

Ensign Mast Raising Checklist

This procedure is best done with three people, but can be done with two if they are experienced with the process.

See <https://sailsaratoga.org/ensign-step-mast> for photos of the key steps

Boat

- Secure bow tightly against dock – ideally facing shore.
- Secure stern, which will be away from dock.
- Place shackle in bow plate for gin pole forestay.
- Make sure the mast step is clear.
- Have two cushions or life jackets ready to place on cabin top and rear deck to cushion mast.

Mast

- All lines must be in front of spreaders, except for backstay and bitter end of main halyard.
- All ties must be removed from the mast if they are more than about 10 feet from bottom of mast. (Otherwise, you will not be able to reach them once the mast is up.)

Gin Pole

- All lines must be separated and running free.
- Check for frayed lines.
- Ensure all rigging is secure and free of damage

Gin Pole on Cabin Top

- Gin pole support block must be placed against the mast hole in the cabin top.
- The gin pole should be raised to the vertical position on the dock while next to the mast hole in the top of the cabin. (This is done by having one person hold the bottom of the gin pole against their foot on the dock, while a second person raises the gin pole to the vertical position.)
- The gin pole is then transferred to the boat while it is vertical. (It is hard to hold the gin pole if it is allowed to move away from vertical.)
- The smooth side of gin pole is toward the bow.
- Secure the gin pole main (upper) forestay through shackle in bow plate and then secure the line to the deck cleat.
- Attach the gin pole side stays to the rear chain plates on the Ensign and then secure the lines to cleats on the cabin top or run the lines around the winch and secure them to the jib sheet cleats.
- Secure the secondary (lower) gin pole forestay through the bow plate shackle and then secure to the deck cleat.
- Make sure the gin pole is perpendicular to deck, both side-to-side and front-to-back.

- Make sure both gin pole stays and both gin pole forestays are tight and secure.

Mast on Deck

- Place the mast on the deck with the top toward the stern of boat and the smooth side up.
- The mast spreaders must be aft of the gin pole and just aft of gin pole side stay on dock side of boat. (When placing the mast on the deck, rotate the mast 90 degrees to get the spreaders between the gin pole and the dockside side stay.)
- Use cushions or life jackets to cushion the mast on the cabin top and rear deck
- If a wind vane is desired, make sure it is in place.
- Attach the hosting line from the gin pole to the mast under the spreaders, using the snap shackle to secure the loop.

Raising The Mast

- The person pulling on the gin pole halyard must stand in front of the gin pole (between the gin pole and the bow) and in the center of the cabin top.
- The person who will guide the mast onto the mast step should be in the cabin, for safety, and must be centered in the boat.
- As the mast is pulled up, a person on the dock should push down on the bottom of the mast to help it assume a vertical position.
- Once the mast has been raised high enough, the person on the dock should guide the base of the mast into the hole in the top of the cabin. (This usually means temporarily stepping on the boat.)
- If something does not seem right, or if the mast cannot be raised, lower it back to the deck and look for interference from lines, etc.
- Once the mast is through the hole in the cabin top, no “helpers” other than the gin pole halyard person and the mast step guide person should be on the boat, as that will tilt the boat. (If the boat is heeled it will be hard to impossible to guide the mast onto the mast step.)
- The mast should be lowered until it is just above the mast step, and then guided onto the step using verbal communication between the mast step guide person and the gin pole halyard person. (The gin pole halyard person can judge the vertical position of the mast by observing the distance between the mast collar and the top of the cabin.)
- Once the mast is on the mast step it is secure, though it may not seem so.
- The gin pole raising line should be lowered using the pull down line. It is sometimes necessary to use a boat hook to get the line over the spreader bolts.
- Once the raising line is down and disconnected, the gin pole side stays and forestays can be removed while the pole is held against the mast.
- Once the lines are disconnected, the gin pole should be moved back to the dock while still vertical.

- Once on the dock, the gin pole can be lowered to the horizontal position. (One person should hold their foot against the base of the gin pole as a second person lowers the other end to the horizontal position.)
- The gin pole lines should be carefully wrapped around the gin pole so it can be used the next time with minimal tangling.