

BE PREPARED

In 1975 Eric Hiscock wrote: 'People have stopped thinking of the boat as a sailing vessel with an auxiliary engine and started thinking of it as a motor boat with auxiliary sails.' It's true, we do rely heavily on our engines these days. **Duncan Wells** looks at what we can do to prepare ourselves in case the unthinkable happens and our engine cuts out.

How many times have you seen a yacht leave her mooring with the sail covers on? With no access to any sails, if the engine dies there is no way one can sail out of trouble and one will need to stand by with some well positioned fenders.

Prepare the sails

We really ought to make it part of the departure checklist that we have the sail covers off **Pic 2**, the main halyard attached to the head of the sail and ready to go **Pic 3**, a headsail hanked on or the furling headsail readied with furling line flaked to allow a snag free set **Pic 4**, sheets attached and rove through the blocks **Pic 5**, figure of eight stopper knots on the running end.

Ready the anchor

It may not be possible to raise sail in time to save the situation and we may need to stop quickly, so we need the anchor to be ready. Our anchor is lashed to the bow roller with a reef knot, which comes undone very easily **Pic 6**. Whatever system you use – drop nose pin, wire or lashing – you need to be able to free it quickly. And



to ready the anchor for deployment we will need to be able to get the chain off the gipsy. With the chain hauled up and allowing a little slack **Pic 7** – you

should never have the chain drum tight, because it puts a dreadful strain on your extremely expensive windlass – simply lift the chain off the gipsy by pulling some chain up from the locker and lifting it off **Pic 8**. If this is not possible, because the chain is too tight, you will need to get a windlass locking handle to release the gipsy **Pic 9**. Or prior to departure you can ease the chain and allow the anchor to rest on the deck **Pic 10**. To anchor, simply pay out a scope of about 1.5 x depth, that will be »

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A motor boat with auxiliary sails?

Departure Checklist

Crew Safety Briefing

VHF – Mayday procedure

Flares – operation

Lifebuoys and danbuoys – deployment

Throwing line – location

MOB drill

Gas drill

Fire drill – extinguishers location and deployment

First aid kit – location

Engine starting

Advise them Hang on – DO NOT FALL OVERBOARD!

Above all – Enjoy yourselves – Have fun!

Make sure you have had a WOBBLE – engine checks:

W = Water, fresh water level check, also check the raw water filter.

O = Oil, engine oil level check.

B = Battery, check terminals and topped up with water etc.

B = Belts- waterpump especially, check tension.

L = Leaks, check to make sure there are no unusual oil or water leaks.

E = Exhaust, check that water is coming out of the exhaust after start up.

Final checks

Make sure that you have ‘walked the boat’ just like pilots do with their planes. Check that cotter/split pins are in place, bent back and maybe taped to all the stays and shrouds. Look round for any obvious signs of wear or chafe on jackstays and halyards, broken blocks. Just give the boat a general once over to make sure that the deck gear is going to work.

Ensure that each crew member has a lifejacket and lifeline and that they are wearing the lifejacket or at least that they have adjusted them to suit and know where they are – depending on conditions and lifejacket policy on the boat. Remember the RYA recommends wearing a lifejacket, unless you are sure it is safe to take it off. The RNLI line is rather more straight forward – ‘Useless Unless Worn’ – and they are the people who will be saving you. I think I would take their advice – especially at my age (56) with a heart attack lurking round

the corner.

Sail covers off, attach halyards, release any reefing line jammers and ready sails for setting, headsail sheets attached, reef the sheets off and lead them up to cockpit winches with stopper knots in their ends, furling line flaked and ready. Any line that is required to run free must be flaked. Ready anchor for quick and easy deployment, but keep it lashed to the bow for the present.

Weather forecast – make sure you have one for the time you will be at sea.

Navigation – make sure you have planned your navigation, destination, course, tides etc. Monitor the barometer. It is not compulsory to prepare a passage plan, but you are advised to do so. In the event of any incident the fact that you had a passage plan prepared in advance would weigh in your favour.

The extremely important final step is to unplug the shore power cable and stow in a convenient locker.

III; throw high and wide, keeping hold of the bitter end, to catch your target **Pic IV**, **V**, **VI**; pull the line tight and re-attach to your boat’s cleat and Bob’s your uncle **Pic VII**.

up mooring buoys, especially if they have no pick up line and buoy. How to lasso a cleat: keep a line ready in case you need to re-attach yourself to the dock; attach one end of the line to a cleat on the boat **Pic I**; coil the line **Pic II**; split the coils **Pic**

How to lasso

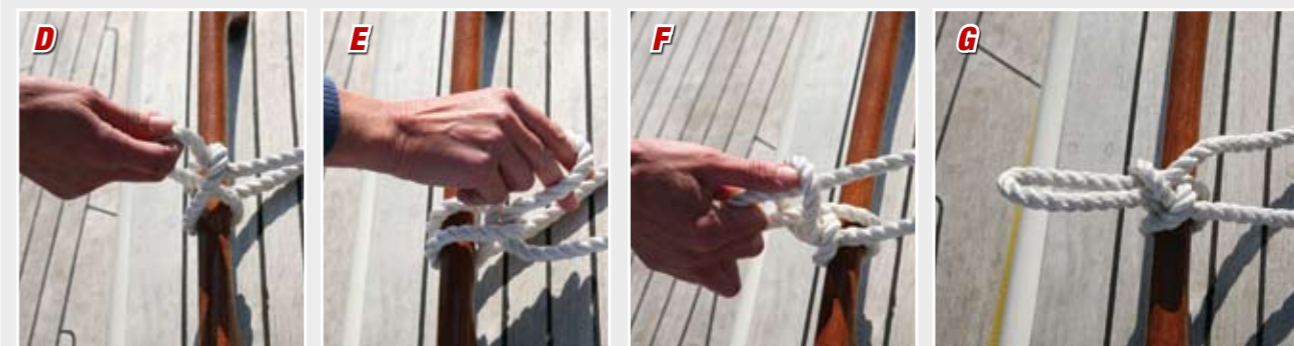
Another handy skill is the ability to lasso a cleat from a distance. It might be useful if you want to try to stop the boat. It is always useful when it comes to picking



ST Tips

Rustler's Hitch

This is a handy quick release knot I use to secure my roving fender, Big Bertha. Make a bight in the running end of the fender line and pass this under the fender line and pass this under the coach roof grab rail **Pic A**. Now from under the bight, reach through it **Pic B** and over the grab rail and take a bight of the standing end through **Pic C** and tighten with the running end **Pic D**. Now reach through this bight and take a bight of the running end **Pic E** and pull it through **Pic F** and tighten with the standing end **Pic G**. And that's it. The fender on the standing end will remain attached to the grab rail, come what may. When you tug the running end, the knot will collapse and the fender will be free. It's a belter. The magic of it is that there is no full turn around the grab rail, as there would be with a clove hitch. it's great for tying up a tender for a quick getaway from the pub quay, or equally a horse outside the saloon, hence its name.



enough to stop you **Pic 11**. It stopped our eight tons dead in F4 of true wind. It was also comforting to know that we could just stop the boat and gain ourselves some thinking time while we worked out what to do next **Pic 12**. Notice that we mark our anchor chain every five metres with pieces of silk using the same colour sequence as the snooker balls and tied into the chain in the order that you pot them **Pic 13** – red, yellow, green, brown, blue, pink, black. That way, if I leave the pink ribbon mark just above the surface of the water,

I know I have veered 30m of chain. If snooker means nothing to you, then simply run the colours in alphabetical order, black – 5m, blue – 10m, brown – 15m, green – 20m, pink – 25m, red – 30m, yellow – 35m and double up as we go above 35m. **Pic 14** This means that when we see one red that's 5m, a scope of 1.5 at the time. When you have handed out enough chain, sit the chain back on the gipsy to hold the boat. We can return to the niceties of anchoring once the immediate danger is over. For now we are just trying to stop the boat.



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Sailing out of trouble

The easiest sail to set on a modern sloop will always be the headsail and if we are lucky this will be just the sail we require – on a cutter we would probably raise the staysail – and as long as the wind is abaft the beam with the headsail on its own we can run our way out of trouble **Pic 15** (see previous page). For wind forward of the beam, when we will sail closehauled, we need to set the main to get the boat to point into the wind **Pic 16** and we will add in the headsail for greater drive **Pic 17**. But hoisting the main, no matter how well prepared we are, is not as quick as setting the headsail and there may not be time for this. If this is the case, dropping the anchor would be the best option or, failing that, a roving fender.

The roving fender

Our roving fender is called Big Bertha and she sits on the coach roof attached to the grab rail with a rustler's hitch **Pic 18**. If we are exiting or entering the marina we will

more than likely have fenders set down one side at pontoon height, so we will have some protection and the roving fender can just help to take the pain out of it all **Pic 19**. Remember that a fender that's set for pontoon height **Pic 20** will generally, if flipped under the lower guardrail and then over the upper guard rail, become a fender that is set for gunwale height **Pic 21**. That's handy to know when you are drifting towards the most expensive looking boat in the marina – which it will be.

It takes fractions of a second to reposition the fenders. Just flip them over and you will be protected.



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A tight squeeze

We are now packed so tightly into our marinas that there really isn't much room for sailing into or out of our dead-end berths. We showed how to sail into a berth in *ST159* of December 2009 and I have been considering since then how we might sail out of our berth. As the prevailing SW wind pins us to the dock, there really is no chance of getting away under main or headsail or a combination of both **Pic 22**. In any event, given the location of our berth **Pic 23**, even if we were to get out of it we would find that we were blown onto the shore before we had a chance to get any way on – especially as the prevailing SW wind means we would be having to fight our way to windward to get out of the fairway and into the river. On the day of the photo shoot, with a NW F3, we sailed into the fairway right up to our berth **Pic 24** and then tried to tack the boat around and make an exit. We got the tack in all right, despite the lack of space **Pic 25 & 26**, but then we were unable to get enough way on to sail out of there and the wind simply blew us down onto the very expensive Motor yachts on the adjacent pontoon **Pic 27**. I'd been concerned about this when planning the



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manoeuvre. A lighter, racier boat or a small boat might well be able to sail her way out, but not us. Even if we warped our way out of the berth we would still not have enough room to get way on to windward before we were swept onto the leeward boats. That said, if the engine was defunct, I can't see why you would go to the trouble of trying to sail out of the berth, it would be better to fix the engine before you did anything else.

Of course, if we've been out sailing, when we return we will have everything set and ready to deploy in the event of an emergency. It is when we depart that we can forget how important it is to have our sails ready to go. So we can add sails and anchor prep to our departure checklist.

Be prepared

Engines these days are generally very reliable, but batteries can often let you down or alternators can break and stop charging, so you never know when you may suddenly have to rely on your ability to sail yourself out of a situation. As long as your sails are ready to set, at least you will have an opportunity to try, as opposed to heading inexorably towards the accident. We had an interesting experience the other day while we were sailing up Southampton Water. We had stopped the engine once we had set the sails.

The procedure for stopping the engine is to put the gear lever into neutral and then to pull the fuel shut off until the engine has stopped – returning the lever to the on position ready for starting next time – and then to turn the key in the ignition to off, before the alarm screams at you. We then put the gear lever to astern in order to stop the propeller and shaft rotating. We reckon that doing this gains us half a knot. So this we did. Later, when I went below, I could hear the whine of the shaft rotating. Odd. I checked that the gear lever was in astern, which it was. I therefore moved the gear lever to neutral and then to ahead and the shaft stopped rotating. With the shaft now silent I tried to put the gear lever into astern, where it lines up vertically with the binnacle and is out of the way but I couldn't move it. It had jammed. I wondered at this point if the engine start battery would have enough cranking power to start the engine when in gear. It didn't.



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In fact the battery started to die. However, trying to start the engine in gear solved the jamming problem and I was able to get the gear lever into neutral. Having given the battery a moment's breather, I tried again. It started, although it only just made it. The battery isn't that old, but it's obviously not man enough for the job and is about to be replaced. The incident illustrated that just a little thing like that could mean that you might have to sail your way back in. It might be worth checking that your battery would start your engine when in gear – generally it should – just in case. In any event, check your engine starter battery is in good condition, topped up with distilled water where necessary.

Finally, it is important to always have a strategy ready when entering or exiting a harbour or marina to employ in the event

of engine failure. Note the direction of the wind and the tide and where they will take you. Are there any spaces on a long pontoon or hammerhead that you could get to? Can you remain up tide and upwind from any danger?

Remember, in today's big boats without the benefit of a sweep oar, there are three ways of saving the day if your engine dies: sailing out of trouble, anchoring or deploying fenders. In all three you need to have prepared the boat in advance. It's also vital to brief the crew on what they need to do in each case.



About the Author
Duncan Wells is an RYA Instructor and Principal of Westview Sailing.