RAFTING UP

DUNCAN WELLS TAKES US THROUGH THIS MOST USEFUL MOORING TECHNIQUE



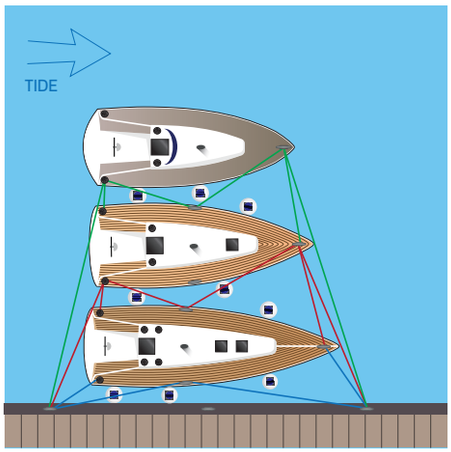
I arrive with three fenders set on each side – on the shoulder, on the beam, on the quarter – at what I hope will be pontoon height. Bow and stern lines should be set on both sides in readiness, as well. Then we need a short length of rope, no longer than six feet with a bowline in one end. This is our midship line. And if the harbour master looks kindly on us and we get our bit of pontoon, we are all set.

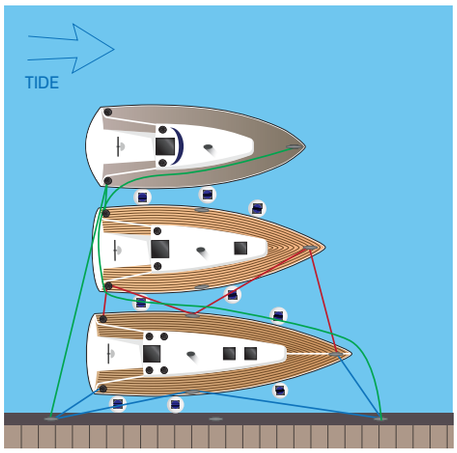
However, if he offers us a raft up against another boat we only need to do one thing and that is to adjust our fenders to gunwale height. But we don't need to undo them for this. A fender down to the water and up a bit which is perfect for most UK pontoons becomes, once it has been taken under the lower guard rail and over the top guard rail, a fender set at gunwale height for rafting up. Simple. This applies to all boats that I know of in the 30 to 45 foot range. On boats where the gunwale height is the same, it doesn't matter if it is only us, the arriving boat, that has fenders set.

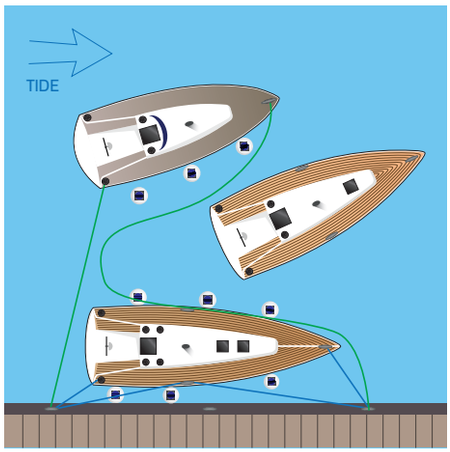
However, if the gunwale of the host boat is higher than ours, we need to set fenders from his guard wire to protect his gunwale because the fenders on our boat with the lower gunwale are likely to be ineffective.

We will approach the host boat into the tide. We always moor into the tide. We use the tide as a brake.

We 'Haloo' the host boat, because it is courteous to ask permission to raft up alongside him. If they are on board they may well tell you that they intend to leave at 4 o'clock in the morning. "Jolly good, we're early risers, too," should be the







response. They are very unlikely to stir before 10 and if they are serious, they will wake you and you can detach yourself and wait until they've gone, then grab their bit of pontoon for the rest of your stay.

So we approach carefully. We resist politely their exhortations to take a line from us. Instead as soon as we are alongside and stopped we take our six-foot line, place the bowline end over our midship cleat, take the other end round their midship cleat and back to us and tie off tight. Now we are not going anywhere.

We will not slip back with the tide, neither our bow nor our stern can wander off into the fairway and we can set our lines at leisure. If they don't have a midship cleat, then take the line around a block on their genoa sheet lead track, or around their shrouds.

Getting that midship line onto the host boat is the only important thing you need to do. Now when it comes to lines, we do not hand the host crew a line, we hand them a bowline. We are confident in our bowline-tying ability and all they have to do is to run it the preferred way through their fairleads and loop it over a cleat. We will adjust at our end. This applies for the bow line, the stern line and the springs.

Before we make everything fast, especially the springs, we need to make sure that our masts and spreaders are not in line. If they are and something sets us rolling, there is a chance that shrouds and stays could become entangled. So we will set our springs so that our mast is a couple of metres forward of or abaft that of the host boat.

With the mooring warps set to the host boat, we will set lines to the shore. We always cross from our boat to the shore via the foredeck of our host, never through the cockpit, which is deemed to be their private living space when there are people aboard.

If they are aboard they can take our shore line around their stern and hand it to us once we are on shore. If there is no one aboard we can nip across their cockpit to pass it round their stern.

If there are a bunch of lines on the shore cleat, we tie a bow line and feed it from underneath and then over the cleat. That way others can remove it if they need to get their line out.

Squeaking fenders? Fairy Liquid does it for me and it gives the fender a bit of a clean.

The creak of a warp? If this is simply old warps creaking as they load up, then get new warps. There is nothing worse than the →

ABOVE LEFT
Leaving from the middle of a raft: The bow lines, stern lines, shore lines and springs for all three boats at the start

ABOVE CENTRE
Boat Two loses shore lines and then Boat Three adjusts shore lines

ABOVE RIGHT
Boat Two sets a stern spring to Boat One. Boat Two leaves the raft

BELOW LEFT
Fenders at pontoon height become below centre image

BELOW CENTRE
Fenders at gunwale height if taken under the lower guard wire and over the upper - no need to adjust the line

'If there is no one aboard the host boat we can nip across their cockpit to pass our shore line around the stern'







ROD LEWIS; ALAMY; ILLUSTRATIONS: CALISTA PAXTON





FAR LEFT
On a busy cleat take your bowline from underneath the others

LEFT
Bowline fed from underneath and over the cleat

BELOW LEFT
A plastic bag acts as a silencer

BELOW RIGHT
Fairy Liquid deals with squeaky fenders

'It goes without saying that if returning to our boat late at night, we walk quietly across the foredeck of the host boat'

'eeek-errkk' sound. It might seem wonderfully romantic in films, but not when you're trying to get to sleep. If, however, they are creaking because they are rubbing on something, then a plastic bag between the warp and the gunwale or coach roof, or whatever the warp is creaking on, will do the trick.

I always used to think that the more upmarket the shop and thus the carrier bag, the better its creak-resistant properties, but having approached the top grocer in the land to demonstrate this by using one of its carrier bags in an example for a recent book of mine and having been turned down by them... [Turned down? The ignominy of it! Did they not know what fabulous publicity they would be missing out on by not having the spread of the readers of my book as well? They won't be able to rely on royal patronage forever you know... Well actually, they probably will!]

It smarts, though, to be turned down. Perhaps as a result of this experience I have now concluded that any old plastic bag will do.

It goes without saying that when returning to our boat late at night, we walk quietly across the foredeck of the host boat. There will be people asleep directly beneath our feet, for certain. And keeping voices and any music quiet when aboard is courteous. Drinking songs until two in the morning are never popular with the neighbours.

If we leave before the host boat is up and about we again need to be quiet about releasing our lines. I would release the springs and tie in my short midship line, then remove shore lines and bow and stern line, then the midship line.

Rafting up for me is all about getting that midship line on at the start and, finally, releasing it at the end.



Stress-Free Sailing focuses on singlehanded and short-handed sailing techniques







Stepping out

When crossing from one boat to the next, don't step from your gunwale over the two sets of guard wires to their gunwale, just in case a gust of wind catches one of the boats and the gap between the two opens up.

Step from your gunwale over your guard wire to your gunwale with the first foot, and then the second foot, and step onto their gunwale one foot at a time and then step over their guard wire etc. So at no point are you straddling and in danger of having to do the splits. Of course if your name's Darcey Bussell, ignore what I just said and go for it.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Duncan Wells is principal of westviewsailing.co.uk – see the tutorial videos – author of Stress-Free Sailing and creator of moblifesavers.com
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