

Advanced Boat Handler's Course

By Phil Bedlington, Under Capricorn

Many of you know me as many things, not all of them polite. However, most of you also know me as a reasonably competent boat handler.

A few Wednesdays ago, I had the good fortune to spend nearly 4 hours with a man named Ned Files who is a boat handling instructor. We met at 0830 and I got off the boat at 1230. The course was conducted on Howard Dares beautiful Hanse 40 *Coorain* (Thank you for your trust, Howard). *Coorain*, as most of you are aware, is totally different from *Under Capricorn* having a higher freeboard and being much wider and therefore having more windage.

The day was a beautiful 12 knot Westerly, the potential bane of most of our lives as we all face North/South or vice versa.

The course commenced with the skill of getting out of the pen. You may chuckle that "we can all do that" but how many of us think about the influence of our propellor on this manoeuvre.

We then progressed North of the wave attenuator and worked on a shift in thought process, i.e. that of having the stern of the boat to the breeze and how much more control you have in this position compared to head to wind. How many times have you sat head to wind only to have the wind take control of the bow and give us a little angst. (Note, not valid for hoisting or dropping sails.)

Once this point was realized, we then progressed to using the engine to hold station and to turn the boat 360° totally within the length of the boat, thus turning your arm of the marina into an ocean rather than a restricted waterway.

Our next task was varietal ways of tying the boat up to the marina in an off-marina and an on-marina breeze without getting off the boat or having anyone to assist until it was totally secure.

We looked at using the engine and a line to get the bow or stern to a 45° to 90° angle to the marina without anyone except me on board. I over simplify this process which took a good hour to cover all the available techniques.

Finally, we looked at a major brain shift. Background thought "All of those of us who cruise or race have rafted up to another boat sometimes for days, with no damage to either boat". The other thought is that "a boat resting against another boat will do no damage if:

1. there is no forward or backward movement of one boat on the other, or
2. one or both boats are suitably fendered.

That said, why must we look on the boat next to us as a problem? Why not look at it as an ally?

If the weather is such that berthing uncontrolled can cause damage to either boat or worse to our crew, why not fender up the boat side of our boat and rest on our neighbour till we are comfortable in getting lines to an appropriate cleat to allow us to either use the crew or engine to get us safely and snugly tied up. We all do this each *Cereberus*, *Queenscliff*, *Stanley* or any other away from home tie up.

I would recommend this to any skipper who has ever had the thought "Oh s*****! I have to park the boat now. I have had a lovely sail but now I am stressed".

The man to contact is Ned Files (0419 155 321). A very patient and knowledgeable chap who has certainly enhanced my boat handling skills.



Amanda, a Couta boat belonging to Merella Curtis, underway in the BLISS series

Photo: Steb Fisher