

mini test

This month **Adrian Jones** finds himself in a philosophical quandary as he wrestles with an issue that would have had Socrates scratching his head. Photos: **Jay Haysey / globalshots.com**...

Research has proven time and again that there are more similarities between human beings than our minds feel comfortable accepting. We are of course all unique and individual beings, but most definitely linked by a common list of traits that characterise the human race.

One of the most common traits of human nature is to believe that we are 'overall more capable and generally smarter than others'.

You might not want to admit it, but it's buried in there within most of us and it influences many of the decisions we make in life. Much of this influence is very positive and gives us the confidence to be outgoing, individual and ambitious, but there are times where it can skew our judgement in quite ridiculous ways.

Take computers, for example. It's now possible to buy a new laptop for as little as £269, but let's be honest: we just aren't going to. As soon as we spot the machine next to it having 2GB of RAM instead of 1GB, we'll be wooed away onto a pathway of desire and stupidity. The next machine will have a dual core processor instead of a Celeron, and that's just got to be worth the extra £40, and so on we go until we find ourselves in the check-out queue with every other fool in the shop gazing lovingly at our new 17-inch MacBook Pro (at ten times the price).

In the cold light of day and faced with the credit card bill, who knows what the heck difference a Celeron vs dual core processor is going to make. Most of us only use our computers to cruise the internet, send a few emails and spell-check Word documents (usually in American English), so do we really need a zillion gigabytes of RAM and umpteen teraquads of storage space? Of course we don't. That £269 machine would have done the job just fine. But we'd have felt less equipped, less capable, and it would have been tantamount to taking a blowpipe to a gun fight. So no matter how ridiculous our decision was, we will stick by it because having the best equipment satisfies our basic human desire to feel more capable and smarter than others.

And I'm more than a little convinced that this line of thinking plays some part in our decision-making when it comes to windsurfing equipment. Take camber induced sails, for instance. For any flat water freerider or speed-conscious rider, cambered sails are perceived as the ultimate tools for the job. If you don't have one, well let's come straight out with it: you're simply not going to

look as good as the guy who does. And that doesn't sit well with our inherent desire to appear more capable than those around us. We just aren't going to be satisfied until we have that cambered sail. After all, they're the best. But is this really true? Are cambered sails really the ultimate tools for the job?

Point 7 is an Italian brand which, after several years of success in Europe with their stealthy and distinctive black sails, are about to launch in the UK. We thought it would be a perfect opportunity to put their 6.5m sails head-to-head to compare the difference between a cambered and non-cambered sail. The ACX is a 7-batten, no-cam freeride sail, whilst the ACK is a 7-batten, 3-cam freerace.

RIGGING

Dimensions are pretty much match-for-match across the two sails, with just a centimetre or so difference at the luff and clew. Both sails have seven battens, a similar plan-shape and the same funky looking compact clew. The most notable differences off the water are the weight and ease of rigging. The rotational is 0.65kg lighter and rigs with a little more ease than the cambered version.

Rotational 1 – Cambered 0

EARLY PLANING

This was a little bit of a surprise, as the rotational was running rings around the cambered sail in the lightest of winds. Not only does it have more 'grunt' to pull you up onto the plane, it also has a much softer more flexible feel, so if you know how to pump you'll get more out of the rotational in the lightest winds.

Rotational 1 – Cambered 0

MANOUEVERABILITY

This was probably more predictable, with the rotational taking the victory here. Apart from its lighter weight, it's easier to rotate and can sit neutral through the transition, making life much less hassle. And if you do drop into the drink, waterstarting and uphauling are of course much easier on the rotational.

Rotational 1 – Cambered 0

CAM VS NO-CAM

THE SMARTER WINDSURFER'S CHOICE



TOP END STABILITY

As the wind increases it's noticeable that the cambered sail starts to show its worth. It's more stable, with the power point feeling locked in place. It's lighter in the hands in a straight line (despite having a heavier static weight), and it locks the board down onto the water much better than the rotational. The rotational starts to become a test of strength at the top of its wind range, while the cambered sail becomes a test of courage.

Rotational 0 – Cambered 1

SPEED UNDERPOWERED

This was another surprise for us. We expected the cambered sail to be the quickest once planing, but this wasn't the case. In marginal planing conditions the rotational was in fact quicker as it had more power, and its pull point helped the board to lift and 'fly' a little more than the cambered sail. Both upwind and downwind, the rotational had the edge.

Rotational 1 – Cambered 0

SPEED COMFORTABLY POWERED

In comfortably powered conditions, we were again surprised that the cambered sail didn't walk it. In fact, off the wind the rotational arguably still had the edge. Tighter to the wind the cambered sail started to nudge ahead of the rotational, but it was very (very) close, and the better sailor / board would come through on top. Heavier people and those with less polished technique will go faster on the rotational as it's more forgiving, more grunty and recovers speed quicker.

Rotational 1 – Cambered 1

SPEED OVERPOWERED

It's no real surprise that this was the domain of the cambered sail. Tight to the wind it was at its strongest. It locks in and just flies upwind with a very light, balanced feel in the hands. The rotational becomes more of a struggle as it loses stability at the front edge and tends to lift the board too much. Off the wind there wasn't as much difference, but the cambered sail was able to nudge ahead.

Rotational 1 – Cambered 1

PRICE

Well, the rotational comes in £50 cheaper than the cambered sail. To be honest we were expecting a bigger difference here, but nonetheless it's another point for the rotational!

Rotational 1 – Cambered 0

TOTAL SCORES

Rotational 7 – Cambered 3

So despite the initial preconception that cambered sails are the pinnacle of the freeride domain, it turned out to be a fairly unanimous win for the rotational. The cambered sail had the edge for speed merchants at the very top end, but it was surprising how much wind it actually needed to start pulling ahead of the rotational. In fact, to have any chance of competing you'd be wise to opt for a sail that's at least 0.5m bigger if it's got cambers, and with that comes extra weight, cost and hassle.

It's hard to ignore the rotational sail's convincing win. It's cheaper, rigs easier, is lighter, and generally has the edge over the cambered sail for performance in most conditions.

Perhaps the time has come to reconsider the status quo? According to Aristotle, the study of human nature began with Socrates, who is said to have studied the question of how a person should best live. Socrates was a rationalist and believed that the best life and that most suited to human nature involved reasoning. So, applying some reasoning in here, maybe, in windsurfing terms, our human nature is guiding us in the wrong direction, and in fact we would be both 'more capable and smarter' if we opted for the rotational sail. ☺



POINT 7 ACK (3-cam)

Size: 6.5m
Battens: 7
Boom: 193cm
Luff: 449cm
Weight: 6.07kg
Price: £429



POINT 7 ACX (no-cam)

Size: 6.5m
Battens: 7
Boom: 192cm
Luff: 447cm
Weight: 5.42kg
Price: £379