

STERN TYING: WITH A MESSENGER

Tips on securing your boat at an anchorage that requires more than an anchor

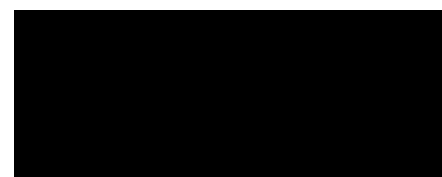


Stern tying can be time-consuming, but it opens up some wonderful anchorages, so we're motivated to make the process simple and efficient. Recently, we devised a modification that has done just that.

Our previous method was fairly standard: once the anchor was set, James stayed with the boat while I took the dinghy to shore, ran a line around an attachment point, and brought it back. By returning the line, rather than tying it to the attachment point, we can release it from Dirona, our 40' powerboat, without going ashore.

MEASURE ENOUGH LINE Getting the line to the attachment point is easy, but returning it is less so. Enough line must be pulled to shore in order to reach back to the boat, which is difficult to judge. (Marking lengths on the tie line would help here, but would not solve all the problems.) This can be exacerbated by boat drift before the line is returned—even if the original estimate was correct, the line still might not reach back.

After pulling what we deemed was enough slack, I carried the pile of line to the dinghy, trying to avoid tangling it or



losing the loose end. Typically, I was also negotiating a steep or slippery slope. Too often, I had insufficient line. Partway back to Dirona I ended up like the dog in the Foghorn Leghorn cartoons: Sproing! Out of leash.

We then had to pull more around the attachment point from the water. With very little leverage, this is a cumbersome task,

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as line tension tends to pull the boat rather than produce more slack.

However, even if everything went perfectly, getting that line back to Dirona just took too long. And as the time it took to get the stern tie in place increased, so did the likelihood that the boat would drift off position in the presence of a crosswind or current. In the September 2002 issue of Pacific Yachting (SEAMANSHIP, "Stern Ties"), Michael Lambert described a bridle system



that would alleviate some of these issues, but the line must still be returned to the main vessel by dinghy. Further, we find that a clean line can catch on retraction—therefore the bridal loops would increase that possibility.

STERN TIE TACKLE Our stern tie tackle comprises 600' of 1/2" three-

strand polypropylene line wound on a plastic reel. A 1" PVC pipe inserted through the centre, with T-ends, acts as a spindle. We slip the unit onto the cockpit handrails, where the reel spins readily to pay out or retract the line.

The new system incorporates a messenger line; a smaller line used to haul a heavier line. Messengers are commonly used in handling mooring lines for large ships. A

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The lines are passed around the attachment point and clipped together.

NOTES

After much searching for an inexpensive, small, all-plastic, non-rusting reel, we finally found one for less than \$15 US plus shipping within USA from Reel-Core Inc. (www.reelcore.com). The sturdy, compact reel (14" long with a 12" outer and 3" inner diameter) holds 600' of 1/2" three-strand polypropylene line if wound carefully, and stows nicely in our lazarette when not in use.

The 3/16" hollow-core polypropylene messenger line we wanted was hard to find. While 1/4" and 1/8" line were both easy to get, we thought 1/4" was too big and 1/8" was too small. So we went with 3/16", which our local marine store didn't have. We ended up ordering it online from Memphis Net and Twine (www.memphisnet.net). It came on an aluminum reel that we were able to use as-is.

Editor's Note: The authors live in Seattle so it was easier for them to access U.S. suppliers. We're not sure what extra steps would be involved for Canadians ordering from the U.S. However, we did some research on stern tying reels and line and came up with some great ideas from Gary Sutherland at Western Marine in Vancouver and Bill Palmer at Paynes Marine Supply in Victoria.

Sutherland said Western distributes two models of plastic reels, both with handles. They are modelled after the reels for

extension cords. One model is hand-held and the other is designed to be stanchion mounted. They come standard with 300' of three-strand 1/4" mid-grade poly for about \$45. Western also distributes 1/8" and 3/16" three-strand poly that can be used as messenger line.

Palmer at Paynes reported that many of their customers purchase either 3/8" (9 mm) or 1/2" (12 mm) Samson MFP Float Line for stern tying. It is a two-in-one braided poly line. It is bright yellow for high visibility and has a red tracer line woven into it. Paynes claims the line is much softer than regular three-strand poly (easier on the hands), coils easier and if you buy a 600' roll, it comes on a plastic reel. The downside is it costs about three times as much as three-strand poly. Palmer suggested using 1/8" or 1/4" Samson braided poly line for messenger line. Samson currently is not manufacturing a 3/16" line, but it may be available from other rope manufacturers.

These products can be purchased at your favourite marine store, or phone Western Marine (604-253-7721) or Paynes Marine Supply (1-800-663-7483) for the dealer nearest you.

For those who want a top-of-the-line reel, Pro-Tech Yacht Services Ltd. in North Vancouver (604-988-3052) sells a Skookum stainless steel reel that will hold 600' of 3/8" poly for \$225.

small line thrown from ship to dock is used to retrieve the ship's mooring line, which is too heavy or short to throw effectively. For a messenger line, we added a smaller spool holding 300' of $\frac{3}{16}$ " hollow, braided polypropylene line with a carabiner clip permanently attached at the end. With a smaller spindle, it mounts on the cockpit handrails below the main line, as pictured on page 73.

PUTTING IT TO USE To deploy, we clip the messenger to a bowline in the end of the main line, and then to the dinghy (the bowline is temporary—for line retraction we don't want any knots or loops in the line). As I head to shore, both lines pay out on their spools. Once ashore, I unclip the lines, pass the end of the main line around the attachment point and clip them back together. James then retrieves the messenger line, pulling the main line along with it, which pays out from its spool, around the attachment point and back to the boat. I stay at the attachment point and guide the line past it.

During the entire process, the boat is in reverse, gently pulling back at idle to the

position where it should sit when tied off. This prevents the vessel from drifting, both minimizing the distance to the attachment point and ensuring tension on the main line as messenger line retracts it, rather than causing the boat to move. When retrieved, the main line is unclipped from the messenger line and tied off. Save for a few minor line tension adjustments, we are done.

On our first trial, we were astonished at how quickly the main line came back to the boat. The little silver carabiner darted through the water, carrying the stern tie line with it, like a trained minnow. James

had the line tied off and the boat in place before I even got back to the dinghy, let alone to Dirona. After several uses, the only modification we've made is to have a bucket handy in which to drop the messenger line as it is retrieved, to limit tangling.

Jennifer and James Hamilton are correspondents for the Waggoner Cruising Guide and boat year-round throughout the Pacific Northwest. Jennifer is currently writing her fourth book, *North of the Rapids*, the story of the Broughton Archipelago and North Island Straits. 🌊

