

Make it Easy on the Crew When Docking

July 4, 2011

By Pete & Nancy Hardy

It happens all too often. The crew is expected to make a very dangerous leap in an attempt to salvage a lousy approach to the dock. We have seen it and we have even read, in a major sailing publication of all places, of a skipper who actually “trained” his wife to make that leap.

We could not believe the piece ever made it to the press. We have seen a crew member make that leap, slip on the dock, fall and then slide off the other side, sustaining a serious laceration in the process. We have heard of crew members who have missed the dock and found themselves in the water between the dock and the boat. Don't ask your crew to jump to save your poor landing.

“What is a poor skipper to do?” you ask. Well, for starters, think safety first. Don't put your crew at risk. Here are some things we tell people when teaching the fine art of docking a boat (power or sail):

1. **We instruct the crew to never jump.** Strongly emphasize this point since some crew members will jump on their own if not instructed otherwise.
2. **Don't start your approach** until all dock lines and fenders are in position for the particular dock. Instruct the crew to have the fenders just touching the water (unless you know the dock is particularly high). Make certain bow, stern and spring lines are set to run outside lifelines and pulpits. Instruct the crew where to stand and how to disembark by stepping off the boat – Remember; NO JUMPING.
3. **Take into account** the wind, current and other boats, all of, which can make a big difference in how the docking goes.
4. **Approach at a speed** no faster than required to control your vessel. In calm conditions with no wind or current that means dead slow. Wind and/or current may require more speed to maintain control. If you are going no faster than necessary to maintain control and you have a major surprise, like engine failure or reverse failure, the chances that someone

or something will get hurt or damaged are greatly reduced. This is no time for hot shot driving, you are too close to hard stuff

5. **Always leave yourself an out.** If, on approach, things don't look as they should decide early enough to turn away or back away and set up the approach again.

Done correctly, your crew will be able to step off the boat and secure the dock lines with minimal risk. Besides that, you will appear to be a person who knows what you are doing rather than the main act at a three-ring circus. Remember, its how you look that really matters.

An excellent video on the subject of docking a sailboat is "*Sailboat Handling Under Power*", by Ray Rutledge. You can order it direct from Western Media Products by calling 1-800~2-8902 or check their web site at www.media-products.com. By the way, if you haven't seen the video, *Around Cape Horn*, filmed on a full rigged ship in 1929, it is an amazing video and also available here.

Have fun out there. . . safely.