

At Ease At Anchor

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PART V

Last month we examined bottom characteristics and began the discussion about selecting anchorages. In this issue, we will finish looking at selecting anchorages and begin the fun part—anchoring techniques. These are tips that will help you feel secure when at anchor. We left the previous installment as Joyce and I closely avoided being caught on a dangerous lee shore in a gale.

The first and most important rule in selecting an anchorage is not to anchor off a lee shore. A lee shore is one where the wind and waves can set you ashore. The preferred anchorage is one where the wind blows from the land, and you are in the lee, on the sheltered downwind side, of the land. This protects you from wave action, and if you should drag, the wind will move you into deeper water rather than shallower.

One little understood fact is that waves can and do bend around islands and headlands. Anchoring in the lee of an island may not protect you from beam swells that can make your boat roll. There is no more miserable motion on a boat

than rolling.

Perfect anchorages are rare, but if you find one, it will have most or all of the following characteristics: not off a lee shore; protection from wave action, especially rolling; excellent holding ground; no underwater hazards; no obstructions to foul your anchor; water deep enough to make the tidal range immaterial, but shallow enough that an excessive amount of rode is not required; little or no current, and plenty of swinging room. To make it absolutely perfect, you would have a balmy breeze, considerate neighbors and could catch your fish dinner right from the boat.

ANCHORING TECHNIQUES

One sign of competent seamanship is the ability to enter a harbor and anchor without disturbing or providing an entertaining (or frightening) spectacle to the crews of other boats sharing the anchorage. To illustrate poor anchoring practices, let me relate two incidents Joyce and I observed while we were anchored in the small harbor at Annapolis, Maryland.

In the first instance, a gusty wind was blowing, and we were on

the upwind side of the crowded anchorage. A sailboat motored to a point just upwind from us. The captain stood on the bow beside a heap of nylon line from which protruded parts of an anchor. He showed signs of wanting to anchor just to weather of us. Having a bad feeling about what was about to happen, I went to the bow and asked him not to anchor there. With a muttered reply he moved to the middle of the anchorage. When he found his spot, he kicked the line and anchor overboard and went aft. Predictably, the anchor did not set, and within ten minutes his rudder was fouled on another boat's anchor rode. They had to call for a tow and send a diver down to free the two boats.

A while later, a chartered sailboat anchored a few yards to starboard. The two couples aboard immediately dinghied ashore. Within minutes, Joyce noticed that the newly anchored boat was drifting stern first. I jumped into the dinghy and boarded the untended vessel. I found the last few feet of rode were feeding out of the foredeck locker as the wind moved the boat astern. The bitter end of the rode was not

Small headset radios with boom microphones would have worked, but Murphy's Law would surely have dictated that they would fail at the most inopportune time. Our system, which served us well, had Joyce manning the helm while I handled the ground tackle.

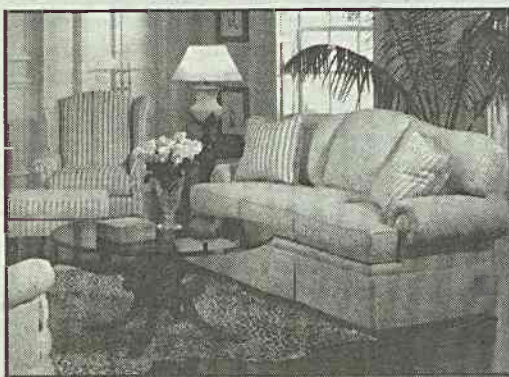
We learned quickly that it pays to take a few extra minutes to make a reconnaissance of the anchorage before choosing a spot to anchor. While motoring through the anchorage, we checked depths, observed how other boats were anchored, estimated the effect of current and wind, chose a spot that gave us and our neighbors plenty of room, and decided how many anchors to use and how they would be arranged. Unless there was plenty of room, we used the same number of anchors deployed in the same pattern as the other boats. Otherwise, a change in wind or current could have caused a problem. I calculated the length of rode needed and faked it on deck while we motored slowly toward our spot heading into the wind or current, whichever had the greater effect on the boat. Faking is arranging the rode on deck so that it feeds free without tangling. A randomly arranged pile of rode with the overboard end on top worked well for us.

When we reached our spot, Joyce stopped the boat and I lowered the anchor to the bottom, making sure the chain did not fall on top of the anchor. If the wind or current did not move the boat, Joyce would apply power in reverse while I paid out the rode. When the calculated amount of the rode paid out and the anchor caught I would cleat the rode and Joyce would apply full reverse power. If that did not move the anchor, I was satisfied.

The foregoing should give you some practical ideas about how to anchor your boat. In next month's issue we will talk about scope and setting multiple anchors.

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