

Anchors - The Next Generation.

Our view of what's happening to anchor design.

So what's up with all these new funny looking bits of metal hanging off the bows of boats these days? Evolution is what's up.

For 1000's of years people have been anchoring their boats with assorted anchors with varying success. First off there was just a lump of rock, then things evolved with the likes of the Biblos, the Killick and the Fisherman anchor, which are still satisfactorily used in some parts of the world. Unfortunately these anchors were often very large, hard to handle and didn't always work that well when pushed.

People wanted better performance and smaller anchors and changes began to be seen. A whole new batch arrived which included most of the anchors common place today. These include the Danforth, Bruce, CQR and more recently improvements to those designs with the arrival of the Delta, Fortress and Sarca. These anchors offered improved performance alongside a smaller, more easily handled size, although some undesirable characteristics like low or average holding power, tricky setting and difficulties with big wind or tide shifts remained. The latest generation of anchors has made big improvements with regards to these issues.

It started some 15 years ago with the arrival of the German Bügel and the French Spade. These two took anchoring to the next level. Over the last couple years more have arrived, each with their own interesting designs, but generally based off the Bügel and Spade design theory. One group, The Bügel, Manson Supreme and Rocna, use roll bars to get the anchor to align itself in the correct position and set well. Others like the Spade use very high tip weight ratios to vastly improve the setting performance. Yet others, The Sword, use the shank shape. Each of the new designs have been hotly debated in many forums with no clear winner - they all work and work well. Many Tests, even as flawed as most are, have shown the new designs to be a step up as well.

A common theme is that they have all moved away from being basically a weight-based item. The new generation all use surface area, and lots of it. A bit like a spinnaker on a yacht - grab as much of the wind as you can or in the anchors case, grab seabed. Due to this design theory change, there are some weird looking beasts that can hold some seriously large loads, far larger than previously. It is quite simple to see why.

Probably the anchor to have the greatest impact over the last few decades is the CQR, a plough design. What are ploughs used for? dragging through the ground. The new generation anchors are shaped almost the opposite.

A great advantage of the design change is the vastly improved setting performance. Gone are the days of starting to anchor 50m ahead of where you actually want to be. The new ones bite fast, so much so that more than a few people have been knocked off their feet on their first outing with them. Having your anchor set within a meter or so of where you drop it each time has been gratefully received by many.

The advantages are far more widespread than some may think. DOC (NZ's Dept of Conservation) fitted their new boats with the Spades as, when anchored in marine reserves and other sensitive areas, they set very quick, within in their own length mostly, so don't leave skid marks across the seabed, leaving the environment more untouched.

Many are fitting these new designs to get the extra security that when someone chucks the anchor over they have the far greater reliability in setting well first time, a great bonus for newer boaties. And that's only two examples of users finding features of the new designs good for specific issues they had.

As a consequence of these design improvements, anchors are getting lighter for the same or better performance. This is all good, as when an anchor is sitting on your bow it is all bad from the boat's perspective. The lighter anchors now give us better and safer boat performance alongside better anchoring performance.

I have always had a thing for anchors (is that a sad thing to say?) and have spent a lot of time researching them and their associated equipment. My staff and I are constantly using, testing and getting real feedback from many users from small fizza boats to very large offshore cruisers. We find ourselves in the position where I just don't see good reason to recommend older style anchors much anymore. The exceptions are grapnels (for specific anchoring in rocks/reefs etc) but even those are becoming a bit redundant with the Manson Supreme and the new Rocna RRR model having rock slots which can aid recovery when stuck in rocks. We do still like the odd Danforth pattern type occasionally; being cheap you can get a bloody massive one and the store well being flat, great as secondaries.

The biggest single benefit we see is the setting characteristics of the new designs. They are hard not to set. Can they drag? Absolutely. An anchor that can't drag is called a mooring. Are they prone to dragging more than older anchors? Everything we've seen has suggested the opposite. I know many will be sitting there saying "yeah, right!" All I can say is try one. Their holding power is, on average, a step up, seabed willing. Holding loads in excess of 1,000kg with an alloy 4.5kg new generation anchor. That's right up there in anyone's language, and far in excess of anything we have achieved with any of the older designs of far greater weight.

All sounds too good to be true but like most things there are downsides. The biggest downside is price. The new generation anchors are quite labour extensive, use very high-grade raw product, and are not mass-produced in the East. They are quality, and quality comes at a cost. That's commercial reality.

Another downside but the reason they work so well is the physical size of some of these beasts. We've had more than a couple of people use the phrase "Gezzz... that's a monster compared to my old plough" and they are right. They are larger which can cause fitting issues if you oversize too much. The 'roll bars' are often also a right pain in the botty on many boats especially those whose anchors come up through bowsprits and similar.

So is it time to chuck that old whatever in the garden and rush down to the chandlery for a new anchor? No.

Are the old anchors bad? Generally, no they aren't going to kill you if set-up well, history has proven that. If your older model is working and you are happy with, why change?

There is no reason 99% of boaters should have to worry about their anchoring system 99% of the time. If you do, improve your system.

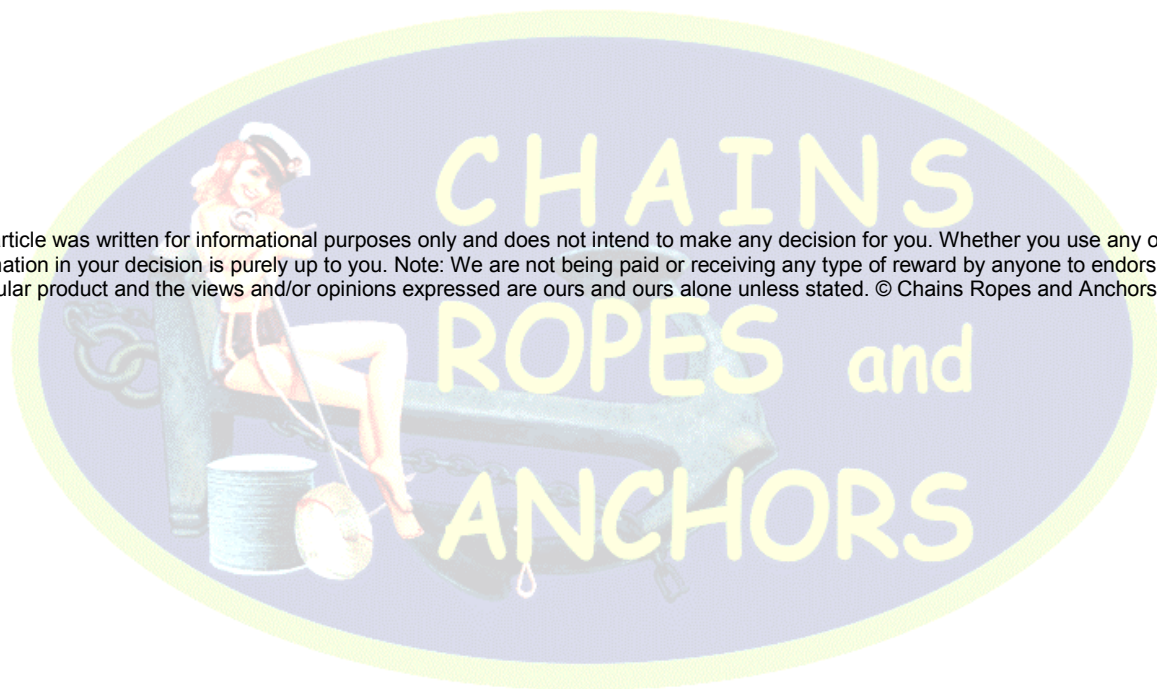
We do, however, believe the new generation anchors are taking over. To write them off without trying them, we'd suggest is plainly silly and self-defeating. They are worth serious

consideration at the very least. Don't sell yourself short by hanging on to old theories or prejudging things. Yes, there will always be a place for specialised designs but as 'good all round' anchors go the new ones are hard to beat.

So don't be scared if a boat pulls into a bay next to you with a funny looking thing hanging off the bow. Be happy that the chances of them dragging into you have been decreased by a good amount. Just make sure you and your old anchor don't drag into them!

Which one of the new generation anchors is the best? Ahh.... That's for you to decide.

This article was written for informational purposes only and does not intend to make any decision for you. Whether you use any of this information in your decision is purely up to you. Note: We are not being paid or receiving any type of reward by anyone to endorse any particular product and the views and/or opinions expressed are ours and ours alone unless stated. © Chains Ropes and Anchors 2007



The Maritime Bondage Specialists