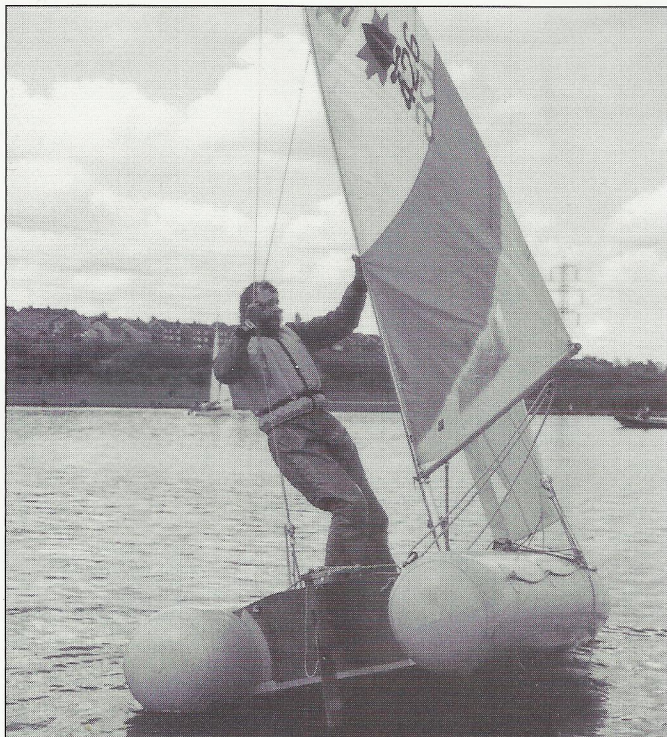


CAPSIZING CAPSIZING

Photographs: David Warren



"The things I do for this Association!" The best way to capsize a Tinker

WHEN THE



Boat almost upright using the short jib sheet – difficult to reach, though

CAPSIZING by J Stewart Warden

I have been threatening/promising for several years to write an article on capsizing or, perhaps more correctly, righting a Tinker after a capsize. As Tinker owners will have discovered, it is very difficult to capsize a Tinker, but it can happen.

In almost 20 years of Tinker sailing, I have only once unintentionally capsized - and even then it was in unpredictable conditions at one of four rallies, when the less foolhardy would have remained in the bar! All the other capsizes were 'self induced' for the purposes of testing various theories for this article.

The techniques described do not purport to be recommendations or to be a comprehensive list of the ways to right a Tinker, nor do I have any authority to claim that my preferred technique is the best - but it certainly is for me!

Safety First - Always wear a lifejacket or buoyancy aid and, if you have crew on board, check their safety immediately after a capsize and ensure that they are not caught in the rigging etc.

Mast/Boom - Although new boats are supplied with masts and booms designed to give buoyancy in the event of a capsize - and therefore prevent the boat from 'turning turtle' - I would strongly recommend owners with older boats to consider injecting the spars with a proprietary foam. It is much easier to right any boat when it is lying on its side, rather than when it has turned completely upside down.

Techniques - I do not propose to explain at length all the ways of righting a Tinker, as it is assumed that most owners will have some knowledge and experience of how to right a conventional boat and other authors, more qualified than I, have devoted pages to the subject in specialist books. However, I will set out briefly some of the methods owners tell me have met with success for them.

1 With the boat lying on its side in the water, if you have been fortunate enough to have been able to climb onto the 'dry' tube, the conventional method of standing on the exposed dagger board will right the boat. Similarly, if you are in the water and can reach the

dagger board, you can apply pressure to the board by hanging on it.

Unfortunately, however, my experience is that the dagger board can break in two. It seems that the strength and quality of the wood has varied over the years and, unless you have help at hand, I would advise caution before adopting this method.

2 If you do adopt it, then my advice would be to apply the pressure gently and gradually as near to the bottom of the boat as may be necessary to right it. Jumping or swinging from the very end of the dagger board will almost certainly lead to disaster and, if the boat has turned completely over, I would expect that the pressure needed to right the boat would, in most cases, simply be too much for the board.

3 It may be possible to pull on a jib sheet, but can you reach it? With the boat on its side, the exposed tube is quite high in the water. The sheet naturally falls into the boat upon capsizing and I found it impossible to reach it from the water. I accept it would be possible to swim round the boat and try to struggle under the sails, sheets, mast rigging etc to retrieve the sheet and throw it back over the hull, but why bother when there are easier ways? Also, I believe there is a risk of damage to the jib sheet fitting/jamming cleat using this method.

4 Some owners say they can simply turn the boat over by swimming either to the bow and twisting it over, or swimming to the top of the mast (when the boat is lying on its side!) and, by 'walking' their hands down the shrouds or mast, the boat can be walked upright. This can be helped by making sure the mast is pointing to windward to enable the wind to assist by lifting the sail as the mast rises. This presupposes that there is wind: when I tried these methods, there was no wind! I was unable to right the boat either with it upturned or lying on its side. In fact, I found that, in trying to 'lift' it in these ways, I was simply pushed under the water by the weight of the boat and quickly abandoned the exercise.

While I would not wish to belittle, in any way, the above methods, I found that either they did not work for me or were too complicated or unreliable or simply involved possible damage to the boat.

IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENS

Stewart Warden conducts the tests which most of us would rather not

My preferred technique

I have dispensed with the forestay on my old Star Traveller and rely on the furling jib to support the mast. When rigging the boat, I tie the forestay (which I should, perhaps, now refer to as a 'line', as clearly it is not serving the function of a forestay) onto the 'D' ring on the bow of the boat, on which the painter is already tied.

This offers several advantages. First, in the event of a capsize, even if the boat turns completely upside down, I simply have to swim to the bow and, as the 'D' ring will be above the water line, the line can be easily untied. Secondly, once untied, it provides a line which is fixed to the top of the mast.

If the boat is upside down, whichever side of the boat I then swim to is of no consequence, as I have a line which follows easily. If the boat is on its side, I simply flick the line over the bow, which is very conveniently shaped to facilitate this.

I then swim to the midway point along the windward side of the boat, ignoring suggestions that the leeward side is better because the wind under the sails will assist the lifting. My view is that, if you right the boat from the windward side, the righting will be more controlled and there is little danger of the boat coming upright and simply blowing over on top of you again.

If the boat is on its side, I simply swim the bow round, so that the tubes are to windward and the sail to leeward. I then allow my feet to float upwards onto the lower tube, which is in the water, and pull on the line, while resting my feet on the tube. Very little effort is required, if the boat is on its side, and very little more if the boat is upside down.

Having a line which is attached to the top of the mast is, in my opinion, the secret. I have not worked out the mechanics and physics, but I guess someone reading this might feel compelled to do so!

If you feel uncomfortable about using the forestay in the way I suggest, simply tie an additional line from the head of the mast to the 'D' ring.

Climbing aboard

Now that the boat is upright, I have to climb back in. I confess that this was an easier task in my younger days, but I have found three easy ways.

- The traditional Tinker way is to climb over the bow, which is easily done. However, there might be some risk of damage to the bow dodger/spray cover.

- The second way is to swim to the transom, pull down the mainsheet into the water and use the sheet as a step to climb into the boat. With hands on the transom and one foot in the looped main sheet, I found this a most easy and comfortable way of getting back in. However, I foresee one danger: namely, that a considerable strain is put on the block and fittings of the boom. In my case, the fittings held and, perhaps, on balance, my final suggestion would be the better method:

- Swim to the bow, untie the painter and then tie the end of the painter onto one of the rope lifelines which run along the side of each tube, aft of a convenient holding patch. Ensure the painter is tied at a convenient height to use as a step in the water. Using the painter as a step and, holding onto the tube, the mast or, in an older boat, the bulkhead, it is again easy to climb in. In adopting this method, there is little danger of anything breaking.

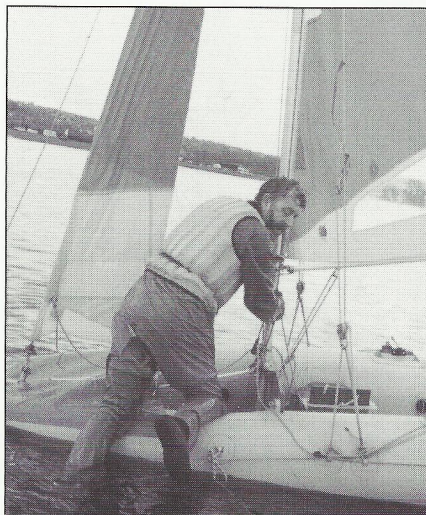
Hopefully, this article will start a flood of letters (*Yes! Ed*) suggesting ways of righting a boat and getting back in and I will learn a better way. I would suggest it would be sensible to try all or some of the suggested techniques - in clement weather and while help is at hand - to see which is best for you, rather than waiting until an uncontrolled situation occurs.

One final note, as they say on *Crimewatch UK*, 'Don't have nightmares'. It is far more difficult to capsize a Tinker than it is to right it.

Right, trying to right the boat by twisting from the bow.



Below, my own technique: boat at balance point, held easily with line and dagger board



Left and below, using the painter tied behind lifeline patch as a step which makes for an easy entry over the bow

