

Tips For Executing A Gainer

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Photography by Lynn Novakofski

There are two schools of thought on how to learn gainers – dropping the handle the first few attempts or hanging on to the handle from the first try. Personally, I recommend dropping the handle.

Holding onto the handle on the first few attempts is going to cause bad habits – slipping out, no line tension, possibly hitting your head on the ramp – and bad habits can be really hard to fix. With the drop-the-handle method, chances are you will understand the trick better, your gainer will be straighter, and you will pretty much already know how to do ride over gainers, which are necessary when doing multiple jumping acts, especially those that combine tricks like gainer, flip and heli.

Start by dropping the handle as soon as you are on the ramp and you will know it is time to progress to holding the handle when you “stick” five or six landings in a row.

Line Tension

The way I see it, line tension can make or break a good gainer. It is how you control yourself in the air. Practicing long-distance jumps is a good training tool for learning line tension. If you are getting slack in the air, chances are you are letting off your edge too early, thus resulting in low line tension. So keep edging all the way to the bottom of the ramp.

The Approach

Try to start your cut from the same point every time. This will help in making your timing consistent. I like about 20 feet from the wash of the right curl. Turn slow! A rushed turn can cause you to be early and out of control. Allow the boat to pull you to the wake to start your turn, and do not forget to keep your skis together. Keep your body tight all the way through the entire trick, from start to finish. If you are loose, you will have no line tension and you need a tight line to keep you from stalling out upside down and coming up short. Keep your handle in tight! Your right elbow should not be more than six inches from your right hip until after you land. Also, hold onto the handle with both hands all the way to the top of the ramp. Seventy-five percent of the reason people slip out is because they let go of the handle with their left hand at the bottom of the ramp. As far as when to start your cut, a good rule of thumb is to wait for the nose of the boat to pass the base of the ramp. Once you get comfortable there you can start cutting later, but do not rush it.

Body Position

When cutting, stand tall; do not crouch. After you cross the second wake, slowly and smoothly shift your weight to the balls of your feet.

Remember, keep your skis together and your handle in tight. At the base of the ramp your knees should be slightly bent with your back straight, hips forward and your chest should be straight up and just over your toes. Keep your eyes at the top left corner of the ramp because you have to watch where you are going.

The Gainer

Now we are at the top of the ramp with both hands on the handle, standing tall with just a slight bend in the knees and the handle in tight. From here, it is all in the hips! You *must* wait until the top of the ramp to pop. This will save you a lot of headaches, literally.

I like to wait for my tips to break the top of the ramp. When you pop, pop off your toes and push your hips forward and upward. Do not drop your chest back, or throw your head back, or throw your left shoulder. It does not look good and you will never progress. It also causes you to lose all of your line tension and your legs will trail behind you.

When you are upside down, start spotting your landing. From here, if your handle is in, body tight, skis together and the landing spotted, you should land smoothly on your skis. To finish the trick make sure you bring your head and your chest up at the same time. If you just lift your head your legs will trail behind you and you will land squatted down or you will go out the front. What I do to fix this is keep my chin near my chest from the “pop” to landing, that way my legs do not have the chance to lag behind. If you are doing all of this and are over-rotating, arch your back in the air to slow down your rotation. When you land, land on your toes in a normal skiing position. Your landing position should be similar to your body position at the base of the ramp.

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