

HOW TO SAIL BETTER

Leaving a tight space

Peter Jones shares a technique for departing a pontoon with limited room for manoeuvre, against a pontoon or between rafts of boats

Reading Jon Mendez's article 'Better Boat Handling – Leaving a dock' (PBO, June 2023) reminded me of a technique shown to me by my late friend Peter Burry, which I have not seen described in print, which is useful if you're hemmed in by obstructions so that use of a bow or stern spring does not swing the boat sufficiently to clear them, or if the wind is holding the boat against the pontoon.

I have used it only on yachts but I think it's probably applicable to almost any type of vessel where it's possible to direct the propwash quite hard to one side and there are cleats on the quarters. I have mainly used this method when allocated a berth in a marina alongside the cross pontoon linking the main pontoons, when the rows of boats on finger berths each side

BELOW The potential problem as shown in Sóller, Mallorca, if there isn't space to reverse...

drastically limit the room for manoeuvre.

It could also be useful if against a pontoon or between rafts of other boats. The boat can be turned directly away from the pontoon without having to have much clear space forward or aft of its original position.

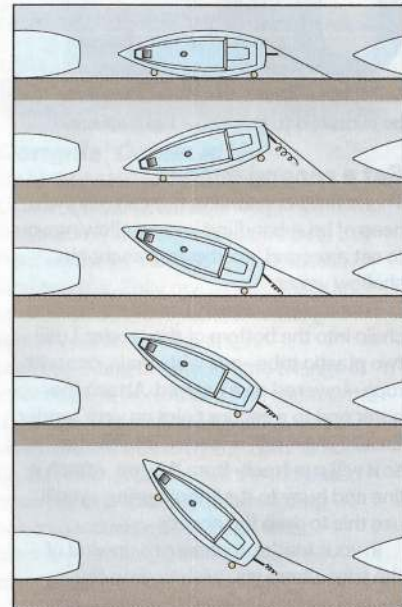
Please note: the step by step photos were taken in an unrestricted situation – where this technique was not really necessary – in order to have an unobstructed view.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Peter Jones began dinghy sailing on the River Avon in the 1950s. After years of revamping sailing dinghies, running Ionian flotilla charter-inspired UK charter

holidays, RYA courses to Yachtmaster Coastal level, and skippering a Civil Service Sailing Association yacht, Peter bought Westerly Merlin *Imagine* in 2001.



Simple steps to leaving a tight berth



Kathy Michaels/Alamy

STEP BY STEP



1 Attach a line as a slip from the quarter away from the pontoon to a suitable cleat or ring some way aft on the pontoon. If there is any doubt at all as to whether the line will slip cleanly round the cleat or ring when one end is released, find someone to stand by to free it at the end of the manoeuvre. This line needs to be long enough to leave room and a bit to spare for the swing in of the stern as the bow swings out.



2 If possible put a large fender on the quarter (if not possible, eg sugar scoop stern or bathing platform projects too far, the line from the offside quarter needs to be longer and the stern will need to be swung out further at the start). Also, if there is not one there already, place another fender well forward to protect the hull if the bow swings in when the stern is pushed out.



3 With the engine running, release the mooring lines (but not the line to the offside quarter) and swing the stern out slightly (this may involve moving the boat astern a little to slacken the line to the offside quarter).



4 Put the engine in gear and direct the propwash towards the pontoon with the rudder as much as possible. This will swing the stern out and bow in and, unless wind or current prevent it, it should also move the whole boat away from the pontoon a little.



5 Once there is room for the stern to swing well clear of the pontoon, reduce the angle of the rudder gradually and the bow should swing away from the pontoon. By adjusting the angle of the rudder and the engine speed it should be possible to ensure the stern swings without making any contact with the pontoon. Increase the rudder angle if the stern appears to be in danger of contact and increase the engine speed if the boat is not reacting sufficiently.



6 Use ahead sparingly to exit back out into the main area. Stay towards the safer up-element side so that if any vessel appears you can slow or even stop without being blown into trouble.



7 The boat will continue to swing away from the pontoon. Once the bow is pointing well away from the pontoon and the stern is also well clear the rudder can be turned further to accelerate the swing, if necessary.



8 Once pointing where you want to go put the engine in neutral and slip the line between the quarter and the pontoon (if a person has been stationed by the cleat/ring remind them in good time to check the rope is running clear or to assist it if necessary), taking care to haul the line in rapidly, so there's little risk of it getting round the prop.



9 With the quarter line clear of the water put the engine in gear and go on your way.