

Quick guide to Anchoring, Winches and Anchoring Etiquette.

We find that a large proportion of winch and anchoring problems come back to 'operator error' and we have made it a bit of a crusade to minimise this. You may know these but in case you don't we'll put them up anyway.

1, Know How to Anchor!

If you have never anchored a boat before you should find it quite easy but don't just throw it over and hope. Apart from being stupid it could cost you your boat. Before you try for the first time read up on anchoring, ask someone with experience to come out with you for an hour or 2, even practice in the safety of a quiet bay before you leave. Make sure you feel confident that you can handle any problems that might arise. That includes retrieving your anchor; you just never know when you may have to bail out in a hurry. Another point to remember is everyone in the bay could be watching you anchor and do you want them all laughing at you? It does happen.

2, Know what equipment you have.

You'd look pretty sheepish if you were trying to anchor in 30 metres of water with only 25 metres of rode. Don't laugh it happens more than you would expect. Take the time to know what you have including the lengths.

3, Check Your Equipment!

Always check your anchor and anchor rode before you leave on any trip, just like you should with all important boating gear. Make sure everything is in working order and tightened if required, from windless to anchor and all in between. There is nothing worse than letting out 100 metres of anchor chain and then finding your winch does not work.

4, Spare Anchoring Gear.

It is a good seamanship practice and highly recommended that you have, at least, two anchors of sufficient size and something capable of being an additional anchor rode, if not a dedicated 2nd rode, for your boat. This provides a back up if the initial gear is lost, and allows you more options on how you anchor in crowded anchorages and heavy winds. It is just like having a spare tire in a car. You hope you never have to use it but if you do it's a complete bugger if it's not there.

5, If you're anchoring on a rope and chain rode work on laying out 5 times the water depth i.e. 5 metres of water means you need 25 metres of rode out PLUS the distance from your cleat/winch over the bow to the water. This is a good starting guide for average conditions. If just stopping for a fish, a quick bite to eat, a real calm night this can be less. If the weather turns nasty 7 to 1 is a good area to head into. More can be good if you have room.

6, If anchoring on an all chain rode work on 3 times water depth PLUS the distance from your cleat/winch over the bow to the water, for most conditions. If the weather turns bad head off to the 5 to 1 area, if not further if room allows.

NOTE: No.s 5 and 6 are only a guide but a good place to start. Letting out more rode allows the pull on your anchor to be less 'upward' and will help your anchor hold a lot more load. But be aware that the more rode you have out will increase the size of the circle you will swing in if the wind or tide turns i.e. look out for boats around you and don't forget low tide.

7, Be aware not all boats are the same so they will do different things while at anchor. Don't expect all the boats to behave just like yours so make allowances for this when deciding where to throw your anchor over. For example yachts are affected by tidal flows sooner and more due their keels than are launches. Wind affects launches with big flying bridges more than low profile boats. So things like these mean boats will hang off anchor differently at times.

8, Be careful not to lay your anchor over the top of someone else's. This can get messy, especially if they decide to move (Murphy's Law says this will usually happen around 4am).

9, When you have just anchored spend some time to make sure that the anchor is well dug in before jumping in the dingy and heading off to the pub or whatever. This can save a large amount of grief later possibly including a visit from the very angry 7-foot tall owner of the boat next to you whose \$50,000 paint job has just been trashed as your boat bounced down the side.

10, The usual custom when anchoring in a bay is 'first in - first served'. If you anchor and the wind or tide changes and you get too close to someone else who was there first, you are the one expected to move, not them. If you are the last in, this maybe 'suggested' to you, usually after a one-sided discussion about your ancestors if you don't handle the situation well.

11, Want to spend \$500+ very quickly? Then don't follow the following advice. It is very important that the boat end of your anchor rode is well fixed to the boat. People not doing this are a good source of sales for us.

12, If you are anchored on all chain a Snubber is highly recommended. A Snubber is a length of rope often with a chain hook on the end. This will stop that annoying clunk clunk of the chain in the fairlead all night.

13, If you use an anchor winch and the weather and/ or wave action gets up take the load of the rode off the anchor winch and onto a cleat. That is easy with rope but if you have all chain get a Chain Snubber, you'll be pleased you did. When your boat bounces on the rode the load does not want to be going through the winch and into the gearbox. Obviously if you have excess money you can leave it there and I'm sure the service people will enjoy emptying your wallet for the repair job.

14, Sound travels real well over calm water. Just remember that when on the stereo volume control or have a new girlfriend aboard. Then again the neighbours may enjoy the show, you just never know but it is probably better to watch out for excess noise especially on those real calm nights.

15, If you see a big raft-up (a group of boats tied together in one group sometimes hanging off one or 2 anchors) going on and you want a quite night, don't anchor by it. The chances are there will be intense 'discussions' going on long into the night. Often this will included a quiet beer or 10 so these 'discussions' may (usually do) get boisterous. The volume is usually directly related to the number of boats in the raft-up. If the raft-up happens to include 22ft yachts called Pied Pipers, be afraid....very afraid and quickly hide your daughters.

16, Big stinky Gin Palaces (big powerboats) or anyone else really, who tries to muscle into an anchor spot by using 'mine is bigger than yours' are referred to as 'dorks', please don't be one.

17, Only use your winch with the motor running. Winches are gluttons when talking amps and will very quickly flatten the batteries given a chance. If you have given the winch a good run it can be advisable to run the motor for a bit to top up the batteries again afterwards.

17, Anchor winches are made to pull up anchors from the seabed and not boats to the anchors. If you are anchored in a breeze or tide use the motor to idle up to the anchor and then use the winch to pull up the anchor. Winching the boat up to the anchor puts the winch (and batteries) under unnecessary load causing circuit breakers to blow and excess winch wear at best.

18, If you have a Free-fall version anchor winch it is a good idea to either lock the anchor in place once it is retrieved or disable the anchor winch switch. Anchors have been accidentally deployed while the boats were at speed. As soon as they hit the water the only way they go is straight through your waterline. Are your life jackets stored handy??

19, It is a 15 minute exercise to do a basic winch service for the average boatie. Doing a service every 6-12 months will keep the winch in best working order extend it's life considerably.

We have found that the above are not as well known now as they used to be. If you are aware of the above, good and please pass them on, if not, they are a few good basic rules to keep in mind.

I think that enough from the C R A School of Safe Boating for the moment. If you have any questions please feel free to refer to the more in-deep articles on our site or just ask and we'll do our best to help.

NOTE: This article has been written for informational purposes only. In no way does it cover the entire subject in great depth or is meant as being correct for every one in every situation. In no way does this article mean to imply all comments made are 'law' even if some maybe. The intent of this article was to inform a little. Be aware regional differences in standards, laws and procedures will mean things maybe a little different from place to place even if the same basic principals apply.