

# Picking things up

By Simon Winkley, RYA Coach/Assessor

There's more to picking up a mooring than just sailing towards a buoy, tying on then drifting away when you're ready to leave. Helping intermediate students to master this skill will not only make them look and feel proficient, but will boost their confidence in other areas such as coming alongside a boat or pontoon. In order to get across the fundamentals of this manoeuvre no tidal flow is assumed until the end when a few considerations are discussed.

## The best approach

When a mooring has been selected (and it's clear that no other boats are competing for it) an approach across the wind, a few boat lengths downwind of the mooring must be made. Turning upwind a little early is better than leaving it too late. If too early, the helm can ease the sails smartly, bear away swiftly then head up again. If too late, the boat could end up head-to-wind with the crew clawing at the air as the boat stalls and begins to drift backwards away from the mooring.

The final approach is best on a close reach, jib flapping, whilst spilling-and-filling wind via the mainsheet falls. The boat should be stopped dead in the lying-to position with the mooring next to the windward shroud, ready for the crew to make fast onto the ring with a well-prepared painter. It may be useful to practice spilling-and-filling in a separate session in open water, with a focus on the direct influence this technique can have on controlling boat speed.

## Excess speed

Inevitably our students will, at times, approach the manoeuvre too quickly. If the boat is moving much too fast then an escape route needs to be taken by sailing



Assuming no tidal flow, aim to pick up the mooring by the windward shroud.



As soon as contact is made, thread the painter through the hoop as the boat drifts back.



To set sail again, moving the mooring aft can create enough windage on the bow to guide it onto the right course.



The use of a long painter in training or recreational sailing is helpful.



In strong wind against tide conditions the mainsail must be dropped to avoid the boat being pinned on a run.

past the mooring or adding a tack or gybe.

If, on the other hand, the boat has only a small amount of excess speed, grabbing the mooring ring from a close reach may cause the boat to tack around it - or even capsize onto it as the crew

weight ends up unexpectedly on the leeward side. A little tip to counteract the boat's desire to swing around the mooring in this way is to add a gentle pull on the tiller as the crew grabs the mooring ring. Remember this only works for a small amount of excess speed.

Tying onto the mooring (or making fast) is best done on most modern dinghies with a painter led from a strong point on the bow with a round turn on the mooring ring and tied off on the

mast. Finally, lower the mainsail and retract the centerboard to avoid sailing around on the mooring.

## Letting go

When leaving the mooring, students should be encouraged not to simply untie the painter, let it go and hope for the best. This drifting away technique carries the risk of setting off in a direction that might be subject to obstructions such as shallow water or harbour walls, and missing the opportunity to head in the direction of open water. Here are two methods they might try:

1. The boat will naturally swing a little on a mooring, so wait for the bow of the boat to swing in the desired direction then ask the crew to promptly back the jib and release the painter at the same time. A standard painter is not typically long enough to tie on as above and to allow the crew to release it from the cockpit so, for these exercises, it is worthwhile replacing the painter with a 6m length of 8mm cord.
2. Ask the crew to grab the mooring and pull it aft, down the opposite side of the boat to the desired direction of sailing. This will create enough windage on the bow to turn the boat onto the desired course. Avoid this method in strong winds, on rough waters or with a barnacle encrusted metal mooring against a freshly polished boat.

## Tidal considerations

Finally, in situations where the wind is against or across the tide, the mainsail should be dropped and the correct jib only approach made according to the relative strength of each of the elements. One particular risk of a two-sail approach in wind against tide conditions is getting the boat pinned on a run with the mainsail powered up after the tidal flow swings the boat 180 degrees on the mooring.

Hopefully by bringing these exercises into sessions afloat, your students will not only enjoy them but will gain an abundance of practical learning experiences.



**Amanda Van Santen**  
Chief Instructor, Dinghy & Windsurfing  
E-mail: [amanda.vansanten@rya.org.uk](mailto:amanda.vansanten@rya.org.uk)  
Tel: 023 8060 4179