

THE ULTIMATE SAIL PATTERN GUIDE

Part 2 – The Hobie 17 and Hobie 20

Unlike the Hobie 14 and 16 sails, Hobie 17s and Hobie 20s have had colored sail patterns from the time of their introduction. When the H-17 was introduced in 1984, Hobie Cat knew that colored sails sold more boats. The H-17 vertical cut sails (and later the Hobie 20 tri-radial cut) brought new aspects to the kaleidoscope of colors on the water. The sails were more transparent than solid Dacron, creating different shades of color depending on whether the sun was shining on them or through them. Batten pockets, reinforcing patches on the corners and extra keel reinforcement panels made the sails asymmetric – the two sides had different color patterns.

Hobie Cat's original offering for the Hobie 17 was a conventional, horizontal cut sail made from one of the most advanced sail materials available at the time. The new material was a two-ply laminated Mylar with scrim. Most of these horizontal patterns (numbers 1-5 and 35 on the chart) are now exceedingly rare. Pattern #35 was the factory-supplied sail at the 1990 H-17 Worlds in Toronto, but it was really a dressed-up overstock from the mid-80's.

At that time of the Hobie 17 introduction, the sailboard industry was booming and because of that, the technology for sails was changing rapidly. Hobie Cat realized early that a vertical cut sail was best solution for the H-17. Hobie quickly replaced the original sails with the new modern vertical cut sails. However, their sail loft did not have any experience making them, so sailboard sail maker Neil Pryde produced the first vertical cut sails for the H-17. These patterns, which had no name at the time, were highly sought after by racers. Bright, neon colors were the order of the day. Many of these became the basis for the first named patterns in 1987, when Hobie started producing their own vertical cut sails for the H-17.

Hobie 17 sales tapered off sharply in the early 1990's and so did the introduction of new sail patterns. Like the H-16 sails, a more somber palette was

developed in the mid-to-late 1990's. Custom sail patterns became more prevalent and several well known ones are shown from this period.

A brighter, sunnier palette was called for in the early 2000's, reflecting Hobie Cat's "back to the beach" theme. The latest introduction, Smoke, evokes a bit of the Tiger's smoke colored sails.

For the introduction of the Hobie 20 in 1991, Hobie Cat had Skip Elliot design and produce the first sails. These had a pastel palette and looked very much like the sails produced by Elliot Sailmakers for NACRA. Production was brought in-house within a couple of years, and the colors brightened significantly, differentiating the Hobie 20 from its chief competitors.

The Hobie 20 jib has always been white Dacron – except for the reinforcing patches at the corners. Five different colors have been used – white, blue, red, green and very rarely, yellow. There didn't seem to be much reason as to which color was used, except for the "Wild Thing" pattern in which each corner had a different color.

In 1994, to celebrate Hobie 20 #500, Hobie Cat produced a one-of-a-kind red-hulled boat. This was sailed at the H-20 Nationals in St. Joe, Michigan. The red hulls stood out like a sore thumb amongst the fleet of white hulls. Even though it had a white sail, we've included that boat as #18 on the chart.

These days, with the exception of the Smoke pattern on the H-17, the only standard color for both the H-17 and the H-20 is white. Colored sail material is expensive in small quantities and there's not much of a demand for replacement sails. You can still order custom patterns, but the availability is limited to the colors of cloth on hand.

Do you know of an unusual pattern or know a pattern name we missed? Send us an e-mail at hcanews@comcast.net and let us know about it! You never know – it might be in the next *HOTLINE!*