



Coming alongside

A controlled return to the dock every time



How a Spring can give you stress free berthing.
By **Duncan Wells**



One of the biggest concerns in boating is coming on to a berth, whether at a new marina or our home pontoon, and staying there, especially if we're being blown off. Springing on under engine is a handy technique that takes all the sweat and worry out of the manoeuvre.

Preparation. Make sure that you're fendered up adequately, one at each stanchion and an extra fender up near the bow. We use Big Bertha our large white roving fender. She sits on the coach roof attached by a Rustler's Hitch for instant access and gets placed between us and any impending 'accident'.

And you want to make sure that conditions are favourable for you. As ever, tide is most important. We always want to be mooring or docking into the tidal stream. That way we can get a grip on the water at very low speeds. If the tide is running against us at 1kn we can be doing 2kn through the water and covering the ground at just 1kn and be in control. If the tide is with us at 1kn then our 2kn through the water will take us at 3kn over the ground. We won't have as much control and we will be pushed through the berth by the tide. The wind will also

affect us to varying degrees depending on its strength, direction and our hull shape. Flat bottomed, short fin keel boats behave quite differently from long fin and skeg or long keel boats. Being blown onto the pontoon doesn't generally present a problem. It's when we're being blown off that we want to know that we can attach ourselves securely and stay there.

The spring goes through the centre/midships cleat. The line doesn't need to be heavy duty. We use a 14mm line for a boat that stands in at about 8 tons, although a 12mm line would do just as well.

Pic 1. Take a standard mooring line and pass it from outboard of the guardrail, through the centre of the cleat if you can (so it can't slip out) and then up to a winch.

Pic 2. Take a piece of plastic tube about 2ft long, slip it over the other end and tie it into a bight using a bowline. Now you have a bight with a piece of plastic keeping it open. This makes it easy to slip over the cleat on the most seaward cleat on the pontoon – hopefully at the end of the pontoon – and then pulling up any slack on the spring on the winch. A couple of turns round the winch and into the jaws will be quite sufficient to hold the boat. For the first time of trying this I would recommend that you do so against the tide.

Now start the engine and put it in ahead. The spring will tighten and you can get rid of the bow line, stern line and the springs that were holding her but she may need some rudder to lie alongside perfectly. Increase the engine revs and see what happens. Adjust the rudder and see what effect this has on the bow. If you have the tide with you pushing you through the berth you will have to use more engine revs and also to

adjust the rudder so that the stern of the boat lies alongside nicely. The tide will tend to kick the stern off the dock.

Now you know what to expect once you've stopped the boat with the spring and how she will behave on the dock. You can also now control everything from the cockpit. By easing the spring on the winch you can allow the boat to move along the dock, ahead. By taking the engine out of gear, with the tide against you, it's easy to winch in the spring and take the boat back along the pontoon. If you're being blown off, you won't get too long before you have to put the engine in gear ahead to remain alongside but you get enough time to ease the boat little by little along the berth. That's how we would tackle a departure in a strong off pontoon wind. We would ease the boat as far out of the berth as possible having rigged the spring as a slip. And with the tide against, you release the tension on the spring by taking the engine out of gear. The tide pushing you out will give you enough slack to lift the bight clear as you exit.

Pic 3. Here we are arriving at the dock all fendered up.

Pic 4. The Spring is ready. We will have the engine out of gear at this point.

Pic 5. We take the bight of »



Approach to dock



Gear in neutral

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the spring and drop it over the cleat like so.

Pic 6. Make sure that it's caught the cleat...

Pic 7... then return to the cockpit and tighten the spring on the winch.

The bow will nudge against the pontoon gently and the forward fender will protect it. Now we click the engine into ahead and adjust the helm to keep the boat alongside. As already mentioned, if we're being blown off or if there's tide pushing us through the mooring we'll need to increase the revs ahead to hold the boat in line.

Then we ease the boat along



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the pontoon by simply paying out the spring until we're in the right place.

Pic 8. Then, making sure that the spring line is held firmly in the jaws of the winch, we step off...

Pic 9... attach the stern line and the bow line and set the springs.

Then the engine is taken out of gear, switched off and the docking spring is removed, coiled and stowed in the cockpit locker ready for the next time.

Pic 10. Springs can also be used for pulling the boat into the dock. If you have the spring loop over the cleat on



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the pontoon but have been blown off, simply motor against the spring...

Pic 11... and you'll return to the dock.

What if you don't have a centre cleat? How about running the spring in front of the mast and then back to a winch on the opposite side to that on which you'll berth? Your approach speed will be low and so any strain on the mast will be minimal.

Alternatively, you could use a snatch block on a stanchion base. This would be even better because it would eliminate any chance of chafe on the mooring line.



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Rustler's Hitch

Rustler's Hitch – also called a Highwayman's hitch, the Draw hitch and the Fireman's hitch. This is a hitch where the rope never actually goes round the rail. You could tie up your horse and if you needed to get away in a hurry one quick jerk would release it. Now with any rope that is attached to something we have a standing end, in our case the end that's attached to the fender, and a running end, the end that's free.

Pic 1. We're going to attach our Big Bertha fender to the coachroof grab rail.

Pic 2. With the standing end attached to the fender and



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the running end free, take a loop (bight) of rope under the rail.

Pic 3. Put your fingers through the loop, pick up the standing part of the rope on the other side of the rail and pull a new bight through the original bight.

Pic 4. Tighten it by pulling on the running end.

Pic 5. With your fingers through this new bight go over the rail and pick up the running part of the line.

Pic 6. Pull a bight of this through and tighten by pulling on the standing end of the rope.

Pic 7. Pull the knot tight.

Now if you pull the standing end you'll find that it's secure, the fender isn't going anywhere.

On the other hand a quick jerk on the running end and the



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hitch will unravel instantly. If it doesn't, you haven't tied a Rustler's Hitch!

One final word of warning – the Rustler's Hitch is intended for light use such as storing fenders on the pushpit, keeping a rope out of the way and safe until you need it, such as a mooring line.