral civilian damage in a greater cause!

Grab the boom...
Push and sheet in and twist the head...
Commit to the rotation...
Raise that foot a little higher if possible...
Regain your composure...
She seems to agree that I need to be committed!



management' implications. Follow these to the letter and you are very unlikely to really hurt yourself.

1) Keep all four corners attached

• **Golden Rule 1:** Hold on tight with your hands. So long as you sheet in hard, this simple but essential tip will make it almost impossible to land on your rig. Repeat it as a mantra; *"don't let go."*

• **Golden Rule 2:** Wedge your feet in the straps. I put on neoprene boots and then stuffed these miles in to well padded straps. It took me five minutes preparation to ease myself out of them every time I came to gybe, but they still popped out a couple of times whilst looping. You don't need to go to the extremes I did, but you really must be very confident that your back foot in particular will stay put. It can be done with foot pressure (which is how the experienced loopers do it), but at this learning stage that just gives you one more thing to think about at the critical moment, so doing it with layers of neoprene may be a better bet. You've probably seen what happens to people who come out of the straps half way through a loop. If not, then it's probably best for morale that you keep it that way...

2) Protect your ears...

Thousands of people have learnt to loop without taking this precaution, but then again quite a few have had perforated eardrums to show for it. If you are looping on port you are very likely to land hard on your left ear, on starboard, your right. Remembering to look hard over your shoulder is the best prevention but there are more reliable ones. Chemists sell little squidgy foam ear plugs that cost half of nothing so if you buy enough and sprinkle them around your windsurf bag you'll never have this excuse. I can't 100% guarantee that they will prevent damage, so helmets are another or

additional sensible alternative so long as they give some protection around the ear. Personally I just used a dodgy looking neoprene hat but I'd rather that information didn't get around. It could wreck my reputation...

3) ...and your back

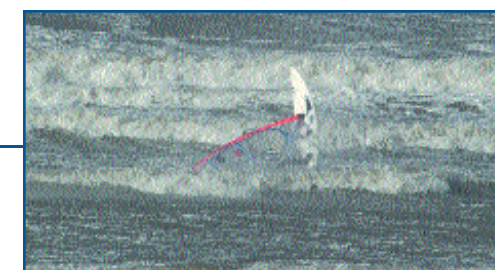
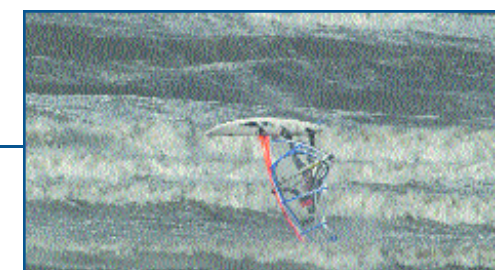
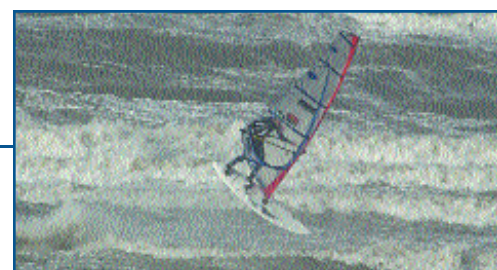
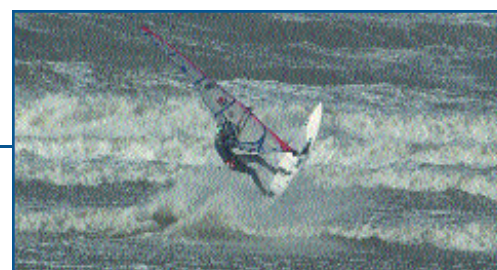
In the event of your doing this in sunny climes, for God's sake wear a thick neoprene something on your back. The next step up from the ear-first landing is the back slap landing...

TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

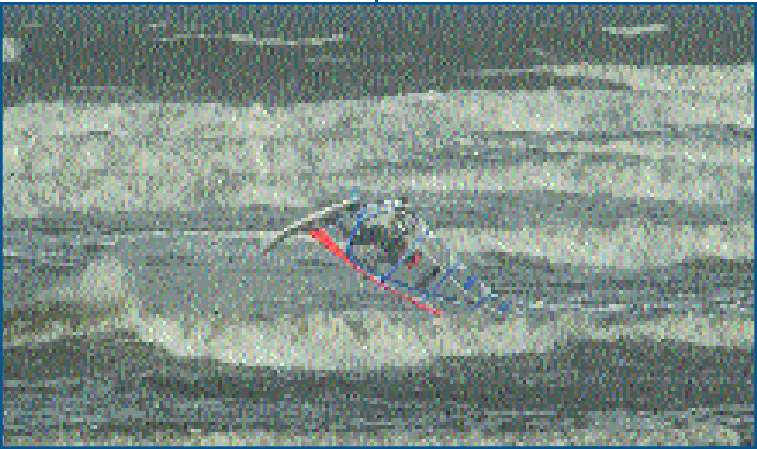
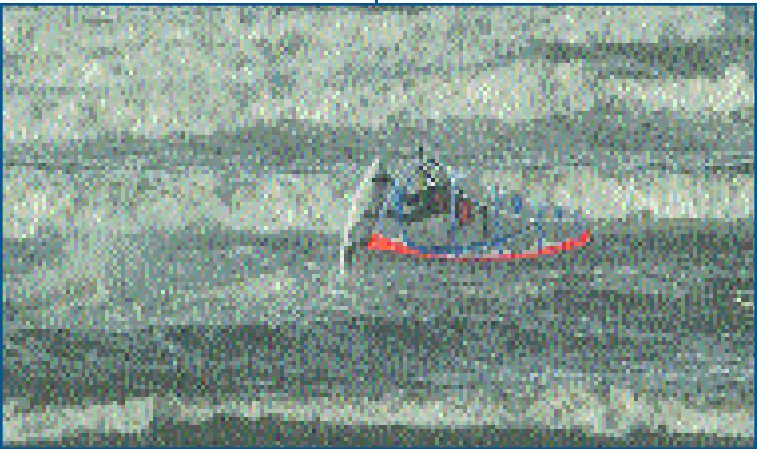
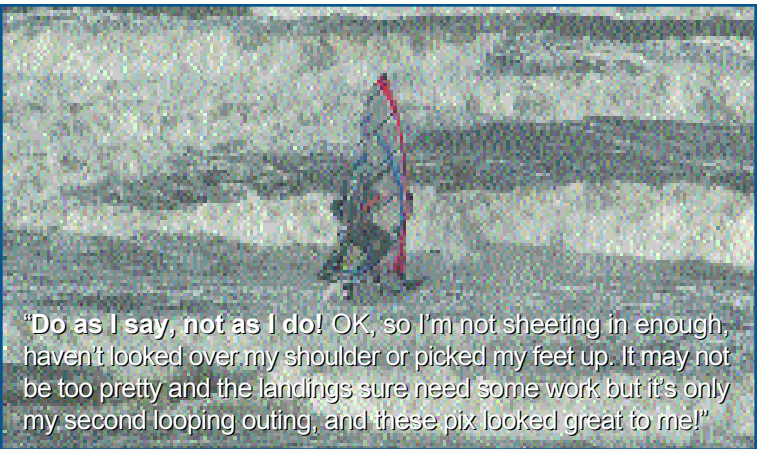
However much you read, one or two unanswered questions will always remain. You almost certainly know all that you actually need to know already, but it is vital to clear away niggling doubts about the manoeuvre before your gun is well and truly loaded. So write down your questions, seek out a looper and ask him/her. If you don't know any, then find and ask a sponsored or professional sailor. Part of the deal for any sponsored sailor is that he is supposed to be approachable and friendly. That means helping you – so take advantage.

RELEASING THE SAFETY CATCH

Your looping gun is now loaded, but it is all too easy to waste good sailing time agonising over whether to 'go for it' and then repeatedly feel like a failure when, perhaps for some quite valid reasons, you continually don't. The answer is to decide here and now what constitute the right conditions for releasing the safety catch so that you've got no excuses when they are met. Using the headings here below to help you, write down (on the *intention to loop form* at the end of the article) your criteria for releasing that safety catch... and then stick to them.



"For every one you waterstart away from there's an apprenticeship to be served..."



Water state: Don't wait for the perfect conditions – they don't exist. My advice would simply be to wait for defined waves, however small. You can do it off chop if you decide to (and many gurus have advocated it), but the uncertainty of not knowing when you'll get that peak for take off makes it very easy to keep putting it off. Also the action of having to force a jump is just one more thing to think about that you really don't need. However, if your local chop is both predictable and steep...

I learnt on the white water reform on the inside on a big day, on just above knee height waves. A small defined lip would have been easier – but don't wait! You only require enough lift to get airborne without really trying – you don't actually need much height at all. If the waves are a bit bigger than that, say thigh height, that's fine too. When you learn, you loop as you come off the wave, so you won't be throwing big air first, and thus a little bit of extra height gives you a fraction more time for the rotation.

Wind strength: Sorry! I'm not selling any major excuses here. Obviously you need to be planing as you approach the wave and obviously if you are well overpowered you need to go and change down. For me a good wind speed for learning to loop is anywhere from roughly the top end of a four to the bottom end of a seven. I have heard it said that it is best to be a bit underpowered. Actually, although it will feel safer, it is harder to get the rotation without good power in the sail.

Wind direction: My advice would be not to release the safety catch if the wind is so onshore that you are having to luff upwind to get nose-on to the wave. That gives you further to go downwind before the rotation starts properly and stacks the dice against you. Anything from on-cross-on to cross, or anytime you can jump without having to carve hard upwind is just fine.

Port, starboard or both: I'm a natural port boy. They're probably just as easy on either tack but don't ask me – I haven't done starboard ones yet. Just sort out now what is a valid excuse and what isn't. We don't want any 'yes buts...' when the time comes.

Equipment: A good planing wind with smallish kit is all that's needed. I waited for 5.0m weather with a wave board before releasing my safety catch but maybe that's one reason it took me 10 years. Actually any small board (sub-100L) with a sail of 5.5m or less is fine. Only you know your equipment – decide now what constitutes the right kit for you and when you're next on it, release that catch.

Further provisos: Maybe you'll be happier on your home patch or with a particular mate. Fair enough, but if you really want to do this you'll keep such clauses to a minimum.

FINGER ON THE TRIGGER

Looping gun loaded... Safety catch released... There is now no turning back with honour at this point! The focus thus far has been to arrive at a logical and clearly identifiable moment when all excuses are wiped away and the easiest option is to go for it. Exactly how you home in on that moment is up to you, but you should establish the ground rules in advance. Here's what worked for me.

I always envisaged having friends there to egg me on and just tip the testosterone levels over the required threshold. In the event I was the only sailor on the beach, performing merely for a handful of dog walkers. (Inexplicably, not one of them came over to congratulate me.)

Before I got down to the water I had a plan. First, wipe off any idea of having a normal 'fun' sail; this one was strictly a mission. One run to check the wind and make sure the straps, harness lines etc were all working fine. I probably would have allowed myself another single run if anything needed adjusting, but I didn't need it. Come into the beach and get off. A few deep breaths. Get on and go quickly and stuff those feet hard into the straps, pick your wave early enough so that you can't pretend that you got confused over which one you meant! Crouch a bit coming up to the wave. Spring up as the board leaves the lip, and...

FIRE... Just do it!

MACHINE GUN SALVO

I know people who threw themselves over the front in a fit of bravery several years ago but who still never actually broke that mental barrier. That has to be the worst of both worlds! I may have taken a shamefully long time to do my first, but my fifteenth

came in under the hour (not that I was counting). They say that when you fall off your bicycle (or is it your horse) you have to get straight back on. You mustn't give yourself time to think – kid yourself that you've cracked it.

Anyway, the more you do it the easier it becomes, and the sooner you do it after the previous attempt the easier it is to pluck up courage, so GO MAD.

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR LOOPS

Don't know – don't much care today – I think you must have mistaken this for a technique article...

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Slow, it's painfully slow. That first time you go for it you throw yourself into a stupid position and wait and very little seems to happen (as you almost certainly haven't sheeted in as hard as you should have). If you hold on and don't sheet out you might just come down, like I did, on your head about 1/4 of the way round but hell, it's only water and the most surprising thing is how unlikely it feels for you to make any unwanted contact with your kit. This is the major reassuring factor if you manage to hold on, and the one that really encourages you to try again.

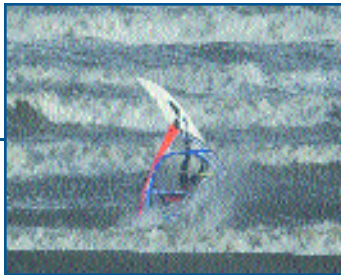
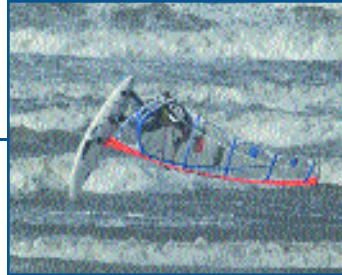
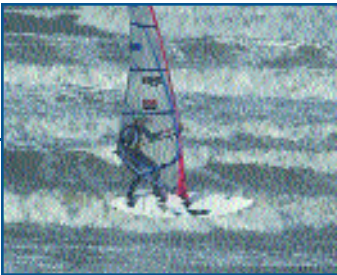
If you make it round it can still be very slow, like overtaking in an old car. You need half an hour to build up speed but then actually overtake in about two seconds. So with the loop you can seem to hang dangerously suspended above the water for an age before suddenly you spin round onto your back without knowing quite how you got there.

That's the beauty of the move, from a learner's point of view – it is *all* in the initiation. If you go for it properly at the outset you can then switch off, become a passenger and enjoy the ride as the natural physics of the move take over. You get thrown around and barely know where you've been or how you got there, but it doesn't matter at all. You can worry about fine-tuning the rotation etc at a later date. There's a lot of air miles needed before you'll even know what you want to control, let alone how to do it!

The other overwhelming feeling I got was that of being a fraud. There I was, as far as my peers were concerned, a fully signed up member of the Loopers' Association – simply because I'd managed to get right round (finally), stay attached (just) and waterstart away (eventually) – and yet I hadn't got a clue really how the manoeuvre worked or how to do it properly. It felt like claiming to be in the carve gybe club simply because you'd managed to footsteer the board round 180 degrees before falling in.

PAIN?

If someone walked up to me and boxed me on the ears or slapped me on the back



LOOPING INTERACTIVE - WIN A SAIL

If you've learnt to loop over the last few years, why not share the experience??? Write in telling us who and how old you are/were and where you sail. Then give us the following information:

- 1) How long it took between deciding/desiring to loop and actually doing your first one and how good it finally felt?
- 2) What was the crucial tip, piece of advice, or push that finally made the difference for you?
- 3) How much did it hurt and what injuries have you sustained looping?
- 4) [optional] Have you got a loop related anecdote or something to add?
- 5) Send us a picture of yourself looping and/or a simple mugshot and we'll print it (probably).

that hard – I'd say it hurt like hell and sue him for damages. But actually it is only water. It can shock you at the time and could damage your ears if you don't take precautions, but the blows are generally less painful and damaging than you get playing football. Anyway you will forget them almost immediately (*postscript – though don't rule out the possibility of a stiff neck and bruised back for a few days afterwards*). The one small area of concern is the whiplash. I probably took it beyond sensible limits racking up twenty odd attempts on a first outing, but my neck did hurt come the evening. If you have upper back or neck problems you should definitely go carefully, otherwise just brace yourself as you go round, look over that shoulder and don't overdo it.

PAIN PERSPECTIVE ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN:

First day of trying to loop	3
Stubbing my toe hard	4
First day of learning to snowboard	5
Second day of learning to snowboard	8
Professional torture	9
Third day of learning to snowboard	10

DON'T:

- Make silly excuses
- Do trial runs (jumping and peering gingerly round the front to "see what it's like" will simply scare you – sheeting in gingerly and experimentally will probably hurt you)
- Wait for just the right wave, piece of chop, wind strength or direction
- Sheet out, let go, look down or go half-hearted
- Make good excuses
- Ring up all your windsurfing mates and bore them stupid when you do succeed (probably the hardest – sorry guys!)
- Put it off any longer...

Now that I've written this article I'd like to say *"I hope it helps you to crack it"*. Actually I really hope it puts you off. It's taken me this long to get to be a member of one of windsurfing's more exclusive clubs, and I don't want any of you non-loopers joining it any time soon! So remember – it's *really* dangerous, and just to back that up I hereby disclaim any responsibility for injury you may receive in attempting anything described above!

Just in case you need an inducement to share your looping secrets we have persuaded ARROWS sails to put up the mouthwatering prize of an Impact Wave sail (size of your choice) for the lucky winner chosen at random from all those who get their offering printed in the *Looping Interactive* page. The Arrows Impact Wave is the 2002 BOARDS mag quiver sail Ian is using in his first photographed loop sequence, so it seemed like the ideal prize – we know it works! The size of your choice could be yours if you sharpen that pencil, think hard and then send in the results to:

LEARNING TO LOOP, BOARDS Magazine,
196 Eastern Esplanade, Southend on Sea,
Essex SS1 3AB

The winner's loop credentials and stories will be checked out by our private detectives so no flights of fancy please!

move of the month



INTENTION TO LOOP FORM *(forward)* Module – FL 0001 MORM *(Ministry of Radical Manoeuvres)*

Part 1.

NAME (block capitals):

LOOP GUN LOADED DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have studied sequences in magazines, watched videos and/or live examples, rehearsed and understood the required techniques, visualised the move, am confident that I am of a high enough standard, have understood the dangers, how to circumvent them and where necessary taken all relevant precautions and can think of no impediment why I should not proceed to attempt the move in person.

YES NO (Tick as applicable)

Part 2.

SAFETY CATCH OFF DECLARATION

I hereby declare that when any of the below-listed meteoric conditions prevail contemporaneously with the below-listed maritime conditions and I am able to use any of the below-listed sails in harness with any of the below-listed boards (or any others that may succeed or replace them but be deemed of an equivalent nature); should none of the conditions listed under the section, "any further provisos" be applicable I will consider myself bereft of further excuses and in a legally binding *man or mouse* situation.

(Insert as applicable:)

WATER STATE:

WIND STRENGTH AND DIRECTION:

EQUIPMENT TO BE USED:

ANY FURTHER PROVISOs:

Part 3.

OFFICIAL DECLARATION OF INTENTION TO LOOP

I, the undersigned, having willfully and repeatedly failed to throw myself over the front as sort of half promised and frequently kind of intended over really rather a long time, do hereby swear on the holy names of Naish and Dunkerbeck, twin gods of windsurfing, that it is my avowed intention, the next time I go sailing, subject to the above safety catch declaration, to pitch myself manfully (or womanfully) over the handlebars.

Signature:

Date:

Witness:

(Windsurfing status:))