

What to wear/Dinghy Sailing

Over the next few pages we cover what to wear for different types of sailing. I also cover the assumptions of sailing in different climates and on different budgets. This ranges from "I want the best possible options" to "I am trying out sailing for the first time and I only want the bare essentials". Obviously personal choice comes into it and we all have our own favourites for different reasons. I hope, however, that it will give you a flavour for what is out there and what your options are.

Dinghy Sailing

In many ways dinghy sailing is one of the hardest topics to cover. It is very much a sport for all seasons and in the UK at least, we sail for twelve months of the year in temperatures ranging from freezing to 30°C. The water temperature can also make a big difference and can vary from 2 to 3 degrees in a cold inland lake or gravel pit to 20 degrees in the summer. On top of that there is a huge variation in boats from the traditional to the latest sports boat with twin wires and asymmetric rigs; single hander Lasers, to Tornado Catamarans capable of 25 knots.

So let's begin with keeping afloat. If you are a member of a sailing club and racing, whether you like the idea or not, you are almost certainly going to have wear a buoyancy aid. However good a swimmer you are, you never know when you might get a bump on the head from the boom and at best be stunned and at worst unconscious, so it makes sense.

My first buoyancy aid was about three inches thick and made of kapok covered by a heavy duty PVC shell. It had lacing eyes so it could be tightened up. It was bulky, stiff as a board, impossible to do up properly and when you fell in the water it went straight over your head making it impossible to see or swim and you just had to hope there was someone around to fish you out. It certainly didn't encourage you to wear it.

Today buoyancy aids and life jackets are covered by European CE standards and the standard that is recommended for dinghy sailing is the 50 Newton standard. It assumes you can already swim, (check details) They have to have specified

What to wear/Dinghy Sailing

amounts of buoyancy, fit well, be tough and most definitely stay on when you fall in. There may be many regulations for which we curse the EEC however, this should not be one of them.

Most dinghy sailors want as much freedom of movement and as little bulk as possible. There are two main buoyancy types used for dinghy sailing. A conventional zipped vest and a pull-over-the-head type. The zipped vest is easier to put on but is slightly longer than the pull-over, which seems to be the most popular amongst the racing fraternity. It fits snugly above where a trapeze hook would go. Freedom of movement is improved by using as many pieces of closed cell foam as possible so that it bends around the contours of the body. This is usually the way you can tell the cheaper vests from the more expensive. The cheap ones will have one or two pieces of 25mm foam that have to bend to fit the body. The better ones will have strategic panels designed to give as much freedom of movement as possible.



I usually manage to test the drysuit once or twice a year!

As I have already mentioned, dinghy sailing is a pretty broad subject and it is difficult to know where to begin so it may be worth looking at examples. I believe I fall into the **Club Racer** category. I sail a National 12 at Notts County Sailing Club, a reasonable sized inland open water. I sail as often as I can between 1st March and 1st January so encounter all seasons. I will do a few open meetings and if possible a championship week but most of my sailing takes place inland. I believe I am fairly typical of thousands of club sailors. We all want to be warm, dry and comfortable in a variety of conditions.

I began my sailing life on the River Trent, which was centrally heated by the outflow of about four power stations up stream. In summer the water was literally tepid and in winter just cool and I rarely bothered with a wetsuit or drysuit. Who said Global warming is a new phenomenon? Today I am sailing on a gravel pit where wetsuits or drysuits are mandatory from mid-October onwards. Not that you need to be told to wear one. On New Year's Day I encountered ice flows on the water that made a terrifying noise when you sailed through them. Many people tend to forget that you are far more likely to die of hypothermia than you are to drown.

What to wear/Dinghy Sailing

When it is really cold I prefer a drysuit. The idea that I can walk out up to my waist in water when launching or avoid the cold chill when hitting the water on an involuntary capsize is appealing. Drysuits are available in front and back zip versions. I prefer the back zip because it means less bulk across the middle, it is lighter and easier to move around in. The main argument against them is that help is sometimes needed to do the zip right up but to me it's a small price to pay. Doing the last centimetre up on either a front or back zip is essential. Because the zip is so stiff it is easy to leave just a tiny bit open. I remember early one March testing a drysuit in an open-air swimming pool. The water was 5°C and all I was wearing underneath was my work shirt and trousers. Everything was fine until I fully immersed the zip and an icy cold trickle ran down my back. When I got out I checked the zip and whilst it looked closed it was not locked home. I was also quite shocked just how cold it was even with a drysuit on. Only my hands were exposed and in just a few minutes the heat literally drained away. Of course I wouldn't go sailing in just a thin cotton shirt but it acted as a reminder of the devastating effects of hypothermia.

Under my drysuit I wear a thermal one-piece suit, although a two-piece system is just as good. As discussed earlier in the layering section, this is essential for wicking moisture away from the body. A drysuit is literally sealed at every opening and risk of condensation could not be greater. Over the one-piece base layer I will wear a fleece salopette and top, depending on the temperature. I have yet to feel cold sailing in this combination.

Some people will prefer to wear wetsuits. These are available in a variety of weights and styles. Just as with all marine clothing there have been huge advances in design and material technology. Look for suits using different thicknesses of neoprene in different areas depending whether it is warmth or flexibility that is the main criteria. There are copper linings, titanium finishes, some of which are a bit gimmicky but do have some benefit. Also look for blind stitching that is waterproof and flat seaming that will not press against the body. There are also non-slip materials and reinforcing for seats and knees.

What to wear/Dinghy Sailing



Latex seals on neck wrist and feet together with a fully waterproof zip mean you could go swimming in your best suit and stay dry

The big difference between a wetsuit and drysuit is that with a drysuit the warmth and protection comes by staying totally dry whether in the water or out. A wetsuit works on the principle that even though wet, body heat will not escape through neoprene. Any water in the suit will warm up. Overall a wetsuit on its own may be lighter and more flexible if you don't mind the initial cold feeling when falling in. It will also need some protection on top to prevent damage and snagging.

A poll of some of our top sailors seemed to suggest that the faster boats such as Tornados, 49ers, etc prefer wetsuits. Sailors on more traditional boats such as 470's and Fireballs etc prefer drysuits. A lot will also depend on the water temperature.

In the summer and early autumn, if there is little chance of capsizing I will wear the first two layers in conjunction with my two-piece waterproof dinghy system. This consists of a lightweight chest high trouser and top. It is waterproof, breathable and very flexible. Being at the drier end of the boat I will often just wear the trousers.

In warm but windy conditions I have a summer weight wetsuit. It is available in long and short versions and I find the long more versatile.

On my feet I wear the neoprene boots with lightweight thermal socks. The boots provide second-to-none grip and are very comfortable and warm. I have recently gone up a size. I found whilst testing various types of socks that, what was making my feet cold was the fact that they were too tight and constricting blood flow. The larger size also enables me to wear them over drysuit boots.

I wear head a fleece hat or balaclava which makes a huge difference as it doesn't absorb any water and can keep you warm when wet.

What to wear/Dinghy Sailing

Base Layer

It doesn't get much more energetic than dinghy sailing in a fresh breeze and, as mentioned in the section on breathable fabrics, in a hour of moderate exercise our bodies give off half a litre of moisture vapour. This is the body's natural cooling system and the moisture needs to go somewhere to avoid you getting damp from the inside rather than from outside in. In a two hour race our clothing system has a lot to cope with.

The options are a crew or zip neck top and leggings or, particularly effect for underneath drysuits, is a thermal one piece. They are made in a thermal stretch fabric woven in a two yarn "bi-polar" system to enhance moisture vapour management. You'll find the fabric moves moisture away from the skin and traps air in the weave to keep you warm. It is also very quick drying.

As wetsuits are not breathable a normal base layer will not help. However a Rash Vest can make the wetsuit more comfortable. It is tight fitting and quick drying.

Mid Layer

Again this will come down to whether you are wearing a wetsuit or not. If the answer is no then you are relying on the mid layer as the insulating layer. It is of course dependant on the temperature and the best options are the toast top and pant which is a micro fleece and gives good warmth without bulk and is excellent for wearing under a drysuit. Warmer still is the i4 fleece range. This could be a top or jacket and the salopette and doubles up on the warmer round your middle.

What to wear/Dinghy Sailing

Waterproof layer

We again come back to the question of selecting a wetsuit, drysuit or traditional waterproof layer. I outlined most of these options earlier in this section. Much will depend on the wind strength and the time of the year. For me one of the most versatile options is the dinghy system waterproof top and chest high trousers. Gill pioneered this development in 1988. Up until then the one-piece suit was the order of the day.

Gill Dinghy system top changed the thinking behind dinghy Clothing



- 1 Soft PU seals are both comfortable and watertight
- 2 Zipped pockets can be accessed even with buoyancy aid on
- 3 Neoprene hem prevents top riding up as well as giving a good seal

It was however inflexible. It was either all on or all off. I remember noticing how some people when they got hot, slipped the one piece suit off the shoulders and tied it round the middle, which was most unsatisfactory. I also noticed that others would wear a pair of overweight chest high trousers from their offshore collection. There had to be a better way, it had to be light and easy to move around in, no more expensive than a good one-piece suit and flexible so you could wear either half on its own. The answer was to produce a pair of chest high trousers, without a fly front in the same fabric we used for making one piece suits. The top half was a simple over the head smock with adjustable soft PU cuffs and neck seal. It had taped seams so was full waterproof. It was an instant success. Some people would just buy the top to put on over a wetsuit, particularly if theirs was a sleeveless one, whilst others would just buy the trousers for warm days but most had the complete system.

What to wear/Dinghy Sailing



Pro-Choice

Hugh Styles

Hugh Styles and Adam May campaign a Tornado, the fastest of the Olympic Classes. They were fourth at Sydney and are currently ranked number 3 in the world.

Hugh Styles kit bag contains:

	Warm conditions	Cold
Base Layer	Rash vest or cool top	Thermal top x 2
Wetsuit/Drysuit	Speed skins or Gill wetsuit	Gill Breathable Drysuit or long arm wetsuit
Waterproof Layer	Spray top (white in Athens!)	Spray top or Dry top
Footwear	Gill Aquatechs	Gill Neoprene Boots
Gloves	Championship gloves	Championship
Head gear	Sailing cap	Base layer cap

How important is the actual weight of the gear?

Lightweight is preferable, easier to move around in. For certain conditions we aim to make up the weight of the clothes to the 9 kg overall clothing limit by adding weight to the harnesses or wear heavier tops for more leverage.

What is your favourite bit of kit?

The Speed Skins and the breathable drysuit.

What to wear/Dinghy Sailing

Dinghy Product Selector

Base Layer	Mid layer	Waterproof	Footwear	Accessories
Crew Neck	i4 smock	Breathable Drysuit A	Competition Boot	Deckhand A,J
Zip neck	i4 Salopette	Regular Drysuit A	Neoprene Boot	Regatta Glove A
Leggings	Toasty Top	Dinghy System A	Aquatech shoes	Championship GloveA
One Piece	Toasty Pants	Dry smock A		3 Season Glove A
		Spray smock W		Trapeze Harness
				Wetsuit W,F
				Buoyancy Aid

A denotes all seasons

W denotes warm conditions

F denotes Female specific sizes available

J denotes Junior sizes available

For further information on your Dinghy Product selection contact a Gill Technical Clothing Specialist on 01159 460844 Or e-mail TCS@gilluk.com Or visit www.gillmarine.com/