

Coming alongside made easy

Duncan Wells shows how to get back on the dock single-handed in a controlled manner

Moorings is something that troubles many people, both newcomers and old salts. But if we can master a few techniques to ensure that our return to the dock is faultless and stress free every time, then our enjoyment of boating will improve immeasurably.

Here are some robust ways of getting

your boat onto the dock safely and calmly. Practise is all it takes. And the more you practise the more confident you will become and the more confident you are the more relaxed you will be.

So pick a windless Wednesday afternoon to leave work early – when hopefully there will be fewer people on their boats to watch you – fender up well and go for it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Prepare yourself a loop for throwing over a cleat



Coil your mooring line into a pair of small loops – it's easier to control and throw



Standing a reasonable distance from your target, throw the two coils high and wide

The simplest way to get onto any dock from any boat is to lasso a shore cleat with a stern line, tie it off and drive against this. If you can lasso you're in business when it comes to boating. It's probably the single most useful thing to be able to do. And the key to successful lassoing is to make small loops, no more than a foot in diameter and then having split these



OK I'm a nerd, I have my own garden cleat. But I'm also extremely good at lassoing

evenly into each hand with one section of line joining them, to throw high and wide. It's almost a flick really. If you have a good amount of line coiled, your lasso will go a long way. Having decent rope also helps. Don't forget to keep hold of the running end, the loose end. Letting go of that will only lead to disappointment. And practise. I practise in the garden.



The loop is simply dropped over the mooring cleat...



... then OXO'd onto the stern cleat. Driving ahead against this holds the boat alongside

Make things easy for yourself by having a prepared line. Take a short line and make it into a loop – tying with a double fisherman's knot works well. All we then

do is throw the loop over the shore cleat, then place it round the boat's stern cleat, click the drive into ahead and the boat will lie alongside nicely. ➔

Using a stern bridle

An incredibly robust method of getting onto the dock is with a stern bridle. I always used to come on with a midship spring line but this required me to get close to the cleat on shore that I wished to drop the spring line onto. It wasn't a failsafe technique in that, if I missed, I'd find myself in some difficulty.

Also I infinitely prefer bridles where the line enters the boat at two different points to hold my boat alongside the dock, as opposed to springs where the line enters the boat at just one point. We use springs of course for springing the bow out or the stern out but in those cases we're trying to leave the dock and not attach to it.

We set the stern bridle up by attaching a line to the midship cleat and then taking it outside everything and bringing it onboard under the lower guardwire by the cockpit and up to a cockpit winch. We need to allow enough slack in the line to make four coils for our lasso and these we will bring from outside over the top guard wire and place in the cockpit in readiness.

We approach the berth and take way off until we are stopped in the water, then step out of the cockpit with the coils and drop these over the shore cleat. We carefully haul in the slack and with a couple of turns round the winch we click the engine into ahead and the boat will drive against this bridle and come into the dock and stay there.

We never use these systems to stop the boat, we always stop the boat first and then lasso the cleat, so we are not putting a great deal of strain on the cleats, either those on shore or on the boat.

The beauty of the stern bridle is that if we miss, then we can gather up the line, make another four coils and lasso it again.



1 Lined up and driving into the tide towards the pontoon



2 With the boat stopped I step out with two coils of rope, the lasso...



3 ... and drop these over the end cleat on the pontoon



4 I take the slack out of the line, being careful to keep the cleat lassoed

COPING WITHOUT CLEATS



A perch

No cleats at your home berth, only rings? Well a home berth is something you can organise the way you want, so what about a perch set up with a line that you will slip over a cleat and drive against?



A large post

You arrive, grab the line from the perch, place it over the cleat and drive against this. If you arrive at a foreign port and find rings then it is trickier, I grant you. But there are ways round things. French



A smaller post

ports seem to specialise in tiddly, short, narrow fingers that tip you into the water the minute you step onto one... and with hoops as well. Well, why not lasso the entire finger? Pretend the whole



The palm head on the left is the better bet if you want something to lasso, but if you only had the handrail it's better than nothing

finger is a cleat.

And don't focus solely on cleats, you can lasso anything that's stable enough – a post, a bollard, a palm head, even a handrail intended for climbing out of the water.



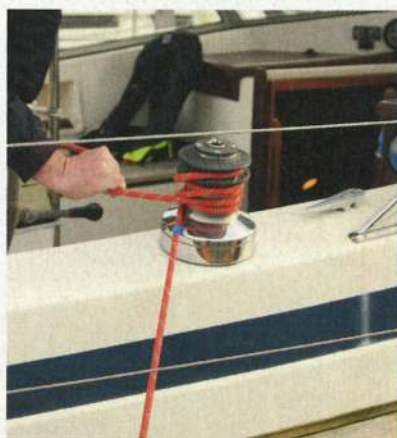
5 With two turns round the winch click into ahead and drive against the bridle



6 The boat will now naturally want to come alongside nicely



7 There we are, secured safely to the pontoon without fuss



8 My bridle line is marked with a piece of blue tape. When the tape is just off the winch, the boat is in the correct position in her berth



Driving ahead against a stern bridle

If you prefer to go astern into your finger berth, we set the stern bridle up as we did for a bows-to mooring but this time we lasso a cleat at the end of the berth and then drive ahead against this.

With the boat holding to the stern bridle we step off and set the mooring warps.

Remember that the shore cleat will line up with the point where you bring the end of the line back on board. If mooring bows to in a short berth, you need to make sure you move the whole bridle forward, or else the bow will go through the end of the berth.

The image (below) shows my boat on a short finger with the bridle coming back on board via a block on the genoa sheet lead track.

If you don't have a cleat amidships, or a suitable genoa track, be inventive – use the shrouds or a block attached to the toe rail (see image right).



Bridle returns to boat further forward via a block on the genoa sheet lead, to allow for a shorter finger



No midship cleat? You can use a block

CONTROL

All of the techniques described here work best if you are mooring into the tide.

If you moor with the tide, everything happens that much quicker and you have no real way of stopping the boat. You'll always have to have the boat in gear or in and out of gear to stop the tide from pushing you through your berth and, frankly, it is a good deal more fraught.

The stress-free part of the exercise comes from mooring into the tide, where you use the tide as a natural brake.

2 knots of boat speed against 1 knot of tide = 1 knot over the ground = controlled

Boat Speed 2 knots

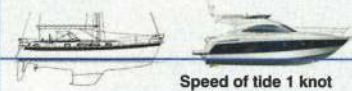


Speed over the ground 1 knot

HAPPINESS!

2 knots of boat speed + 1 knot of tide = 3 knots over the ground = too fast with no means of stopping = out of control

Boat Speed 2 knots



Speed over the ground 3 knots

MISERY!

Managing the wind

If you have wind on the beam when mooring, it is either going to blow you into the dock or away from it. If it is blowing you onto the dock and you aim for your berth you will probably find that you will be blown down beyond it, so you need to anticipate this and aim upwind of the berth. The opposite applies if you are being blown away from your berth.

Essentially we need to remain upwind all the time to prevent being blown past what we are aiming for.