



## ADDED VALUE IN SAILMAKING

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*By Steve Haarstick,*

If there is no discernable difference between one product and another, price is often the only meaningful way to determine which is the "**Best Buy**". One look at the mountain of super-market mail advertisements would indicate price is most often used to differentiate one head of lettuce from another. Similarly, almost every car dealer advertises that he has the "**Lowest Price in Town**", that you'll get the "**BEST DEAL**" only at his dealership. On the contrary, I have never seen any car dealer advertise that his prices are higher than anyone else in town, but he provides services that no one else offers, like actually being able to fix your car! That would be a new twist!

Probably the only other concept that has more popularity in advertisements is sex. We are all prompted to believe that if we buy our next Chevy from the dealer down the street, not only will we get the best price, but also our sexual prowess will be enhanced as we "vava-voom down the street". Or better yet, we can fantasize that perhaps one of the scantily clad models in the car advertisements will be our passenger.

If we apply these two proven advertising concepts to the sailmaking business it would seem that perhaps we have overlooked something! As I peruse the popular sailing magazines, I have not noticed too many sailmakers promoting their products with the aid of beautiful women in the picture, certainly not like the boat accessory ads. Are we missing the proverbial boat here? It would make more sense that a beautiful woman would appreciate our intelligence, or superior genes, or whatever, for making the best sail buying decision, not to mention sailing on our boat, preferably at sunset, than our buying some souped-up Chevy.

Other than the "Classified" ads from the "Far East" in the back of the magazines, I have not noticed very many sailmakers advertise that they will beat any price. Unlike most car ad's, we are still promoting ourselves on the basis of **Added Value** (at least in the printed ads), but it is also a fact that price is becoming more and more of a factor in the industry.

When times become more "competitive", the natural reaction is to sell on price, because this is the easiest comparison to make between products. If the potential buyer doesn't perceive that there is any significant difference, then relative price will be the determining factor in his choice of which product to buy. It is always easier to sell on price alone, but this is an extremely perilous path to follow, as it negates many of the strengths of any organization.

### **There are strategies to contend with a price competitive market:**

- 1. Reduce cost of materials and construction, & finishing work by "cutting corners" and compromising.**
- 2. Buy Factory 2<sup>nd</sup>'s, End Rolls, Discontinued Sailcloths.**
- 3. Use inexpensive Plotters and "Pizza Wheel" cutters to draw or cut your panels**
- 4. Reduce the number of panels and seams in a sail.**

One method is to reduce costs to the absolutely lowest possible level possible by "compromising" on all the "little" things that the customer will never notice: like materials, hardware, finishing work, in-process inspections, equipment upgrades, R&D, automated office procedures, accurate scheduling. And remember, since you got the order on price, you can forget about on-time completion, or delivery to the boat, and certainly at this price, on-the-boat service.

What about Repair service?. After all, repairing sails can't be all that difficult. Why bear the added cost of using only the most experienced sailmakers in repairs? Surely it can't be that hard just to fix a couple of rips and tears! Actually, we are only beginning to scratch the surface of cost cutting.

If price were the **Only** factor, sails shouldn't even be built in the US, but overseas where people are paid very little by comparison. (As of 1999 many companies have shifted some or most of their sail production overseas, especially Small Boat and One Design sails).

There are many other methods to cut costs, however, this one is the only one that provides **Haarstick** with motivation to excel. Our job as sailmakers is to provide our customers with the Best Value in the Business. While we are just as cost conscious as the next guy, there are some things we just won't do, no matter what the cost savings are. Using anything less than the very best **sailcloth** available is unacceptable.

For example, did you know that it is easy to buy all kinds of sailcloth for less than 30% of the Cloth manufactures' catalogue list price? Every fall, and sometimes even in the spring, lists of discontinued fabrics, "cosmetic" seconds, short roll leftovers, and the worst of all, "End Roll 2nd's" are offered for big, BIG discounts. This is not limited to just "high tech" fabrics like Kevlar, but is available throughout the sailcloth line. So what's wrong with these fabrics? After

all, sailcloth is sailcloth, right? There can't be THAT MUCH difference, not at 70% off!!! Besides you don't keep much of an inventory in stock, so you're going to have to buy whatever is available in the spring anyway, so why not save a bundle?

If a sailloft doesn't test all of its cloth in house, but merely relies on the manufactures' tests (about 98%+ of the saillofts do exactly this), these offerings look pretty attractive, because you just don't know how much difference there is between a really good batch of cloth and a really dreadful batch! Well, at *Haarstick Sailmakers*, we really do know the difference, and it's just not worth buying dreadful cloth at any price!! When you've spent as much time, energy, and not least of all, man-hours as we do **TESTING EVERY INCOMING SHIPMENT of cloth**, when you've committed to stocking an entire line of fabrics that work together in a sail, and you've seen what these "odd-lots" are really like, you are just not tempted to use this "stuff" in your customers' sails. Will the other guy be able to beat your price if all else is equal? Yes, no doubt about it!! Is the quality of the fabric used in sails that important to all our customers, do they really appreciate that there is a **REALLY BIG DIFFERENCE IN SAILCLOTH QUALITY?** I think our customers do, at least I hope they do. (Read [Impact Flutter Testing](#) for more information)

If we had had the "forward vision" to save money at any cost, we could have waited over 12 years, and opted for one of the many Plotter, or Laser cutters so much in vogue today. Instead we chose the world's best piece of cutting equipment, the Gerber cutter! Even today, it is still the best piece of cutting equipment in the world.

If we were satisfied with cut-panels that have to be trimmed off and faired by hand, or seam curves that are "cleansed" as one sailmaker proudly stated, we probably shouldn't have spent so much money on a CAD-CAM system that was so accurate that when combined with the unmatched precision of the Gerber cutter, it produces panels that are perfect! There is no "cleansing" of seam curves in a *Haarstick* sail. As in most things, we got the design and cutting system that we paid for, **one of the best systems in the business!**

Only *Haarstick* makes every Triradial with 5 horizontal seams. We can better align the cloth's strength direction with the direction of loading. And we can better control the draft throughout the sail. *Haarstick* sails have some of the smoothest, most effective vertical distributions of shape in the industry.

Last, but certainly not least is *Haarstick Sailmakers'* commitment to Customer Service. Our service program last year set an all time record for the number of "on-the-water" service calls made in any previous season. Our Service personnel made a super effort to help virtually everyone who asked, and many that didn't. What is even more unique about our program is how our service representatives are compensated for the service they provide. **To insure that our primary interest is in helping our customers AFTER the sale, all our service work is paid for directly, not indirectly by a commission on the sale.** If we wanted to save, big bucks, in the quest to have the lowest price, we could easily drop this program and pay solely on commission. Of course, the emphasis would then be on merely selling you

the sail, not on making sure you have the help you deserve after the sale. In fact, this would make us just like the rest of the industry.

When I began this sailmaking adventure so many years ago, I really had only one burning desire, and that was to become the best sailmaker in the business not necessarily the biggest, or the richest. I can't say whether or not I have achieved that goal, or whether I ever will, but the quest has been most rewarding. The thought of compromising what I have held dear for so many years just isn't in the cards. I can't conceive of being in this game solely on the basis of the "Lowest Price". **I hope that we can have the opportunity to show all our customers why *Haarstick* sails are still the very best value in the business.**