Installing Lazy-Jacks
Give yourself a helping hand.

This time of the year sailors are getting ready for day sailing, weekends or longer cruises. One of the popular requests is for Lazy-Jacks. They are favorites for those of us who want an extra hand that we do not have to feed. Here are some ideas we would like to share with you that could help you get your mainsail stowed or reefed easily.

By Jack and Alex Wilken

Lazy-Jacks are an optional but useful piece of rigging that can be put together in a few hours, bought as a package, or rigged by a professional. The basic concept is a series of light lines which connect from a single point on both sides of the mast to several points on both sides of the boom in order to confine the main sail to the boom to facilitate sail handling. The design we will suggest is simple with no moving parts, creating a minimum of chafe.

Design Factors
First, does your rig have single or multiple spreaders? This will help you decide on where to put the attachment points on the mast. The next is the length of the boom. The number of elements and attachment points on the boom depends on its length, or the foot of the main sail if that is significantly shorter. (Figure 1, showing a double spreader rig)

Materials
We normally use 1/4" polyester double braid line for the Lazy-Jacks. You can use three strand line because it makes the splicing simpler, but it has the tendency to twist. Low friction rings (LFRs) or thimbles can be used instead of blocks. Using standard splicing thimbles will give you more chafing of the line that runs through them if they are nylon, and, if they are stainless steel, the hard edges will wear whatever they come in contact with. LFRs are anodized aluminum with soft edges. The attachment points for the mast can be drilled and tapped for machine screws, or pop riveted using an eyestrap or a terminal eyestrap.

On the boom you will need two to four small cleats made of aluminum or plastic and one fairlead or eye strap. These should be attached with machine screws.

Getting started
We start in the computer, but, if you would rather, you can draw your design with paper and pencil, or measure directly on your spars (Figure 2). Whichever method you choose, start with the mast attachment point. This will be about two thirds of the way up a single spreader rig and at or close to the upper spreaders on a double spreader rig. Let’s make that point “A”. Now, come back 24” from the mast on the boom and that is point B. From there divide the boom up into 24” sections. These will be points C, D, etc. These need not be exact, and you can increase the interval as you move towards the clue of the mainsail. Full length batten sails will stay in place so you can have more space between the points on the boom. At this point you measure how much line you need in place, or draw it to scale on paper or in the computer. Once you have the design, if you want to verify the placement of the attachment points, it is possible to test your design by using the main halyard and some other line to make mock Lazy-Jacks. This line does not need to be 1/4” diameter, just use what you have. Attach the mock Lazy-Jacks to the boom at the points you have chosen using existing hardware and, if needed, loop them under the boom and hold in place with duct tape. Then, pull them up with the main halyard to see how your attachment points will work. Adjust where necessary.

Installation
This includes drilling, tapping, and splicing. If you use LFRs for all the fairleads above the boom, they will be spliced into the lines (Figure 3) at X and Y (Figure 4). At point A on the mast the
LFRs are lashed to a terminal eyestrap (Figure 4). Point B, either on the sides or bottom of the boom, is where you mount the cleat(s). Two cleats are needed if you mount them on the sides, but only one is needed if you mount it on the bottom. Blocks can be substituted for the LFRs, but we do not recommend it because they need maintenance and chafe against the sail. Also, LFRs look cleaner in our opinion. In Figure 2 C and D will be cleats, and E is a fairlead or eyestrap to hold the line in place when it loops under the boom.

**In Summary**

Finding the ideal spaces between the attachment points on the boom can be a little trial and error. Sometimes the first one, B, should be less than 24” from the mast, and the points further out on the boom can be more than 24” apart. Starting at B with 18” and then every 24” after that will work, but this may give you more parts (lines) than you actually need. Once you have your Lazy-Jacks in place, it is important to adjust them so they do not hold the boom up – that’s the job of the topping lift. They should be tight enough to hold the mainsail on the boom but sufficiently loose so as not to chafe the mainsail when it is up. In some cases the Lazy-Jacks are loosened at the cleat at B and pulled forward to the mast when sailing. After your Lazy-Jacks are installed, may your first use be at anchor in the San Juans!

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Figure 3: Low Friction Rings are spliced into points X & Y.

Figure 4: Low Friction Ring lashed into a terminal eye strap for attachment to the mast at A.