

James Baumgart is a well-known sailor/racer in the waters of Southern California. You can read more about his adventures aboard his Catalina 25 Indiscipline III on his [website](#). His comments and photos regarding the TillerClutch can be seen on the [Catalina 25/250 forum](#). Below are his independent reviews of the TillerClutch:

**Review No. 1, During the 2010 Silver Gate Yacht Club / San Diego All Catalina Association Coronados Islands race.
April 17–18, 2010
by James Baumgart, CA**

During my 11 mile ocean delivery from Mission Bay to the start line of the 'Around the Coronados' race I used the TillerClutch extensively. This was an early morning motor sail in calm winds and fairly large seas on the aft quarter (5 feet). The device worked very well. It is so easy to flick on and off. The boat is hypersensitive to even a 1/8 inch move of the tiller. The trick is to carefully set the boat on course. Get the tiller very stable in your hand. Then click the lever. In many cases, the boat would hold a good course for 5 to 10 minutes. A simple squeeze of the lever allows a minute tiller adjustment. Once inside San Diego harbor, the device worked even better. I did not use the autopilot at all on the delivery, nor did I ever feel a need to do so.



During the race, we were quite busy and very competitive. For the 15 mile run out to the island we did not have the [TillerClutch control] line even hooked up. I like how quick and easy it is to disconnect and put away, and how quick and easy it is to set up when you want it. I was trimming and doing foredeck and my friend was at the helm most of the way over.

After rounding the island, we were in very rough seas and complex, shifting winds coming off the lee of the island. Shortly after we blew out of the lee, we went up with my reaching spinnaker. After the hoist, I took the helm. I quickly ran the control line and hooked up the TillerClutch. This would be about the toughest conditions you could test in. Rough seas on the beam, winds about 10 knots on the beam, spinnaker up, in a competitive race. My crew was hiking out so I was helming and trimming.

Now there is no way the autopilot could have steered in these conditions and kept the spinnaker full. Locking the tiller did not steer the boat to a competitive race level, either.



I found I could lock the tiller for a few seconds while trimming without a serious course change. This gave me a way to let go, just for a couple of seconds, and attend to a task like trimming the guy. I definitely liked having the device hooked up when short handed in the cockpit.

After the race, the next day I headed home 11 miles upwind. Once again motor sailing, this time in winds about 15 knots, right on the nose, with seas about 3 feet on the port nose (about 11 o'clock). I had the main reefed. I did not use the autopilot at all on the way home. It was easy to hook up the TillerClutch, and easy to steer with it disengaged. The TillerClutch when disengaged adds a slight friction to the tiller, nothing too noticeable. In these conditions, it was hard for the boat to hold a course for long with the TillerClutch engaged. Every minute or so a wave would knock the bow to leeward and the wind would take the boat down. I adjusted the tiller for a slight curving course to windward, and the boat would hold course for a couple of minutes.

What I found was, rather than sitting and steering the whole way home, I would slightly adjust the tiller every few minutes. This allowed me to clean up the boat, eat lunch, shake out the reef, look around and relax all while steering a reasonable course.

I took some photos of my installation. Even though I complained last week about the need to re-tension the line when the tiller is hard over, in practice I never needed to re-tension the line. I never tried to heave the boat to.

I'll publish the photos so you can look at what I did. I showed the device to several fellow sailors. I'll do some more testing under full sail and also try heaving to. It is so simple. I really like how easy it is to set up, use, and put away. After I put the line away for the day, when motoring back into my slip I found myself clicking the lever on the (now empty) TillerClutch.

I did not use the autopilot the entire weekend except when flaking the main single handed while motoring back to the slip in the crowded harbor. And I mainly did this to make sure the autopilot would not get tangled up on the clutch line.

Review No. 2, San Diego April 21, 2010 by James Baumgart, CA

First of all I do a lot of extensive single hand sailing, on the order of 170 days at sea per year and about 2,000 miles sailed per year. I do this nearly every day. I have been doing so for 5 years, so I have most sailing tasks down to a perfected routine. I can even set, gybe and douse my spinnakers single handed. I sail in Southern California ocean waters – so generally mild winds and moderate seas, but since I sail year round I can, and do, see some big wind and big sea days. I race and cruise. I do have a boat nearly perfectly balanced and as completely set up for single handing as any you will see. I have all lines led to the cockpit (19 lines) and have an old, but functional, tiller pilot. The tiller pilot has, at times, failed me and I've always wanted a good backup. Once, I was about 100 miles from home, 40 miles offshore and about 20 miles from my destination for the night when I caught a fish. During the fight, I stepped on the autopilot cable, breaking it. I didn't really have the option of continuing on without the autopilot. So I hove to and did a repair, soldering and fixing wires far from land. Since then I have wanted a viable backup.

Yesterday evening winds were about 10 to 15 and seas about 4 feet at very close interval. I put on my big 155% jib (which is overpowered at 12 knots) and full main. The boat was intentionally set up on the verge of being slightly overpowered in the gusts. I left the tiller pilot in storage and hooked up the TillerClutch.

Single Hand Tacking Out of the Harbor

The main channel at Mission Bay is narrow. Winds were on the nose, and there is a crane and barge doing work further constricting the channel. So the situation called for many sharp, quick tacks to get out of the bay. With the TillerClutch I was able to really improve my tacking. What I did was put the tiller over for an easy tack, then engage the clutch. As the boat came around, I first cut the genoa sheet, then shifted the lazy sheet to the winch. As the boom crossed the boat, I reached back and gave the TillerClutch a squeeze, centering the tiller, then relocking it. I then sheeted in and winched the new genoa sheet home. After that I returned to hand steering. This worked faster and better than any "auto tack" on the tiller pilot and much cleaner than my usual single handed technique of just putting the tiller down and letting it flop about while I worked the sheets (which always results in overshooting the tack).

Sailing upwind in a bumpy ocean

Once out of the harbor, I tested the TillerClutch on all points of sailing. Hard on the wind, it was possible to easily get the boat to self-steer. If a wave or gust pushed the bow up, the jib would slightly luff and it would come down. If the bow fell off, it wasn't long before a wave or gust would push it up again. The boat yawed through about 20 degrees, but would stay on course.

Close reaching in rough seas, the boat would still self steer, but not as well. Yawing was wider. Tiller corrections were needed about every few minutes.

Beam reaching into the swell the boat would not self steer at all. The TillerClutch was useful for a few seconds at a time. When it was time to turn for home I used the TillerClutch to gybe the boat through a gentle curve, using the same basic method as when tacking. This let me take my hands off the tiller to sheet the main and get the jib over.

On the way back home I was on a broad reach down swell with 4 to 5 footers on the aft quarter and winds still around 10 knots. Boat speed was around 5 knots. The boat would not self steer at all. She would surf at times and big swells would just knock the bow 45 degrees off course. Nothing would bring her back on course but hand steering. I'm sure my autopilot would have been yawing all over the ocean as well. Of course this is a fin keel, spade rudder boat.

Once in the harbor, I set the TillerClutch to get the nav lights on and to prepare for dropping sails. In the calmer waters I started the engine, dropped the jib all without touching the tiller (no roller furling on my boat). I made a slight tiller adjustment and got the engine in gear, main down and flaked. I made another slight adjustment and sailed into my marina basin, got fenders deployed and dock lines ready. I then disconnected the TillerClutch and put the line away for another day.

I sailed the whole evening without the autopilot and frankly never needed it.

One thing for sure – I DON'T want to give you the test unit back. I really like it, and I think I can keep my autopilot in the box for those long 60 mile deliveries under power. I'll get you the photos tomorrow of my totally simple installation. I don't believe I spent more than \$10 on everything needed to get this going. The lines don't interfere with my seating nor with access to the engine, instruments, or controls. My canvas tiller cover fits over the TillerClutch without a problem.

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