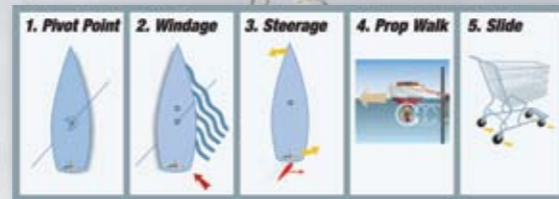


THE BIG 5 SEE ISSUE 172 AUGUST FOR FULL ARTICLE



CROSS WINDS AHEAD

PART 2: WIND OFF BERTHING: THE SECRETS REVEALED



This month Hamble School of Yachting's **James Pearson** looks at how to avoid some common pitfalls when berthing and unberthing our boat alongside a pontoon when a strong wind is holding her off.

Last month we looked at berthing and unberthing with a strong sidewind pinning our boat onto the pontoon. We learned the importance of the stern line, a decent stern fender, springing her off and lassoing cleats. This time, the situation is reversed; for example, the main challenge when arriving is to get the boat close enough to the pontoon for crew to step ashore.

With departing, it is all about doing so under control, in case of obstructions to leeward, and ensuring none of the crew is

left behind on the pontoon.

As we'll be finding out in this article, it's not always as easy as this sounds, so having a well drilled crew and a good plan that you stick to are just as crucial for this as they are in any other boat handling scenario.

As we covered in detail in *S7172* (August 2011) our boat's behaviour is governed by five broad principles, which should help to predict what she will do and therefore inform our plans of action. See the top of this page for a reminder of the five principles.

CONDITIONS

Once again we had a direct crosswind gusting up to 26kn and were using *Orinoco Flow*, a Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 37. We conducted this photoshoot an hour either side of low water, so tidal effects were so minimal we were able to disregard them. However, one key principle must be stated; always conduct all of these manoeuvres into the tide. It helps steerage by allowing us to achieve more water flow over our rudder without moving quickly over the ground.



ARRIVING AT A WIND OFF BERTH

The clear and obvious challenge of arriving at a wind off berth is ensuring we get our boat close enough to get our crew off with lines to secure us. For novice helmsmen, especially

with an unfamiliar boat and especially one with high topsides, it can be disconcerting to get the boat as close as it needs to be to the pontoon. From an

aft cockpit it often feels as though you are driving the boat onto the pontoon.

GETTING IT WRONG

Because for us with our long pontoon and wide channel downwind, falling short and blowing off would not cause any damage to anything other than the skipper's ego, it was an interesting exercise to get it wrong first by falling short.

As our pontoon is lying directly upwind of us with wind blowing across it at 90° our approach is pretty much head to wind. This makes it a little difficult to feel the force of the wind blowing our bows off until we make our turn and present our starboard bow to it. So, as human nature dictates, we err on the safe side and decelerate as we approach. As we turn when we feel we are approaching the pontoon we are going too slowly to adequately have steerage against the boat's windage. This is worsened by the fact that the more we turn, the more of our side we present to the wind. The upshot of this is that by the time our boat is orientated parallel to the pontoon we are about 3m away from it and drifting

further away by the second. Our crewman at the shrouds could further exacerbate the problem by making a leap for it and falling short, but we won't be providing a demo of that today. This isn't a major cockup where there is plenty of room, because we can always keep going round and trying to make our turn later and later until we get our crewman within range. Getting it wrong by misjudging the distance the other way by driving the bow onto the pontoon is thankfully rare.



GETTING IT RIGHT

Where we have the opportunity provided by a mooring slot on our pontoon considerably longer than our boat, as we have here, we can afford to come in at a shallow angle. This provides us with more of a handle on how our windage is battling with our steerage and also means that more of our turn has already been done before we get into close proximity with the pontoon. Ensuring our boat is well fendered right up to the bow, we might ask our crewman from his better vantage point at the shrouds to count down the number of metres or feet to the pontoon as we approach. The aim is to feather the bow along the pontoon, ideally rolling our fenders along the flat of the bow while being controlled but assertive on the throttle. A quick burst astern to take the way off the boat and our crewman is still well within range to step down and attach lines in an unhurried manner. So how do we gain the confidence to be

more assertive with the throttle, especially if we're in an unfamiliar boat? If we have the room to do so we can dry run the steering off part a couple of times as we make our approach upwind. We'll soon get a feeling for how much throttle we need to keep our control at different angles to the

wind. As we close the pontoon we can take a transit – cleats on the front and back of the pontoon can serve this purpose – to warn of a loss of steerage as we slow down to make our turn. »



Coming in obliquely to feel balance of windage against steerage

Perhaps more than for any other manoeuvre in boathandling, practice makes perfect for approaching upwind pontoons. Novices really can't believe the extent to which it feels like

you are landing on top of the pontoon, and the way to get the feel for this, for you and your boat, is to get out there and do some fender bashing, working up to the point

where you can reliably roll the bow fenders along the pontoon and give the crew time to alight in a controlled manner in a variety of wind strengths.

SECURING

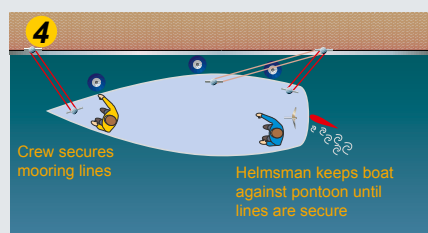
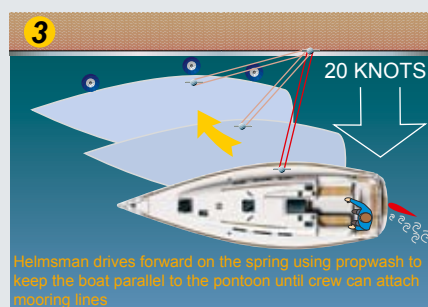
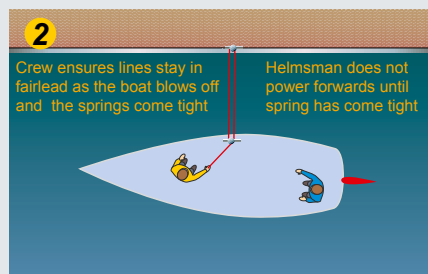
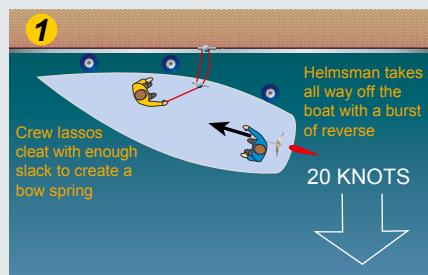
Back to the five principles again, we know that in this stiff sidewind our pivot point being aft of our centre of windage will mean our bow will want to blow away from the pontoon faster than our stern. With this in mind we equip our crew with the bow line to secure first. The added benefit of this is that our boat has a handy and powerful foresail sheet winch conveniently placed near to her stern, so even if our crew fumbles with the bowline

allowing our stern to blow out. The boat will stream happily by the bow while we winch the stern line up to its cleat at our leisure.

Even if we have dropped two crew off at the shrouds and both have been super quick with securing both bow and stern lines in a strong wind it's not uncommon for the boat to have blown off a couple of metres, which is not a convenient or sensible place to leave her. If we are on a long pontoon and nobody

is watching, we could simply drive carefully ahead, while our bow and stern lines make our hull act like a pair of parallel rules and we will get our boat close up against the pontoon where our crew can secure it. This is inelegant, however, and there might not be the space to do it if, for instance, we have a berthed vessel ahead. A better solution all round is the amidships spring or amidships grab line as described below.

AMIDSHIPS SPRINGS AND GRABLINES



Using a miship spring to get alongside is an invaluable skill, particularly when short handed.

Why do so many single- and short-handed sailors fit their boats with an amidships cleat? If very strong winds are driving our boat off the pontoon we might not be able to get her to stay close enough for long enough to get our crew or ourselves ashore to secure lines quickly enough to secure her close in. If our boat has been fitted with an amidships cleat or fairlead we can drive her in with an amidships spring. We do this forward against a bow spring rather than astern against a stern spring, because in forward gear we have the additional assistant force of propwash and our rudder to help drive our stern in by steering away from the pontoon. Here's how we do it assuming we have a helmsman and one crewman:

As we arrive at the pontoon with our crew, we aim to come to a halt with our crew and the shrouds level with a cleat, which we want to end up roughly where we would like our moored stern to end up. The crew then takes a bight of line from the cockpit winch or stern cleat of the boat.

This line, when doubled, needs to be about the length of the distance from our amidships cleat to our stern cleat.

Our crewman lassos the cleat in question using the technique we covered last month.

It's important, if the boat has an open fairlead, to keep a foot over the open top of the fairlead with both ends of the line running through it while you are lassoing.

Once our crew has successfully lassooed the cleat, he confirms this to our helmsman who waits until the boat has blown off the pontoon until the spring comes taut.



Our crew can now remove his foot from the fairlead and himself from the immediate vicinity of the lines, which will shortly become well loaded.

It's then a case of the helmsman selecting slow ahead and steering away from the pontoon so the propwash keeps the boat roughly parallel. The boat then parallelograms into her mooring slot and, providing the helmsman keeps the power on, she will sit there while the crew attaches the three remaining mooring warps.

GRAB LINE VARIATION

This alternative method favoured by singlehanders involves a much shorter loop being dropped over a cleat, which we plan to end up with about halfway between shrouds and stern. Often one end will be led to a cockpit winch, so as soon as it is lassoed on the helmsman can quickly pull in the slack and then use a combination of engine power and winching to lever the boat in. With the grabline being quite short, a large stern fender is a good idea in case you touch.

ASTERN APPROACH

In very strong winds and a tight berth, some may prefer to attach the stern line first. The bow can then be winched in on a long line.

LEAVING THE BERTH

At first thought, there shouldn't be much trouble associated with leaving a wind off berth. The manoeuvre certainly isn't going to trouble our fenders as, even if snugly moored, we'll quite likely have our boat a foot or so off the pontoon with our bow and stern lines stretched taut. With this in mind, surely it's just a case of untying the lines and driving off? Well, if we happen to be in an open berth with space to leeward we'll probably get away with it. However, if we try the same thing in a finger berth with a boat to leeward, for instance, we need to stick to best practice if we aren't going to come unstuck. As we covered in Warp Speed (ST175), leaving our berth properly in most conditions will involve slipping doubled lines from aboard the boat. This is especially important when being strongly blown off, as a crew member uncleating singled lines from the pontoon risks being left behind with the boat hanging at the end of a line, especially if they release lines in the wrong order.

LINE SLIPPING ORDER

We can slip both springs first and let our bow and stern lines take the strain. Remembering about our bow windage, if we want to leave in the direction our boat is moored we can afford to release our stern line first and conclude with the bow line and drive off. If we slip our bow line first, the bow will pay off, which may be desirable, if we want to turn quickly through 90°, for instance. ■

SWAPPING TO SLIPS

Good technique in swapping our singled mooring warps for doubled slips is especially important in wind off conditions. We want to be actually slipping our berth with everyone aboard the boat, but at least one of our crew will need to go ashore to remove our singled line for a slip. The crew needs to do so without losing too much slack if the boat is not to blow out too far, making getting back aboard a struggle.

On a boat with lots of spare lines, cleats and fairleads, a separate new line can be used as the slip and placed under the mooring line on the same cleat, but many boats under 35ft have to share cleats and

fairleads, which can make a bit of a snake's wedding out of two separate warps. Here's a neat way of changing a singled mooring line to a slip:

Ensure the boat is moored with enough spare line on the pontoon to go back to the boat and cleat. Leaving the line cleated on the boat, run the slack back to the boat and cleat, ideally to a different cleat from the one the other end is cleated to. OXO the loose end with about a foot of slack.

Our crew on the pontoon can now uncleat the OXO there leaving a slip.

Only a foot or so of slack has been lost, the original mooring line has been

reused so there's less opportunity for tangles, but at no point have we completely unsecured the boat to swap lines, which would have been risky indeed in wind off conditions.



CONCLUSIONS

Practice makes perfect when it comes to balancing throttle and turning in for approaching an upwind berth. Pump up your fenders, ensure the run of the bow

is especially well fendered, equip a crew member with a big roving fender and try it out in your boat in a variety of wind strengths. As we also learnt last week a decent ball fender is an invaluable bit of kit.

If your boat does not have an amidships cleat and/or fairlead, consider fitting one.

When leaving, we need to think about line order rather than have a free-for-all with crew randomly undoing lines.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Pearson is an RYA Yachtmaster Instructor and Chief Instructor at Hamble School of Yachting. He has been a keen sailor since the age of seven, sailing on a variety of craft ranging from racing dinghies to tall ships. He became a professional instructor at 18 and has sailed tens of thousands of miles since and taught hundreds of people at various levels through the RYA schemes.

HAMBLE SCHOOL OF YACHTING



Hamble School of Yachting's friendly and experienced instructors have offered high standards of tuition for over 30 years. The school offers the full RYA training programme both ashore and afloat for all levels of experience as well as own boat tuition from one day covering sailors' own particular needs right through to a full RYA course. As demand has increased, the school has introduced many bespoke courses, such as yacht maintenance training, ISAF Offshore Safety Training and professional STCW qualifications. More recently, the School became the official training partner for the World Cruising Club, the organisers of the annual Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC).

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