A cordless winch handle for *Johanna*

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I have often wondered how I could find a cheap electric winch to help me hoisting *Johanna*'s 48sqm (around 50kg) sail. The electric winches have been rather expensive although some are not that bad any more. One idea I had was to buy a large cordless drill and fit an adapter which goes in *Johanna*'s present halyard winch. Such tools are mass-produced and therefore generally much cheaper. However, none of those I found was sufficiently geared down to get a human winding speed of 0-120rpm with full torque.

.. *Johanna*, caught in the tack. Hoisting her 48sqm sail can be quite a job...

Then, last spring I read a short review of a new electric winch handle with an internal lithium battery in it; the **Winchrite ™**. I ordered one right away. A few days later I could collect it at the post office. The total price was around 5000 Norwegian kroner, which I felt it was worth - a few days before I had received 9000kr for *Johanna*'s old Bm mast. Easy come, easy go!

.. the handle came in a good canvas bag.
It was fitted with charging chords for 220V AC and for 12V DC.
A little indicator LED changes from red to green when the lithium battery has been fully charged...

..close-up; to the left the 8-sided, replaceable cog, to the right the charging socket with the indicator LED above it. With the square knob at the bottom one flicks between forward and reverse...

I used the Winchrite on *Johanna*'s halyard winch (Andersen 12ST) during the summer and I found it to be very easy and "natural" in use. The sail went up in a little over two minutes, probably less than half the time I spend on hoisting the sail manually, when alone. I made no changes to the halyard; it is still the 5-part type it used to be. This resulted in that the new winch handle seemed to live an easy life and it was also easy to hold it with one hand. Just remember; to get the best out of it, the winch should be fully self-tailing, as mine is.

> **NOTE: A big asset with this cordless winch handle is that one can feel any changes in torque. If something gets jammed, a luff parrel or whatever, one will notice it and not end up overstressing something.**

Battery capacity

As you can imagine, I was very curious to learn how long the internal battery would last until needing re-charging. I found that I could hoist the sail 6 times before I noticed the first signs of speed drop. Given the nature of the lithium batteries, I guess that a 7th hoist would be the last one, so I recharged the battery. Six times is good enough for me.

.. First test of the *Winchrite* on the *Andersen 12ST* halyard winch. With the manual handle I must lower the sprayhood to swing it, but with the electric handle one may actually fit the winch close to a wall or even in a corner...

Ruggedness

The Winchrite looks much like any power tool in that respect. Although there seems to be seals everywhere, I would not leave it out in the rain for ages. I don't want to know how much it can take so I actually take mine inside right after hoisting the sail, mainly to keep it out of the way and to avoid losing it over board.

Conclusion

I am glad I bought this thing as it lowers the threshold for going sailing. Not everyone will need it - I've seen a young friend (all muscle and bones) hoisting *Johanna*'s sail without using the winch at all - and even without stopping talking while hauling up the sail.
If I should dare to make a rule of thumb, it would sound about like this:

"If the sum of the sail area in square metres and your age in years has passed 100 – 110, then you may well think of getting an electric halyard winch."

In a couple of days my sum will reach 106 so I must be qualified - guess who that rule was written around...

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PS: If you want to learn more about the Winchrite, just check this link: http://sailology.com/