

# HOWTO Master Mediterranean Mooring

*MBY's definitive guide to all those essential tasks you need to know how to do but were too afraid to ask*

Words & pictures **Gilbert Park**



**Fig. 1** A simple clip attached to a temporary stern line is much quicker and easier for crew to attach



**Fig. 3** Large cylindrical fenders are better at protecting the bathing platform than flat or stern fenders



**Fig. 2** Once secure this is then replaced with a heavy duty sternline fitted with chain and a snubber to reduce wear and jolting



**Fig. 3** Two way radios fitted with headsets make communication between skipper and crew much easier especially in windy conditions

After a wet and windy summer in Brittany, we decided to move our boat to the Mediterranean the following year to enjoy an extended season of sunshine and calm blue seas. We got her safely down to her new home, port of Aigues-Mortes in the South of France, and planned to start our Mediterranean adventure at the beginning of May with a view to returning in late July. Our Sabreline 36 is an ideal boat for us; it cruises at 15 knots, has comfortable accommodation and a flybridge to steer from and watch the world go by. The only downside is the windage, especially when berthing, and the fact that I can't see the bathing platform from the flybridge.

Initially we enjoyed some lovely days cruising in the South of France. All that changed in La Ciotat when the weather forecast suddenly flagged up an imminent Force 10. Fortunately, our berth had ropes with surge springs attached and we were fine.

From that moment on it seemed that wherever we went, the wind would whip up a stiff Force 6-7 just as we attempted to berth. My wife is not at her best with ropes and fenders and gets especially stressed when the wind makes life hard for both of us. We had read up about stern-to mooring techniques and watched some YouTube videos so we thought we'd be okay. However, in the high winds, the noise and unpredictable movements added to her anxiety. So we needed to make things as simple as possible for both of us. After much trial and error, these are the solutions we alighted on.

#### **MOORING TACKLE**

The first step was to change all our mooring lines to floating ropes so that if they did get dropped, they wouldn't get tangled around the props as we backed into the berthing slot.

These stern lines normally have to be looped through a ring or around

a bollard before being brought back on board and cleated off; fine on a calm sunny day but not so easy on a windy one. Our solution was to use temporary stern lines with clips that can quickly and easily be clipped on to the rings and then cleated off on board (Fig. 1). Once these are on, the bow line(s) can be picked up and secured.

We then change roles and I go on to the bathing platform and replace our temporary clips with heavy-duty 14mm ropes fitted with rubber snubbers and a metre of chain (Fig. 2). The chain can be looped over a bollard or fed through a ring without any fear of it wearing through.

To do this, my wife manoeuvres the boat gently astern to release the tension on the temporary line, allowing me to undo one of the stern lines from the boat cleat and attach the new heavy-duty line. The temporary line is then used as cross spring. We then repeat the process on

the other side. Be careful never to get your fingers trapped between a rope and a hard metal part as you do this – the consequences don't bear thinking about.

We have tried a variety of fenders to protect the bathing platform as we back in towards the quay, including flat and step fenders, but find large cylindrical ones work best (Fig. 3).

#### **COMMUNICATION**

This is the key to stress-free mooring in high-wind conditions. Unfortunately, it is often difficult because of the extraneous noise in a marina.

We find that two-way radios make a huge difference, enabling information to be passed in both directions without shouting (which increases anxiety), especially the distance from the bathing platform to the quay wall.

We use headsets to keep our hands free and have the handsets fitted to our lifejackets (Fig. 4). We have tried voice activated headsets but found

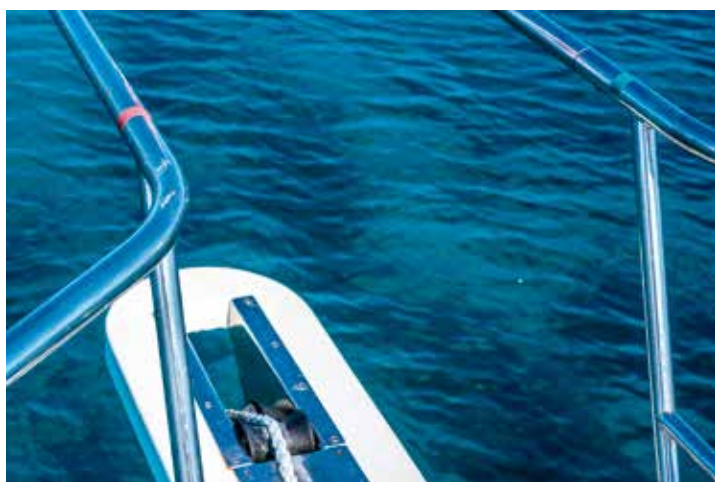




**Fig. 5** Colour coded tape means the skipper can ask for a nudge ahead on red or green when directing operations



The Parks' Sabreline 36 (far right) is well suited to their new Mediterranean cruising grounds but it took them a while to master the art of stern-to berthing in windy conditions



**Fig. 6** Using coloured tape and terms like the 'front green side of the boat' makes it easier for inexperienced crew to identify the 'starboard bow'



**Fig. 7** Use gloves to pick up the lazy line then run it up to the bow using a piece of cord to avoid cuts and keep the dirty drips away from your decks

that the wind noise continuously activated the radio, so now we use the press-to-talk button on the headset. The first headsets we used had boom microphones and headbands but we found this to be a bit clumsy and have now replaced them with headsets that have an earpiece and a separate clip-on microphone.

Using the headsets, my wife can count down the distance to the quay wall as well as letting me know when we are hooked on. When we swap roles, I can then ask her to move the boat backwards and forwards to adjust the permanent stern lines.

The other important part of communication is understanding the information given. I mostly cruise with my wife and occasionally some less experienced crew. They all share one thing in common – difficulty in recognising which side is port and starboard, especially in a stressful situation. All the usual mnemonics still rely on knowing which is right and left, and which way the boat is facing. Now we simply call the sides red and

green and have put coloured tape on the throttles (Fig. 5), guardrails, stern and bow (Fig. 6). On that note, I also agreed to stop using the terms bow and stern, fore and aft and simply use front and back instead.

Does it work? Before leaving, I undertook extensive sea trials with my 4-year-old granddaughter, asking her to run to the front red side or the green back side etc. Apart from being an exhausting game, she got it 100% correct. In real life in a high wind, it also works and costs next to nothing.

#### KEEP CONTROL

Coming in stern first, it's common for the bow to be blown off and to then find the bow thruster is not powerful enough to push the bow back. There are a couple of ways to deal with this. First, always try to make allowances for this in your approach. Second, get the upwind stern line on first and then the bow (lazy) line before you bother with the downwind sternline. Once these lines are secure, put the remaining stern line on and the springs.

Picking up lazy lines is unpleasant and painful if there is a lot of growth on them. Wear gloves or loop a piece of cord around the lazy line and run it up to the bow with your arm outstretched (Fig. 7). This keeps your hands away from the rope and the dirty water drips back into the sea rather than on your decks. You can even use the cord to pull the lazy line through the fairlead so it's ready to go on a cleat.

Ignore all advice (of which there is usually plenty) to switch the engines off before you have at least three lines on. Using ahead and astern judiciously enables you to tighten and loosen lines appropriately.

#### FINISHING TOUCHES

It took a while for us to realise that leaving in the late morning in order to reach our destination at lunch time was not the smartest move. The winds are at their strongest between noon and late afternoon. Now we leave much earlier in the morning when it's calm and windless, arrive just as the wind is picking up, moor,

lunch and follow the example of the locals by having a siesta in the heat of the day – perfect.

Our latest improvement is to fit a reversing camera. I had one on board to fit into the engine room but hadn't got around to it. So one day, I attached it to the mast spreader with cable ties and ran the leads to the pre-wired video port on the flybridge's multifunction display. To my surprise, it worked as soon as I switched it on! It doesn't show up on the lower helm MFD, but that's not a problem because I can view it on my tablet too. Only one word describes our early experience with it – brilliant.

Mooring in high winds still provokes some anxiety but having the right gear, an agreed and rehearsed way of mooring up, good communication and an understanding of what is happening has gone a long way to reducing the stress levels for all of us. We had to learn this the hard way but hopefully, our experiences will help others achieve their own harmonious solutions more quickly. **IMBY**