

50 Advantages Of Junk Rig

- over other rigs

by Annie Hill

Anyone who is a proponent of junk rig is used to being asked, 'Well, what's so good about it, anyway?' For some people, there is one overriding aspect of the rig that appeals: generally the ease of reefing, but for many there is a whole host of reasons why we consider the rig to be preferable to any alternative. Back in July, our Webmaster challenged website users to name the top 50 advantages of junk rig over other rigs and they rose to the challenge. It didn't take us long not only to reach, but to exceed 50 perceived advantages! It's hard to rank the advantages in order of merit, so, generally, they are listed in the order they were posted. All the perceived advantages were of interest, so I'm bringing them together in the following article. It would be great if non-website users would join in and add to the list with a Letter to the Editor.

1. **Junk rig is much easier to handle downwind:** With its reluctance to gybe until you are sailing well by the lee, with the fact that the sail is fully squared out so that it is working efficiently and with the ease with which you can change from running to reaching to beating, without having to handle guys, poles or vang, the junk rig is much easier to sail.
2. **Increased crew safety:** With junk rig the crew (usually) does all sail handling from the cockpit, instead of having to work on the exposed deck; the ease of reefing reduces stress on both crew and gear; the light weight of the boom and the fact that it's generally above head height, reduce the risk of injury; lack of stress keeps the crew rested and thus more alert.
3. **Sail rips have minimal impact:** Generally, a long horizontal rip is not catastrophic on a junk rig, since it will be restricted to only one panel and the boat can still be sailed as before, whereas on other rigs the sail has to be lowered immediately. If the tear is particularly big, the damaged panel can usually be taken out of service by tying two battens together
4. **Ease of reefing and making sail means that you always sail under the correct amount of canvas:** This makes for faster passages and ensures the boat is properly underway in the aftermath of a gale, which is arguably when you are most likely to be knocked down.
5. **Much easier for the older, not-so-strong or 'mobility-restricted' people to use:** An electric winch can take the effort out of hauling up the sails; reefing and tacking are simplicity itself and even sheeting the sail generally requires little effort. While many sailors give up sailing due to the effort of handling the sails, changing to junk rig could have extended their sailing years.
6. **An unimpeded view:** Junk sails set well up the mast, unlike the deck-hugging sails on other rigs, which impede the helmsman's view.
7. **Low cost:** Junk rig is cheaper to build and maintain than any other mainstream rig. Low tech materials and construction methods keep costs to a minimum, and many junkies build their own sails. The lack of rigging on a free-standing mast avoids a major expense with wires, bottle screws, toggles, etc.
8. **Ease of repair:** Most junk rigs are essentially 'sticks and string' and these simple and easily understood materials and structures, make for straightforward repairs.
9. **Better performance in squally conditions:** The ease of reefing and setting sail makes it a lot easier to sail efficiently when contending with squalls and gusty conditions.
10. **Junk rig is more suited to family sailing:** The loads on the lines are less; there are no deck cars to trap small fingers and toes; there are no flailing jib sheets to hit children; there are no flogging sails to frighten them; the relaxed parents can take time to ensure the children are enjoying themselves.
11. **People are more complicated in their head than the rig:** They have complicated, demanding and expensive boats, instead of opting for ease and simplicity.
12. **You can carry all that's required to maintain the rig far from yachting centres:** In addition to your normal tool kit, to repair a junk rig, you need cordage, some sail material and needle and thread. For full maintenance and/or replacement, add a couple of spare battens, a sewing machine and perhaps some wood, glue and fastenings.
13. **You can work on your sails in a marina:** Unless the wind is abaft the beam, sails can be raised and lowered alongside with no drama, and with no risk of being whipped by a slatting sail.
14. **You can use the battens as a ladder:** On most junks it is possible to climb up the sail by way of the battens, in order to con your way through a reef or ice. Or to make an adjustment to the rig while under way.
15. **It's easy to make your own sails:** While few owners of gaff-rigged boats and even fewer owners of bermudan-rigged make their own sails, many junkies routinely do so.

There isn't even any need for a specialised sewing machine.

16. **No sail bags down below:** With the light- and heavy-weather canvas permanently bent on, there is no reason to have extra sails down below. This frees up space and allows the accommodation to be used more efficiently.
17. **The junk sail is self-tacking:** While most rigs have self-tacking mainsails and some have self-tacking jibs, the latter require special gear or work less efficiently than a standard jib. The junk sail is intrinsically self-tacking, which makes beating to windward, especially in close quarters, infinitely less work.
18. **Because the sails stay on deck, the boat can stay drier below:** Wet sail bags spread salt water about, which makes it difficult to keep the boat's interior dry. If you can keep salt water out of the soft furnishings, the boat will be a much more pleasant place in damp conditions
19. **Junk rig epitomises the KISS principle:** Keep It Simple, Sailor (or Stupid, depending on your interpretation!
20. **Junk rig is more manoeuvrable than most rigs:** Because you can so easily reef and make sail, you end up with a more manoeuvrable boat. For example, being able to reef the sail right down, when coming to anchor or alongside, allows you time carefully to consider the situation
21. **Junk rig is more manoeuvrable than most rigs:** You only need to concentrate on where you are going, because of not having to do any sail handling.
22. **Junk sails can be made in a small space:** While most people might prefer to find a large space to lay out the sail, more than a few excellent sails have been made in a normal room such as a living room
23. **Junk sails can increase comfort aboard:** Because the sails don't flog, they can be kept up for motoring and thus reduce rolling. On multi-masted rigs, one of the sails can be sheeted hard in to dampen the rolling downwind.
24. **Junk rig is ideal for motor-sailing:** Not only because a junk sail doesn't flog, but also because it still gives some lift and drive. The fact that it's set and ready will also reduce the amount of motor-sailing you do, because when the breeze returns you can simply switch off the engine and let out the sheet.
25. **Ease of tacking means you sail more:** For example you might work your way up a narrow river taking scores of tacks, without wearing yourself out.
26. **You don't need a sail cover:** Most home-made sails use awning-type, UV-stabilised fabrics. If you live somewhere clean, you don't need sail covers, which means that you can simply pull up the sail and go out, even for just for a short while.
27. **Easier for dinghies:** When the rig is fitted to dinghies and small boats, the sail is caught by the lazyjacks instead of falling all over the crew and getting in the way of the helmsman.
28. **Safer for dinghies:** it is so easy to reef, that you are much less likely to capsized in gusty conditions.
29. **No sail changing:** As well as eradicating dangerous foredeck work, this means that the boat is sailed under the correct canvas. We humans tend towards sloth, so bending and unbending sails on other rigs tends to be postponed.
30. **In moments of stress,** letting go of the sheet calms everything down: without the nerve-wracking, stressful noise of flogging polyester
31. **The rig couldn't be simpler to heave to:** let go the sheet in calm seas; otherwise sheet in as hard as you can and put the helm down a little. She tries to tack but has insufficient way on. (If the boat is *very* sporty she may tack anyway; in that case ease the sheet a little until the sail is nearly feathering.) With self-steering, just set the vane to pinch the boat excessively to achieve the same end.
32. **You can sail safely by the lee:** just wonderful when weaving in and out of skerries or sailing in fluky conditions. You simply point the boat where you want to go, without having to agonise about whether you can 'make it on this gybe'. Takes all the worry out of close-quarters, downwind sailing.
33. **The boat is much quieter at anchor, in windy conditions:** Because there is no shriek of wind through the rigging, this reduces stress on the crew.
34. **Less gear = less maintenance.**
35. **The rig is very docile:** This means that sailing is much more fun for timid and/or lazy sailors.
36. **If you are setting sail in windy conditions, you simply pull up all that is required:** With most other rigs, you have to pull up the whole sail and then put the reefs in. This takes longer and can be quite stressful.
37. **With junk rig you can sail with however much or little sail you fancy:** Most other rigs have a set amount of sail that has to be tied into place.
38. **Stop-start manoeuvres under sail are very feasible:** This is not the same as heaving to, but is more like stopping for a red light, as distinct from parking. When sailing in waters with much commercial traffic which is restricted in its ability to manoeuvre, with junk rig you can simply stop and give way, by letting go of the sheet, even if just for a few seconds.
39. **The very low stress in the junk rig's sailcloth allows for panels to be joined along the battens with ordinary tailor's seams:** (Arne's Amateur Method B). David Tyler has confirmed that seams made in this manner, have held perfectly well on *Tystie* for 10,000 miles.

40. **Junk rig is a great way to introduce new people to sailing:** Due to ease of handling and simple rope arrangements, once the sail is up, it's easy for a complete novice to tack and gybe single-handed. This is a great way to build confidence!
41. **There is no reason to use a preventer running downwind:** This keeps the rig much more manoeuvrable.
42. **There is no bowsprit:** Junk rig has a traditional air, but there is no bowsprit to work on, which can make changing down headsails quite exciting, and sometimes downright dangerous.
43. **Neither a spinnaker nor a staysail is required:** All the area you need can be bent onto one, two or three masts.
44. **The ease and economy of sail making encourages experimentation:** and rig development.
45. **The string-controlled junk rig could be expanded to fit much larger craft than yachts:** Electric capstans would then be used on the halyards and sheets. We know of junk sails up to 80sqm, but sails of 100 – 150 sq m should be possible. In some situations, this could make working sail a reasonable proposition
46. **No need for the "reef early" rule as with other rigs:** "Just in time reefing" can be the rule on a junk.
47. **The experience of sailing a junk, and of endlessly being given the**

- "received wisdom" by bermudan sailors, encourages junkies:** to break rules, think independently and find their own way of doing things.
48. **You learn to enjoy sailing "on the edge":** You know reefing is just a jam cleat away.
49. **Fewer parts to break or fail (especially stainless steel):** The capacity for catastrophic failure, eg dismasting, due to the failure of one small part, is far less than with other rigs. Most components in a junk rig are easily checked, and wear is visible.
50. **A coloured sail gives off a lot less reflected glare than a white polyester sail:** Many, if not most junks, have a coloured sail, which is more comfortable to live with, and, possibly safer and healthier than a white one, something very relevant when sailing in the Tropics. Equally, coloured sails stand out better against a sea covered in white caps.
51. **With only one sail (on a single-masted boat), there's nothing to mask the wind;** the whole sail is pulling all the time. When sailing on a broad reach with other rigs, the foresail is usually blanketed by the main, contributing nothing. To goose wing, you need to use a pole, which is at best awkward and at worst, dangerous.
52. **On a single-masted junk rigged boat, you can see all the sail all the time:** No more craning your head around the main to see the set of the

genoa, or catch a glimpse of the tell-tales.

53. **Ease of handling takes the drama out of sailing:** With junk rig you simply have an enjoyable trip while with any other rig it would have been hard work. In essence a good junk rig is infinitely more practical than a bermudan rig.

And a few more, but perhaps less serious, advantages.

1. **Distinguished:** Junk rigs stand out from the crowd.
2. **You get photographed a lot:** Junks are unusual, and attractive and regularly get cameras pointed at them. Junkies get given lots of photos from people, usually with the comment "I took these photos of your boat. You don't normally get a chance to have a photograph of your boat under sail." Little do they know!
3. **You spill fewer drinks:** Because you simply put the helm down to tack, you don't have to let go of your drink!
4. **For junkies, we have the most beautiful rig anywhere:** More than a few people are converted to junk rig from its appearance and all of the other advantages are just icing on the cake!
5. **It's a lot easier to find your boat in a crowded anchorage;** Especially when you've left your brain at the yacht club bar!
6. **Making your own sails opens endless opportunities for creativity:** Junkies can show their

individuality in the use of colours, layouts and self-applied decals.

7. **The junk rig can make you appear to be a much more competent sailor than is the case:** Quick and easy manoeuvres in confined waters and in fluky winds, as well as sail handling solely by pulling strings in the cockpit, makes you look like a pro.
8. **Junkies are interesting people and great company:** even grumpy Kiwis :-)
9. **If your mast is a wooden one, you can hug it and talk to it in the cabin:** This can be comforting. Metal ones sometimes crackle during thunderstorms (just in case you'd missed it) and they're all nice to grab when you're being thrown around. You can even clink a glass against it and say, "Cheers, mate".
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