

HOLD FAST

IN RECENT TIMES ANCHORING HAS COME TO BE REGARDED AS MORE HASSLE THAN IT'S WORTH AND ONLY DONE IF ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. PLEASE DON'T FALL INTO THIS TRAP! YOU MAY WELL BE LIMITING ENJOYMENT OF YOUR BOAT AND POTENTIALLY PUTTING YOURSELF IN HARM'S WAY BY NOT USING YOUR ANCHOR.

By Ned Files, boating instructor

1 If you are not familiar with the area you're anchoring in, you should consult your chart to ensure the area is not prohibited, that the sea bottom is suitable for your anchor type and that you have 360 degrees of swing room taking into account the position of your anchor, the amount of rode (anchor chain and/or line) paid out and your boat length. Once you are confident about your anchoring location, bring the boat to a complete stop and, with your engines in idle, look and feel how the prevailing conditions are affecting your boat, ie, what is the natural drift? The rule of thumb for how much rode to pay out to first, set your anchor equal to three times the depth of water and then a minimum of five times the depth to stay on anchor (including the height of your bow from the water and the tidal range). These are guidelines only and generally apply in water up to about 3 to 5 metres in depth and in relatively calm conditions. Ideally, use a ratio of 7:1 or greater if the water is deeper than 7 metres. With the 7:1 ratio in mind you can now work out your boat's maximum anchoring depth in relation to the length of rode you carry on board. It comes as a surprise to some that it is shallower than expected, ie, 70 metres of rode gives an anchoring depth of only 10 metres at 7:1. The theory behind these ratios of depth to length of rode is that the longer the rode, the greater the scope (arch) and the more parallel to the sea floor the rode will lie; therefore it is less likely to pull the anchor out. A short rode or scope is likely to dislodge the anchor and won't hold if the wind picks up or if the swell or chop increase. The boat used in this demonstration was fitted with a chain counter; if you don't have that luxury then you can mark your chain so that you know how much is out. It's also handy to know how fast your winch pays out. You can easily calculate this by timing how much chain it pays out each second interval.



2 When you are ready to drop anchor, position the vessel into the wind. If there is no breeze then look for signs of current or look to see in which direction other boats are facing. Motor slightly upwind or up current (whichever is the strongest influence) of where you want to drop the anchor, bring the vessel to a dead stop. Engage reverse at idle speed so that it starts to gently move astern, and then start letting out your chain. Engage and disengage the engine just enough so you continue moving gently astern. Your goal is to lay the chain along the bottom rather than piling it up on top of the anchor as this may foul it. Remember the greater the scope, the greater chance of your anchor setting. Having paid out the desired length, place the engines in neutral and let the weight of the boat continue its momentum astern until you feel the anchor bite.



Your deckhand on the bow will also see the anchor chain go taut and should signal the skipper. The anchor should now be set. If you wish to dig your anchor in a bit more, wait for the boat to settle for a short while and then engage reverse at idle speed for only a second to take another bite at the anchor. Once you are confident that the anchor is firmly set and, if there's room, you can then let out a little more chain to give it more scope.



As you are the skipper, you should then go to the bow and check the set of your anchor, see that all is as it should be and confirm the visual bearings with your crew. Remember, the skipper's responsibility for the overall safety of the boat is absolute. Once you are completely satisfied that the anchor is set, you have double checked your bearings (position) and confirmed that there is no dragging, you can now turn off your engines and enjoy the peace and quiet. If you are staying on anchor for a while it would pay to isolate your start batteries at the main switch to give yourself the best chance of getting going again.



Wait for the vessel to settle again and then take a couple of visual bearings, preferably abeam of the vessel, on either side so that you can tell if the vessel drags the anchor. These can be marks in the water, structures or shrubbery on land. If you have a GPS with an anchor alarm, set that.



6 **WEIGHING ANCHOR** First and most important, start your engines before performing any other task. If you have attached a snubber, bring the chain up slightly so that the load is back on the winch and remove the snubber line. Your deckhand on the foredeck should signal the skipper to indicate the direction and angle at which the rode is lying, rather than waving instructions. As you can see from these photos, an outstretched arm is indicating the rode is tight as well as indicating direction; a lowered arm again indicates angle and direction, time to winch on. Drive forward slowly in the direction of the anchor and start bringing up the chain. If you have a bow thruster you can use this to push the bow in either direction. The idea is to gently drive the boat to the anchor rather than having the whole weight of the boat on the winch. Secure the anchor back onto the deck with a lanyard secured at one end to the anchor and the other end to a strong point, ie, a bow cleat. Should the winch clutch release while underway the anchor will not pay out; it's not hard to imagine the damage this could inflict on your boat.



For practical boating instruction from novice to advanced levels, please contact Ned Files at High Tide Boating: 0419 155 321 or email ned@hightideboating.com.au