

TRIED & TESTED



Stand in the stirrups and push up the top ascender, then sit and lift the bottom ascender



You can't get this high in a bosun's chair! Inventor Etienne Giroire demonstrates the ATN Mast Climber's party piece

ATN mast climber

Tried and tested by Miranda Delmar-Morgan

When a light fails at the top of the mast, the very first question you must ask yourself is: can you reach it from your bosun's chair? Suspended from a halyard, you can't get above the point where the halyard thimble is tight up in the masthead sheave. This leaves you some distance below the errant light while it remains dimly but defiantly out of reach.

The second question is: who is going to get you up there? Many of us sail with inexperienced crew. Do we trust them with our lives? If they raise their hands above a loaded winch, the coils on the drum can fly off the top with disastrous consequences. A self-tailer resolves this to some extent, assuming it keeps its grip, but your life is then dependent on a self-tailer, not a good idea. So your crew is trying to grind you up there – a double-handed job for them even if you are diminutive – and tail the winch at the same time.



The mast climber packs neatly into a small bag

This stretches the skills of even the best multi-taskers. When lowering you, they will have to release the cleat, and your life will be entirely in their hands. So you have to hope they keep their hands low and the turns on the drum as per your nervous instructions.

The final questions are: who's the lightest person and do they mind being put 15-35m up in the air, then left there until someone remembers to let them down again? I was once put up a 36m mast, and then forgotten. Unable to compete with the dockyard noise in the background, I couldn't make myself heard. I was left there, petrified, while the witless young crewman who'd winched me up went below for a pee, got offered lunch as he passed the galley, and forgot me. I've never forgotten him.

A great new answer to all of the above is the ATN Mast Climber, invented and manufactured by Etienne Giroire, a solo ocean racer who often has to get up his own masts alone. It is a two-part kit that stows into its own bag, which doubles as the tool bag.

You attach your chosen halyard to a secure point at deck level and tighten it snug. You then ascend the halyard using two climbing ascenders, the chair hangs on one, the foot straps on the other.

Your legs provide the thrust. You sit and pull your feet up beneath you, then stand up. Then you slide the seat ascender upwards, sit down again and repeat the process.



Both parts ready to rig. Miranda was impressed by the quality of workmanship

Once you've reached the top of the halyard, stand up in the foot straps and hey presto, you can see above the masthead. Brilliant!

The footstraps alleviate hamstring pressure and you can sit there, with a comfy backrest, all day long if you wish. You can go up and down at your own speed, whenever you wish, without needing anybody else. Retaining control and independence greatly reduces anxiety.

It should be noted that the climber doesn't work on wire to rope halyards. You also need to decide and assess where you want to be at the top and choose the right halyard to ascend. Secure the halyard to the deck with strong tension to prevent it sagging.

Straddling the foot straps either side of the halyard provides an element of bracing.

For some reason it was easier going up than coming down. Etienne says it takes a bit of practice, but it would be nice if the length of the foot straps was adjustable – they were a bit too long for me. Made in the USA, every engineered component is made of stainless steel or anodised aluminium, making it all look and feel like an excellent piece of kit.

Price \$450+\$55 shipping (£280+£35)
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