

# BOXES and LOCKSES

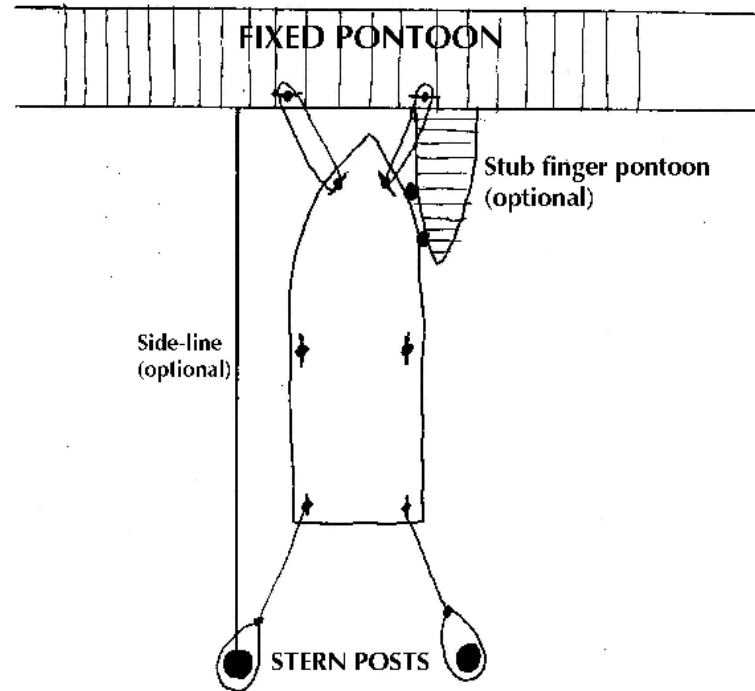
There can be few greater spectator sports than an English couple attempting to berth into continental box moorings - nor a greater cause of marital disharmony!

In principle, the idea is simple: two rear posts have to be lassoed while going in between them towards a pontoon/quay to which the bows are fastened to rings or cleats. Sometimes, the boxes have a short alongside-bow finger between pairs of boats; others have brightly coloured side-lines (see Fig ) on both sides, usually.

Boxes have singular advantages over pontoon moorings in terms of security and privacy. You will never have another boat rafted alongside. Thus the effort of learning the technique is well worth-while.

But especially with a cross-wind and short-handed, and without proper preparation, they can be an absolute disaster!

The following is written on the assumption that the boat is manned only by the helm and one crew. (It is obviously much easier if the helm has two crew: one at each stern quarter for boxes and one at each end for locks).



## A. Preparation

1. Fenders: 4 on each side with lines long enough to reach to water level (needed eg for the Kiel Canal). Wear fenders permanently tied on for the Dutch/Danish Rivers and canals. Keep them on the side decks so that they can be kicked overboard in a hurry when needed eg when going alongside a fuel berth or pontoon or another yacht instead of a box.

2. Lines:-

2 for the bow each at least 7 metres long (heavy flexible nylon eg braided or plaited);  
2 for the stern each at least 10 metres long (heavy flexible nylon eg braided or

plaited);

1 very long line for the bow for emergency use (see B9 below)

2 nylon beam/mid lines with short loops for dropping on midships cleat or side winches, round a bollard and back onto the cleat/winch for temporary beam fastening

3. At least one long boat hook, ideally one for each side

4. One very long pole (eg spinnaker pole) for reaching posts at a distance (see B8 below)

5. A boarding plank: a) for protecting the boat's sides from an irregular quay or lock side  
b) for walking the plank down from the bows to low pontoons (frequently a problem in Denmark - some local boats even brought kitchen steps for this!)

## B. Boxes

1. Well before entering, everything must be prepared:

- Fenders in-board (to avoid them snagging the posts on entry/leaving). However, if the box has a short stub finger between the pair of boats you will need one or two bow fenders ready rigged (Fig. stbd).

- Rig the 2 bow lines cleated at the inboard end, under and over the rails ready to throw on shore
- Rig the stern lines under the rails, inboard ends brought forward into the well, outboard ends over the rails on to the side decks and amidships with large (at least 1.5 metre diameter) loops tied with a bowline (*not* a slip knot) ready for dropping over the stern posts
- Boat hooks ready on each side deck

2. Select a box that is free (shown by green tab, but check return date with binoculars), ideally not too deep, and wide enough and with side lines if possible, facing into wind. (You may need to tie up temporarily to a hammer-head if available in order to locate a suitable box.)

3. Approach from as far away as possible to get a straight line run in at slow revs aiming to just miss the windward post.

4. Slow to a walking pace as the posts reach the beam and drop on the rear loops (if short handed, the crew does the windward and the helm the leeward post) and quickly gather in the slack so as to be able to brake the stern as the bow lines are attached.

5. If sidelines are present, crew can hold the windward side-line with the boat hook to prevent sideslip and you have all the time in the world. If not, the crew needs to jump ashore smartly or throws the bow lines to a shore person. The bow lines need to be quickly threaded through the rings or over cleats (no hitches, so that they can be released quickly from the deck) and back, to be cleated on board when the bow is the correct distance from the pontoon

6. Tighten up the stern lines and cleat

7. Kick fenders overboard for protection from neighbouring boats

8. If there is a strong crosswind, there may only be time to get the windward post lassoed and the windward bow line on. The leeward post can sometimes be lassoed using the long spinnaker pole, or if all fails:-

9. Temporally fasten the bows to the pontoon with the single long line, upwind if necessary. Pull out with stern line, paying out the long line from bow until the missing post can be reached and lassoed. Then pull the bows back in and secure normally.

10. On leaving:-

- Remember to disconnect electrics (!); warm-up engine and have all lines ready to cast off, fenders inboard.
- Pull back on both stern lines if no crosswind or try flicking off the lee loop from the post before heaving on the weather line as the bow lines are slipped (again slipping the lee line first if there is a cross wind)
- If the box has sidelines, the crew can steady the bow by the boat hook or using a windward bow line looped around the side line.
- Or, in a strong side wind and if sidelines are present, the helm can hold the ship steady with the boat hook amidships while the crew undoes the bow lines, then transfer the boat hook to the crew while the helm pulls back on the stern line and casts that off. Then engine out while the crew steadies amidships.
- As soon as the loops are flicked off the stern posts, engine astern, watching that the bow does not migrate into the neighbouring boat.
- The crew ties up the bow and stern lines ready for the next occasion

## C. Locks

1. Learn the lock signals in advance

2. Keep adequate steerage way on until about to tie-up - the wash from other vessels or lock surges can throw you completely off course; keep clear of the stern wash of other ships - especially barges!

3. Have ready: bow lines on both sides; mid/beam lines on both sides; stern lines on both sides - both sides in case sides have to be switched at the last minute!
4. Fenders down on both sides, touching water if necessary to meet low floating pontoons (eg Kiel Canal)
5. Approach the lock side ideally on the side of your boat that the reverse prop walk pulls into (port for starboard rotating props)
6. Aim for a central bollard or ladder
7. Get a **midline** round it eg from mid cleat/sheet winch round the bollard or ladder and back again on cleat/winch
8. Attach bow and stern lines if time allow
9. Ease lines as water level changes
10. Leaving: free stern line first, then bow line and lastly the mid line while crew fends off lock wall

*Ted & Diana Evans, Ragged Robin III*