

A NEW TURN OF SPEED

Four speeds and two models to meet different requirements. Pontos brings something new to the winch scene. We went to test them... here's what we found.

BY PAOLA BERTELLI

Winches are often thought of as pieces of kit that belong on yachts. We take them for granted on board, just as we take for granted the effort needed to sheet in. All in all, winches haven't seen a great deal of development over the years, and the mechanism is the same as it's always been. However, in late October we went to Saint-Malo, in northern France, to try out the Pontos winches. And when we are impressed by something, we like to say so. They impressed us because they bring something new to the table, and it's no exaggeration to say that they simplify rope handling immensely.

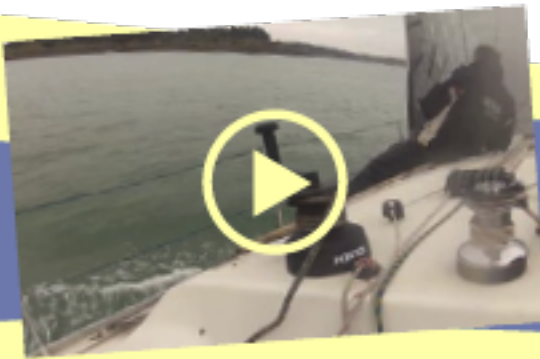
WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

At first sight the Pontos products look like normal two-speed winches, but in fact they have four. This may conjure up images of buttons to press, gears to engage and so on, but this is far from the truth - they work in an extremely straightforward way, and you never have to let go of the handle - these winches offer the same performance and operate in the same way as normal two-speed winches until the sheet tension reaches a specific level.

At this point the mechanism, patented by Pontos, is ready to kick into action, and it engages as soon as you reverse the handle's direction of rotation. The winch slips into third gear, and when you reverse the direction you find yourself in fourth. The machinery returns to the starting position as soon as tension on the sheet eases - and it all starts again!

Another new feature on the Pontos winches is that there are two very different models

with different purposes and methods of use, to be selected according to individual requirements. Both are four-speed designs, and are the same size - for now the dimensions are 40, 46 and 52 - and are based on the same operating principle. One model, though, the Trimmer, is designed to reduce effort to a minimum while the other, the Grinder, is intended to speed up and streamline rope handling.



TRIMMER – PUFFING AND PANTING IS JUST A MEMORY

The Trimmer winches are an interesting alternative for anyone thinking of mounting electric winches, or is tired of all the puffing and straining involved in managing their yacht.

They are used in the traditional way, and the advantage of the four-speed design is, of course, that it reduces effort. And what a reduction! We tried the them out on a Sun Odyssey 40, a typical cruiser boat with an overlapping Genoa. The two winches were on the coachroof, not a very comfortable location for sheeting in the Genoa sheet. After hauling in the sheet by hand you begin to work on the winch. The Trimmers operate like normal 2 speed winches until the tension on the drum reaches a certain level. When this occurs and the direction of rotation is reversed - totally automatically and without having to do anything,

the third speed engages, and then when the direction is reversed once again, fourth. When you reach the fourth speed the handle can be turned using just two fingers of one hand, with almost zero force. It's so easy that you have to get used to the fact that fatigue won't slow you down and warn you that you've almost reached the end and that you should look at the sail for the final trim - there is actually a risk of sheeting in too much, and with it also the foot of the sail.



HOW THE PONTOS WINCHES WORK



The totally mechanical system that allows, by reversing the direction of rotation of the winch, to insert the third and the fourth speed is based on a dog clutch and the mechanism that enables it to move and become engaged. The clutch movement is the key, and this is where Pontos have introduced the real innovation. When the tension on the drum increases and reaches a specific level two springs are compressed and these activate the mechanism.

Operating the 4-speed Pontos winches compared to the classic 2-speeds

Winch
2 Speed



Trimmer



Grinder



GRINDER – A NEW WAY OF USING A WINCH



If you have watched the video you will have realised what's new about the Pontos winch. The Grinders change the way winches are used. There is longer any need to recover the sheet by hand, load it into the self-tailing, fit the handle and start to turn it. All that time is saved and you can immediately begin to sheet in the sheet, already pre-loaded in the self-tailing, with the handle. This winch aims to speed up and streamline maneuvers. It works well not only with jib sheets but also furling, unfurling large asymmetrical and hoisting sails. With this model the four

speeds do not involve less effort, but they do mean that the winch, ready with the sheet and handle, can be used straight away - when the Grinder 40, for example, is operating at the first speed it recovers seventy centimetres of sheet with each turn, and twenty at the second speed. This model is designed not only to be faster when racing - a quarter of the yachts at the start of the Route du Rhum in Saint-Malo had Pontos winches on board - but also simplifies maneuvers when cruising, especially for those sailing

with a less expert or skeleton crew.

We tried out the Grinders on a JPK 10.80, a very sporty design. The advantage is immediately clear, even it is difficult at first to remember not to sheet in by hand. However, we noticed the real difference when starting to tack with only one person at the sheets. It's a whole new life!



PROS

- The Grinders speed up and simplify rope handling. Even less expert crews will be able to use them immediately.
- The Trimmers involve much less effort than before, and are a valid alternative to electric winches.

CONS

- For now the Pontos winches are mounted on a base with the same holes as the Harkens. Mounting on other bases will present a problem.
- The intense loads can damage the cover of the sheet.