



Boat Handling and Seamanship

Have you ever had a problem getting into or out of a dock? Is steering in reverse mysterious? Does the boat sometimes not turn when getting underway using the motor?

The “Boat Handling and Seamanship” seminar is focused on the fundamentals of safely handling a Harbor 20, for both skipper and crew. The meaning of “Boat Handling” is pretty obvious. But what is “Seamanship”? To me, seamanship is knowing how to do things the right way, the same way, every time. So, when things start going wrong, and when they do it is usually in an exponential fashion, you don’t have to think about what to do.

This is a hands-on seminar, and will be conducted on the docks and on the water. So, please be prepared with sun-screen, hats, etc. Described herein are the sorts of things we will cover in this seminar.

Every sailor should be proficient at tying nautical knots. These knots are designed such that they can always be untied, regardless of how much loading has been applied, without the use of tools such as pliers or marlinspikes. A surprisingly small number of knots can serve you for a lifetime, and are useful both on and off the water. There are very few tying or lashing tasks which cannot be accomplished using the following knots: bowline, proper cleat, clove hitch, rolling hitch, figure eight, and c-gasket coil. You will become proficient at each, and an illustrated handout will be provided. If you don’t have a spare line aboard your boat for the knot tying exercises, please bring another from home.

Starting and stopping, such as when leaving or returning to a dock or mooring requires boat handling know-how. This is because when the boat is not moving, or moving very slowly, the rudder does not work. So, steerage must be achieved either by getting the boat moving by giving it a good push so the rudder can get a bite, or by using a sail. Only one sail should be used in such a situation, and it should always be the sail furthest from the wind. If this does not already make sense to you, it will. We will do a lot of exercises sailing into and out of the docks.

Sometimes, it is necessary to steer in reverse. When steering in reverse it is very important to securely hold on to the tiller. If you let go, it will slam to one side or the other violently, possibly doing damage to your bottom paint. We will practice moving in reverse under both sail and motor.

When tying to a dock, dock lines should be positioned such that the boat cannot move fore and aft. If the bow and stern lines cannot be lead forward and aft of the bow and stern, a “spring” line should be added.

The lazy jacks for the mainsail provide convenience, but can also cause problems. It is important to keep tension on the leech when raising the main with the lazy jacks up,

because the full battens can easily become caught in the jack lines. And, it is not possible to flake the sail on the boom when dropping it with the lazy jacks up, so it must be flaked once you are stopped. Properly flaking the mainsail can dramatically increase the life of the sail. The mainsail can also be raised and lowered without using the lazy jacks. The advantage is that the sail can be flaked as it is lowered. We will cover raising and lowering the mainsail both with and without using the lazy jacks.

Tacking and gybing are maneuvers you repeat over and over. These should be practiced such that they are performed the same way, every time. Doing things differently can cause confusion, cause problems, and even be dangerous. Tacking and gybing proficiently can go a long way towards safe, fun, and fast sailing. Various techniques will be demonstrated. There will be varying personal preferences, but the important thing is to be consistent.

Your telltales tell you whether your sails are acting efficiently or not, and simple mnemonics can be used to apply the information the telltales are giving you. The telltales on the luff of the jib are used for both steering and trimming. The mnemonics for the jib telltales are:

If steering: Turn away from the telltale that is dancing, until it is flowing

If trimming: Trim towards the telltale that is dancing, until it is flowing

If applied consistently and continuously, these two simple neumonics can have greater impact on your boats performance, and your fun and enjoyment, than anything else.

The power generated by your sails quadruples when the wind speed doubles. For this reason, it is very important to know how to depower your sailplan when it gets windy. Sailing overpowered stresses the boat and the crew, is slow, and can be dangerous. Upwind, the boat heels too much, and the rudder is dragging sideways. Downwind, the bow wants to submarine. We will cover the adjustments which can be made using the main outhaul, the backstay tensioner, and the boomvang to flatten and depower both sails. If flattening is not enough, we will show you how to quickly and easily reef your mainsail. Your tiller tells you what you need to know. If the tiller does not feel the same in 20 knots of wind as it does in 10, you are overpowered. Once depowered, you will find the boat back on its feet, the helm will be back in its normal position, and you will be going fast, and having fun!

While most of this is familiar to skippers, this seminar could be very valuable for your crew. Except for the handful of single-handers in our fleet, this is a team sport.

If you have questions or suggestions regarding this program, please contact:

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We hope to see you there!