

## Cutting the cant about canting keels, by Jim Murrant

Let's start facing facts about yachts with canting keels. They are not yachts, they are motor boats and, as such, should be banned from competing with genuine yachts.

As long as they have to keep their motor running day and night to provide hydraulics for the keels and electrics to drive their winches, they are, and will remain, motor boats.

I am not a Luddite. I am not against the development of canting keels, I simply believe that development should take place separately.

There are other reasons for this. The rate of failure of the systems is much higher than that of 'traditional' fixed keel yachts, particularly in heavy weather. And keel failure, when it comes, is dramatically dangerous. If the system jams, the most common failure, it rarely jams in the safest position, which is straight up and down. It jams at an angle which can put the boat in danger.

Another common failure is that the through-hull opening is damaged causing dangerous leaks. These are not minor irritations, they are life-threatening emergencies to all on board. To compound the problem, canting keel yachts are usually at the top end of the scale in size, with commensurately large crews.

Ocean racing is acknowledged as a sport with serious risks, but these are largely known and allowed for. I believe the *likelihood* of failure of canting keels, and that the *likelihood* of the need for rescue of the crew is too great to be put to the test.

If the technology were to change so that the motor did not have to be run all the time, and if the rate of failure were to drop, then perhaps my views would alter.

But I doubt it as there are philosophical arguments as well. The early definition of a yacht was that it did not use anything other than manpower to make it function, with the exception of what used to be called the 'auxiliary' motor. Mechanical aids such as gearing for the winches still used basic manpower. The winches were not powered by electricity generated by the boat's motor.

Another difficulty is that the technology is not available to all the competitors. It is a very expensive technology. It gives such an advantage to those with enough money that I don't believe there is a handicap system which can effectively give the disadvantaged boats a fair chance.

So what is the answer? The ideal ocean race, perhaps, would be where all the boats are the same and allotted to a skipper and crew as in a raffle, and the contest then would be as fair as possible. But that is hopelessly idealistic and impossible to achieve.

But in the meantime I don't think changing the whole spirit of the sport is the way to go.

Learn more about *The Boating Bible Manual of Seamanship* – 6 CDs

- Boat Handling 1 & 2 (2 disks)
- Navigation and Passage Planning
- Safety and Emergencies
- Skipper and Crew, Knots and The Language of the Sea
- Weathercraft

Plus a bonus FREE DVD – The Joys of Sailing

Visit our website now – <http://www.theboatingbible.com>