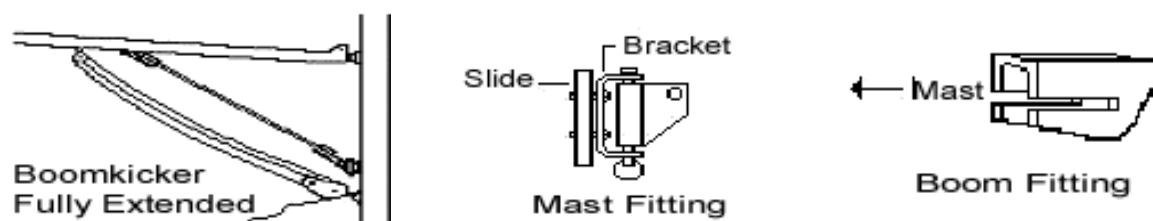


BARTON BOOMSTRUT £128.90–£198.42

Fully-battened mainsails combined with lazyjacks are a popular and efficient reefing system on cruising yachts. A rigid system has several advantages – you can dispense with a topping lift, reduce weight and windage aloft, and keep the angle of the boom with the mast fixed. This can help improve the set of the mainsail and facilitates dropping the mainsail into the ‘net’ formed by the lazyjacks.

Most racing yachts opt for a rigid boom vang, powered either by gas pressure or with a powerful internal spring. Both of these systems replace the traditional kicking strap and have their own built-in mechanism for adjustment. But at £300 upwards, they are expensive bits of kit. There is a simpler and cheaper option offered by Barton Marine called the Boomstrut. In this system, a pair of fiberglass rods is fixed between the foot of the mast and the underside of the boom, set inside the existing kicking strap. The struts are kept under compression (which gives the boom ‘lift’) and the existing kicking strap is pulled down until the correct angle between the boom and the mast is achieved.

At half the price (or less) of a gas- or spring-powered system, it is an attractive option for a cruising boat. The units come in five different sizes and suit boats from 6m (20ft.) to 12m (39ft.) The Boomstrut might look rudimentary, but it is wonderfully simple in practice. There are essentially three parts to the unit: a pair of flexible fiberglass rods, which are clamped together at each end, which attach to brackets fitted to the base of the mast and the boom. The metal fittings are anodized aluminium with stainless bolts, and everything is well finished (photo.1).



The three parts to the Barton Boomstrut: a pair of fiberglass rods, a mast fitting and a boom fitting

The mast fitting is supplied with a lug, which drops down inside the sail track. This allows the bracket to be clamped to the track – thereby avoiding the need to drill holes in the mast (photo. 2). In my case, the stainless bolts supplied were 3mm too long, so rather than cut them down, I replaced them with shorter bolts. I also used ‘Locktite’ on the bolts – something which the instructions could usefully have suggested. This mast bracket acts like a miniature gooseneck for the bottom end of the compression rods (photo 2).

The boom fitting was a little more complicated to fit. The bracket is attached to the underside of the boom with M8 bolts and this involves drilling and tapping three holes to take the stainless steel bolts. This requires a 6.8mm drill (7/64 inch in old money) and an M8 tap – neither of which I had. A quick trip to my local hardware shop cost me nearly £20 for these essential extra tools. It would have been a generous touch if the kit had included these extra bits (photo. 3).



Photo. 1 (above): The boom fitting (top), mast bracket (center) and a clamp at the end of the fiberglass rods.

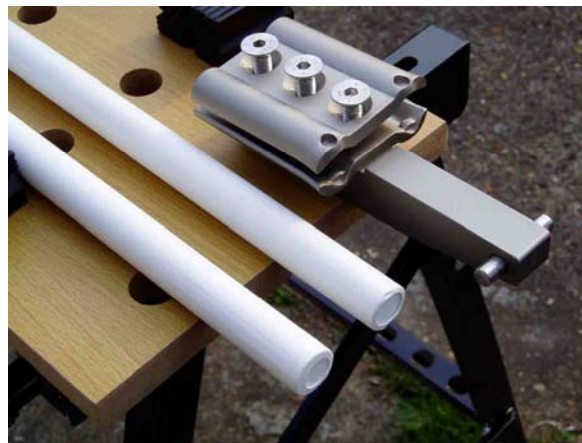


Photo 2 (right): A lug slides inside the sail track and allows the mast bracket be fitted without drilling the mast.



Photo. 3 (left): The 'extras', a 6.8mm drill bit and an M8 tap, cost nearly £20.

Photo. 4 (below): The rods had to be shortened by 100mm. This involved removing the boom-end clamp before cutting.



Once this bracket is attached with the open end of the jaws facing the mast, the boom is raised approximately 30cm above the horizontal to allow the end fitting for the rods to be slotted into the boom fitting. In my case, the rods had to be shorted by 100mm (see fig. 4). Barton Marine advises that you do not shorted the rods by more than 150mm and their instructions recommend that you double-check your Boomstrut size before fitting. It would have been useful if the instructions had actually included these dimensions in a simple table to allow a last minute check. However, you can access the table on their website.

You need to fit the compression rods into the boom and mast brackets the correct way up, so that when downward pressure is brought onto the boom, the rods bend in towards the mast. Although the correct way is shown in a very small diagram in the instructions, it would have been useful if this had been pointed out more clearly. *Peter Firstbrook*



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Sailing Today Verdict

The Barton Boomstrut offers a rigid boom vang which is cheaper and simpler than gas- or spring-powered systems. The unit is well made from fiberglass and anodized aluminium and is easily fitted with basic tools, although an M8 tap and 6.8mm drill bit are essential. The fitting instructions could usefully be improved.

Suggested Boat Length in Metres	Pin To Pin Length MM	Rods Can Be Reduced By MM*	Max Initial Stroke in MM	Max Stroke At Full Adjustment in MM	Force in Kg
Up to 6 m	960	150	300	150	90
6 - 7.5m	1070	150	300	150	140
7.5 - 9m	1180	150	300	150	185
9 - 10.5m	1320	150	400	250	230
10.5 - 12m	1450	150	400	250	270

