

The Ultimate Sail Pattern Guide

From Flamer to Spirit, We've Got Them All



In the beginning, all sails were white.

In the late 1960s, only a few boat manufacturers offered colored sails, most notably Akort, the makers of the Sailfish and Sunfish. Hobie Cats seemed made for color. But the first colors weren't in the sails – they were in the hulls.

When you ordered a Hobie 14 in the late 60's, you could choose from twelve different gel coat colors and you could select separate colors for the hulls and decks. From a distance though, you still couldn't tell a Hobie Cat from any other sailboat. Hobie Cat needed

something to make their product unique and with any luck, sell more boats. The fully battened sails were a natural canvas, so Hobie started introducing colored panels. The rest is history. Today, Hobie Cats and colored sails are inexorably connected.

The first experiments with color were tentative – a single panel in the main and jib. Then alternating color panels were introduced and ultimately, whole sails of a solid color. In 1974, someone had a brilliant idea: package a full-color sail pattern with special hull and tramp colors, use the relatively new black anodized aluminum and give the scheme a name. Thus, the first named "package boats" – Banana, Orchid and the ever popular Flamer designs – were born in 1975.

In the late 70's named package boats really took off. Who can forget the Tequila Sunrise, the most popular pattern ever? Also, in 1977, Hobie Cat began providing boats for the World and US National Championships. In some cases, these had the new sail patterns for the coming year, but often, they would be custom patterns not available otherwise. Large, sail numbers in

an ornate font replaced the plain identification numbers of the early sails. Eventually, the package names became associated with just the sails.

In the 1980's, the number of color patterns exploded, driven by sailcloth dyed with multiple colored stripes. The popular Prism and Blue Hawaii patterns would not have been possible without this innovation. The dyed sailcloth was extremely versatile. It could be used in a single panel, with as many as eight different color stripes, or combined with a reversed second panel to create the "double" patterns. It could be moved around to different panels, but did not work well in the higher panels due to their increasing wedge shape. As boat production numbers waned in the late 80's, the dyed material became harder to get in smaller quantities. The last pattern made with it was the All American in 1990.

But while the sail patterns were becoming more numerous, hull colors were being phased out. Sun fading and discoloration were real problems with some colors, so by the end of the 1980's, hulls were limited to white, blue and yellow. The exceptions to this were the Stars & Stripes special edition of 1987 with gunmetal blue-gray hulls and its special commemorative sails and some of the 1989 Nationals boats had light gray hulls. With the exception of last year, the last provided boat Nationals was in 1989, but Hobie continued to supply a limited number of charter boats with sail patterns unique to the events.

In the early 90's Hobie began to experiment with some completely different technologies to set their products apart. Sail window material became a design element in the ill-fated Formula 1 package. These sails were unlike anything seen before or since. They were teamed up with white powder-coated aluminum to create a striking look. Unfortunately, they didn't wear